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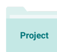

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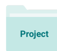

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Irish women's writing, 1878–1922

Advancing the cause of liberty

Edited by Anna Pilz and Whitney Standlee

Manchester University Press

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On 18 December 1896, men and women from Sligo town and the surrounding countryside gathered at the village of Drumcliffe to hear the Gore-Booth sisters speak about suffrage.[1] Just two days prior, Constance, twenty-eight years old and the eldest daughter of Sir Henry, landlord of the Lissadell estate, had been elected president of a new local suffrage organisation. Eva, twenty-six, was its honorable secretary, and their youngest sister, Mabel, twenty-two, served on the committee alongside other local men and women. The Gore-Booth sisters were inspired by private relationships and public reforms. Earlier the same year, when Eva was convalescing from a respiratory illness in Bordighera, Italy, she met the British suffrage campaigner Esther Roper, who would become her lifelong partner.[2] Roper's involvement in suffrage campaigns on a local level in Manchester and on a national level in England inspired Eva Gore-Booth to initiate a local branch of the Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association.[3]

British and Irish suffragists believed that the United Kingdom was on the cusp of radical change. The Local Government Act of 1894 increased certain women's power in the public sphere, permitting those who met specific property qualifications to serve as Poor Law guardians. In Ireland, the Dublin Women's Suffrage Association declared the act to be a landmark in the women's movement: 'There is nothing which has happened in our time that has imparted so powerful a stimulus ... to our fellow countrywomen ... a stimulus [which] will be powerfully strengthened when in addition, they obtain the County and the Municipal.'[4] The Gore-Booth sisters seized upon this sense of promise. Their Sligo suffrage campaign was the first public political act of two women who would shape the history of twentieth-century Britain and Ireland. Constance, who married the Polish painter and playwright Casimir Markievicz in 1900, would become a leading figure in Irish republicanism and in 1918 would be the first female elected to the British Parliament. Eva would lead the fight for social reform

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The suffrage meeting in Drumcliffe gives a foretaste of the poetics that Constance and Eva developed over the following three decades. The meeting hall was 'packed to the doors' with an audience that consisted primarily of men – most of whom had come to object to women's right to vote. However, the suffragists had prepared to meet their opponents with the full force of a rich and subversive discourse. Alongside the Christmas evergreen that decorated the hall, they hung banners proclaiming, 'No taxation without representation' and 'Liberality, justice, and equality'.[5] These slogans from the American and French revolutions placed Irish women's suffrage on equal footing with those national movements, and – implicitly – the Irish national movement that was inspired by eighteenth-century republicanism in France and the United States. Another banner, 'Who would be free themselves must strike the blow', proclaimed a line from Byron that had been appropriated by the abolitionist Frederick Douglass in his argument that the emancipation of black slaves and Daniel O'Connell's campaign for Catholic Emancipation in Ireland were analogous.[6] Douglass was committed to universal suffrage and championed the women's rights movement in the USA. The discourses of liberty that were evoked in these slogans were expounded in Constance and Eva Gore-Booth's speeches, which demonstrate the way in which the sisters manipulated radical social and national discourses in their attempt to appeal to the various sympathies of the audience.

In her brief speech, Constance Gore-Booth used a range of rhetorical techniques. She first played to the audience's sense of nationality, declaring:

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Her words were calculated to appeal to a spectrum of political identities: to republicans, Home Rulers, and even loyalists. She simultaneously appealed to reason, drawing from the enlightenment discourse of John Stuart Mill, who had supported Irish suffrage societies. In his landmark essay, 'The Subjection of Women', Mill had argued that the 'testimony of experience' should be the basis of any law; since men and women had never been equals in civil society, present-day inequality was based on feeling rather than fact. Constance Gore-Booth followed on from Mill's principle, glossing her logic with a wry allusion to the forthcoming celebration of Victoria's

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Eva Gore-Booth's remarks received less coverage in the local press but were equally rousing. She called on 'Irishwomen to follow the example of the farmers at Drumcliffe, and to insist in spite of opposition in taking their affairs into their own hands (cheers).'[10] This may have been an allusion to the Gore-Booth family's support of Horace Plunkett's Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, which aimed to give tenant farmers a greater share of profits through cooperative enterprises such as the Drumcliffe Creamery. Yet Co. Sligo had also been a prominent battleground in the Land Wars. The founder of the Land League, Michael Davitt, had urged the tenant farmers of Sligo to withhold their rents in an act of civil disobedience. By not specifying to which 'example of the farmers' she was referring, Eva created a range of potential interpretations for her audience, depending on an individual's political allegiance.

Passive resistance was the foundation from which all of Eva's activism would proceed. By contrast, Constance's work combined staunchly rationalist arguments with emotionally charged propaganda. This rationalism has obscured the extent of Constance's feminism. Whereas Eva moved in identifiably feminist circles throughout her life, it is a widely held misconception that Constance – if she were ever a feminist at all – abandoned feminism for nationalism. However, as a discussion of the Gore-Booth sisters' writing about suffrage will demonstrate, Constance's vision of Ireland was of a state that embodied complete social equality, of the classes and the sexes, and, to her mind, the emancipation of women was implicit in the emancipation of the Irish nation.

The divergence of the sisters' politics can be credited to fundamental differences in personality as well as to the influence of the social circles in which they moved after they left Lissadell. Constance first studied at the Slade School of Art in London, where she briefly encountered Fabian socialism; her next important move was to the Académie Julian in Paris where she lived a bohemian life that was politically on the fringe but was essentially non-activist. When she returned to Dublin as Countess Markievicz in 1903, she began to move in radical nationalist networks, which she encountered through friendships forged in Dublin's avant-garde art and theatre scenes and through the radical periodical culture of Revivalist Dublin. Eva moved from Sligo to Manchester, where she lived with Roper and became a leader

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The revolutionary ideals that were so prominent at the Sligo suffrage meeting are at the forefront of Eva Gore-Booth's first volume of poetry, *Poems* (1898). The quality of the selections is uneven, yet *Poems* is nonetheless important for understanding the linguistic codes and images through which Gore-Booth addressed suffrage. The French Revolution is a major trope. 'In Praise of Liberty', the second poem in the volume, uses simplistic rhyming couplets and a series of clichés to weigh the merits of love, life, and liberty against one another. The refrain asserts, 'I know that Liberty is best, / And no man sadder than a slave'.[11] Slavery recurs throughout the volume. It is implicit in 'Prayer of the Modern Greek', which introduces a rare tone of militancy as the poet beckons ancient heroes out of the Elysian fields to join 'A fight as glorious' as the epic victory at the battle of Salamis.[12] The object of the present-day battle is undisclosed, but the poet's petition, 'Let each man take his victor's crown / And fling it down [...] Let Liberty's course cap of red / Flame out athwart your brows instead', provides an important conceptual link to Gore-Booth's discourse on suffrage. Freedmen in Rome wore the red Phrygian cap as a symbol of their emancipation, and the cap was adopted by French Revolutionary partisans to signify liberation.[13] The cap in the poem connects the setting in antiquity with the historical moment that was for Eva Gore-Booth representative of the triumph of class and sexual equality.

The reality of the French Revolution was problematic for a dedicated pacifist. A pair of poems placed almost forty pages later indicates Gore-Booth's attempt to reconcile history with her politics. 'Song of the Fair Exile' and 'The Exile's Return' are in the voice of a French exile to Scotland who cannot repatriate for fear of being killed. The first poem

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By writing out the bloodshed, Gore-Booth codifies her belief that women's suffrage was a battle that should be conducted through a peaceful parliamentary campaign. Even so, the didacticism of *Poems* was objectionable to several reviewers. The *Academy* cautioned, 'Miss Gore-Booth has a trick of pulpiteering, which should be checked'; W. B. Yeats agreed, advising her to 'avoid every touch of rhetoric every tendency to teach'.[16]

One way of avoiding didacticism was to turn to more flexible scenarios than the historical tropes and female icons, such as Joan of Arc and the biblical Eve, which have a heavy presence in *Poems*. The Revival's focus on retelling, or inventing, myth and legend offered an ideal cast of characters which Gore-Booth could adapt to her purposes. The Gore-Booth family's introduction to Irish mythology seems to have been through W. B. Yeats, who visited Lissadell in December 1894 on one of his folklore-collecting expeditions.[17] However, Yeats was not a singular influence. George Russell (Æ) took note of *Poems* and invited Gore-Booth to contribute to the *Irish Homestead* and to his edition *New Songs: A Lyric Selection made by Æ* (1904). The volume includes poets who would become some of the most notable voices of the Revival, including Padraic Colum, Alice Milligan, Susan Mitchell, Seamus O'Sullivan, and Ella Young. Among them, Eva Gore-Booth was the only poet to have previously published a volume of poems.[18] In *New Songs*, Gore-Booth's work is distinctively feminist. In Susan Mitchell's 'The Living Chalice', 'the mother' is merely a conduit for the 'Master of Life',

whereas Gore-Booth's 'The Revolt Against Art' has a female deity: 'the earth bends to her dream'.[19]

Gore-Booth's one-act play *Unseen Kings*, also published in 1904, builds upon Revivalist themes. The plot is almost certainly based on Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (1902). In Cathy Leeney's study, *Irish Women Playwrights*, she notes Gregory and Gore-Booth's common construction of a spatial binary in their texts: 'an inner, protected space where Cuculain is encircled by women, poets, music, and feasting' and the external space where violence threatens the interior sanctum.[20] Gore-Booth's drama also differs in important ways. *Unseen Kings* is ostensibly about Cúchulainn, but the agency in the play is given to the two female characters: Niamh, a prophetess who has the power to control Cúchulainn's actions, and the Stranger who enchants Niamh and returns in her guise to send Cúchulainn out to battle where he is killed. In *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, Niamh is not a mystic and is simply the hero's lover, but in *Unseen Kings*, Niamh's pacifism is not driven by a romantic desire to protect Cúchulainn's life but by an esoteric vision: she believes that the world is an illusion that cannot be penetrated by violence.[21]

Niamh in *Unseen Kings* stands as an important counterpoint to Queen Maeve, whose tomb, according to legend, crests Knocknarea, the mountain that presides over the Lissadell estate. Eva Gore-Booth would later invent another history for the warrior queen, but in the poems that follow the play in *Unseen Kings*, she seeks simply to establish Maeve's neglect. In 'A Hermit's Lament for Maeve', she is described as lying in a 'lonely grave' of 'gray stones', compared to the 'earth-encrusted gold' of the High King's dun.[22] 'To Maeve' focuses on the slander of Maeve's reputation after her death, which Gore-Booth suggests was driven by jealousy.[23]

One of the most important poems in the volume is 'Lament of the Daughters of Ireland'. It begins with an epigraph from Sophocles' *Electra*: Orestes' reminder to his sister, 'in women, too dwells the Spirit of Battle'.[24] Importantly, this was not a literal call to combat; Gore-Booth's representation of violence here is as nuanced as in *Poems*. While 'Lament of the Daughters of Ireland' proclaims the daughters' origins in violence, this violence is located in the ancient past, not modernity.[25] This is reinforced by the poem's footnote referring readers to Douglas Hyde's *A Literary History of Ireland from Earliest Times to the Present Day*. Gore-Booth cites Hyde's discussion of the Council of Drumceat of the year 590 at which, he notes, 'women were exempted from military service'.[26] The episode is indexed in Hyde's book as 'women ... tardily exempted from service', but for Eva Gore-Booth, Irish women's role in combat was evidence of their social and legal equality with men in ancient Ireland. Gore-Booth is not calling for a

renewal of violence but for a restoration of the equality that she believed characterised antiquity.

In Gore-Booth's play *The Triumph of Maeve: A Romance*, published in 1905, Maeve, the High Queen of Connaught, is explicitly pacifist. All of the principal parts are female apart from Nera, a harpist in Maeve's court, and Fergus, the Chief of the Ultonian exiles. Both of these characters are portrayed negatively. Fergus protests, 'I would not obey a woman', and Nera bewitches Maeve, forcing her to 'storm the city of the magic fire'.[27] In both plays, Gore-Booth's drama is not simply feminist in its recasting of female characters in the lead. Rather, she rewrites the very nature of the heroic in order to reinforce her pacifist convictions. Acts of violence are the result of sinister interference, not heroism, and the heroic character is reimagined as a strong leader who holds the affections of the people but who refrains from conflict.

Gore-Booth returns to didacticism in the *Egyptian Pillar* (1907), but her polemic is tempered by greater poetic skill.[28] The titular image is taken from the poem 'Women's Trades on the Embankment', which is set at the Egyptian obelisk that stands on London's Victoria Embankment. The suffragist theme is emphasised in the poem's dedication to Constance, in memory of 'some dreams we hold in common'. Furthermore, the epigraph – ' "Have Patience!" – The Prime Minister to the Franchise Deputation, May 19th, 1906' – refers directly to Gore-Booth's activism and is a stark contrast to the codifications of her other suffrage poetry. 'Women's Trades' opens with London's 'sad-eyed workers' passing by the obelisk, an object that creates a temporal fulcrum between the contemporary oppression of the working-class and the slavery of the ancient Israelites. The analogy is sustained throughout the poem, with the last stanza referring back to the epigraph: 'Long has submission played a traitor's part— / Oh human soul, no patience any more / Shall break your wings and harden Pharaoh's heart, / And keep you lingering on the Red Sea shore'.

Egyptian imagery is important to Gore-Booth's poetry for several reasons. While the slavery of the Israelites was a common trope in abolitionism as well as in the women's suffrage movement, Egyptian texts were also taken as the foundation of the modern theosophical movement. In 1877, the founder of the Theosophical Society, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, published her influential book *Isis Unveiled*, which claimed to be, as Matthew Beaumont summarises, 'a vast repository of all those ancient occultist insights inaccessible to contemporary, positivistic science'.[29] Beaumont's essay discusses the elective affinity between socialism and occultism at the *fin de siècle*; similarly, occultism was closely tied to the women's suffrage movement. One of the tenets of theosophy was the belief in the duality of humanity: the presence of 'masculine and feminine principles at the cosmic

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One way of avoiding didacticism was to turn to more flexible scenarios than the historical tropes and female icons, such as Joan of Arc and the biblical Eve, which have a heavy presence in *Poems*. The Revival's focus on retelling, or inventing, myth and legend offered an ideal cast of characters which Gore-Booth could adapt to her purposes. The Gore-Booth family's introduction to Irish mythology seems to have been through W. B. Yeats, who visited Lissadell in December 1894 on one of his folklore-collecting expeditions.[17] However, Yeats was not a singular influence. George Russell (Æ) took note of *Poems* and invited Gore-Booth to contribute to the *Irish Homestead* and to his edition *New Songs: A Lyric Selection made by Æ* (1904). The volume includes poets who would become some of the most notable voices of the Revival, including Padraic Colum, Alice Milligan, Susan Mitchell, Seamus O'Sullivan, and Ella Young. Among them, Eva Gore-Booth was the only poet to have previously published a volume of poems.[18] In *New Songs*, Gore-Booth's work is distinctively feminist. In Susan Mitchell's 'The Living Chalice', 'the mother' is merely a conduit for the 'Master of Life',

whereas Gore-Booth's 'The Revolt Against Art' has a female deity: 'the earth bends to her dream'.[19]

Gore-Booth's one-act play *Unseen Kings*, also published in 1904, builds upon Revivalist themes. The plot is almost certainly based on Lady Gregory's *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* (1902). In Cathy Leeney's study, *Irish Women Playwrights*, she notes Gregory and Gore-Booth's common construction of a spatial binary in their texts: 'an inner, protected space where Cuculain is encircled by women, poets, music, and feasting' and the external space where violence threatens the interior sanctum.[20] Gore-Booth's drama also differs in important ways. *Unseen Kings* is ostensibly about Cúchulainn, but the agency in the play is given to the two female characters: Niamh, a prophetess who has the power to control Cúchulainn's actions, and the Stranger who enchants Niamh and returns in her guise to send Cúchulainn out to battle where he is killed. In *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*, Niamh is not a mystic and is simply the hero's lover, but in *Unseen Kings*, Niamh's pacifism is not driven by a romantic desire to protect Cúchulainn's life but by an esoteric vision: she believes that the world is an illusion that cannot be penetrated by violence.[21]

Niamh in *Unseen Kings* stands as an important counterpoint to Queen Maeve, whose tomb, according to legend, crests Knocknarea, the mountain that presides over the Lissadell estate. Eva Gore-Booth would later invent another history for the warrior queen, but in the poems that follow the play in *Unseen Kings*, she seeks simply to establish Maeve's neglect. In 'A Hermit's Lament for Maeve', she is described as lying in a 'lonely grave' of 'gray stones', compared to the 'earth-encrusted gold' of the High King's dun.[22] 'To Maeve' focuses on the slander of Maeve's reputation after her death, which Gore-Booth suggests was driven by jealousy.[23]

One of the most important poems in the volume is 'Lament of the Daughters of Ireland'. It begins with an epigraph from Sophocles' *Electra*: Orestes' reminder to his sister, 'in women, too dwells the Spirit of Battle'.[24] Importantly, this was not a literal call to combat; Gore-Booth's representation of violence here is as nuanced as in *Poems*. While 'Lament of the Daughters of Ireland' proclaims the daughters' origins in violence, this violence is located in the ancient past, not modernity.[25] This is reinforced by the poem's footnote referring readers to Douglas Hyde's *A Literary History of Ireland from Earliest Times to the Present Day*. Gore-Booth cites Hyde's discussion of the Council of Drumceat of the year 590 at which, he notes, 'women were exempted from military service'.[26] The episode is indexed in Hyde's book as 'women … tardily exempted from service', but for Eva Gore-Booth, Irish women's role in combat was evidence of their social and legal equality with men in ancient Ireland. Gore-Booth is not calling for a

renewal of violence but for a restoration of the equality that she believed characterised antiquity.

In Gore-Booth's play *The Triumph of Maeve: A Romance*, published in 1905, Maeve, the High Queen of Connaught, is explicitly pacifist. All of the principal parts are female apart from Nera, a harpist in Maeve's court, and Fergus, the Chief of the Ultonian exiles. Both of these characters are portrayed negatively. Fergus protests, 'I would not obey a woman', and Nera bewitches Maeve, forcing her to 'storm the city of the magic fire'.[27] In both plays, Gore-Booth's drama is not simply feminist in its recasting of female characters in the lead. Rather, she rewrites the very nature of the heroic in order to reinforce her pacifist convictions. Acts of violence are the result of sinister interference, not heroism, and the heroic character is reimagined as a strong leader who holds the affections of the people but who refrains from conflict.

Gore-Booth returns to didacticism in the *Egyptian Pillar* (1907), but her polemic is tempered by greater poetic skill.[28] The titular image is taken from the poem 'Women's Trades on the Embankment', which is set at the Egyptian obelisk that stands on London's Victoria Embankment. The suffragist theme is emphasised in the poem's dedication to Constance, in memory of 'some dreams we hold in common'. Furthermore, the epigraph – '"Have Patience!" – The Prime Minister to the Franchise Deputation, May 19th, 1906' – refers directly to Gore-Booth's activism and is a stark contrast to the codifications of her other suffrage poetry. 'Women's Trades' opens with London's 'sad-eyed workers' passing by the obelisk, an object that creates a temporal fulcrum between the contemporary oppression of the working-class and the slavery of the ancient Israelites. The analogy is sustained throughout the poem, with the last stanza referring back to the epigraph: 'Long has submission played a traitor's part— / Oh human soul, no patience any more / Shall break your wings and harden Pharaoh's heart, / And keep you lingering on the Red Sea shore'.

Egyptian imagery is important to Gore-Booth's poetry for several reasons. While the slavery of the Israelites was a common trope in abolitionism as well as in the women's suffrage movement, Egyptian texts were also taken as the foundation of the modern theosophical movement. In 1877, the founder of the Theosophical Society, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, published her influential book *Isis Unveiled*, which claimed to be, as Matthew Beaumont summarises, 'a vast repository of all those ancient occultist insights inaccessible to contemporary, positivistic science'.[29] Beaumont's essay discusses the elective affinity between socialism and occultism at the *fin de siècle*; similarly, occultism was closely tied to the women's suffrage movement. One of the tenets of theosophy was the belief in the duality of humanity: the presence of 'masculine and feminine principles at the cosmic

level'.[30] In Joy Dixon's *Divine Feminism*, she explains that the emphasis was not on sexual difference but on sexual equality: 'men and women were so different precisely because, in essence, they were only different aspects of the same thing'.[31]

In 1907, the year that the *Egyptian Pillar* was published, the Irish suffragist and theosophist Charlotte Despard published 'The Case for Women's Suffrage'. Despard's essay opened with the subject of 'the "great woman principle" in ancient cosmogonies', including 'the mysterious Isis of Egypt'.[32] Although Gore-Booth did not formally join the Theosophical Society until 1919, theosophical ideas are present in her writing more than a decade earlier. *The Sorrowful Princess*, also published in 1907, is set in 'a wood in Egypt before the shrine of Isis'.[33] The theosophical idea of the duality of humanity is suggested by the stage directions, with Isis' shrine on one side of the stage and a 'tree Sacred to Osiris' on the other.[34]

In Egyptian mythology, Isis is the goddess of the natural world as well as the goddess of magic. Here, Gore-Booth's interests in esoteric religion, Irish mythology, and women's suffrage coalesce. 'Women's Rights' which follows 'Women's Trades' in the *Egyptian Pillar*, is set by Glencar waterfall on the border of counties Sligo and Leitrim. The poem equates the natural world with springtime, peace, the spiritual, and the feminine, in contrast to a male, industrial, urban environment: 'where men in office sit / Winter holds the human wit [. . .] Frozen, frozen everywhere / Are the springs of thought and prayer'.[35] The poem evokes the early poetry of W. B. Yeats, particularly 'The Stolen Child' from *Crossways* (1889) and the opening line of 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' from *The Rose* (1893).[36] However, by creating a gendered contrast between the natural world and the material world, Gore-Booth transmutes the anti-materialist impulse characteristic of Irish Revivalist writing into a poetics of suffrage: 'Men have got their pomp and pride— / All the green world is on our side'.[37]

In three of the poems that follow 'Women's Rights' in the *Egyptian Pillar*, the masculine and feminine binary is complicated by the gender-neutral term 'comrade'. The poem 'Comrades' begins with a sympathetic image of 'Men who are born to die whose dreams are soiled by the dust', but the poet asserts that while truth and justice may be the shared pursuit of some men and women, 'only the gods in heaven are true enough to be just'.[38] The word 'comrades' is used to similar effect in 'The Visionary', where fellowship, 'a dream of comrades', is the preserve of the other world. These poems mark a transition from poetry that is directly engaged with the fight for women's suffrage to an esoteric verse that challenges the very notions of gender. 'The Anti-suffragist' in *The Agate Lamp* is an exception in which the overtly political impulse lingers. Even here Eva Gore-Booth maintains a mythical artifice. The subject of the poem is a princess who is held prisoner

in a tower without any contact with the natural world: 'They brought her forth at last when she was old; / The sunlight on her blanchèd hair was shed / too late to turn its silver into gold'.[39] For Gore-Booth, sexual equality is the natural and spiritual state of humanity.

Eva worked towards abstraction, but Constance became a consummate propagandist. She adopted popular forms and later in her career even used gender stereotypes in order to achieve her desired effect. The most extreme examples of this are her plays and cartoons from the Irish Civil War that depict Irishwomen as wives and mothers who sacrifice their husbands and sons for the nation. Yet Markievicz's earlier work hints at the intricate relationship between nationalism, socialism, and feminism which is obscured by her later choice of form. In 1908, Markievicz travelled to Manchester and London to participate in large-scale suffrage rallies organised by Eva and Esther Roper. She was given a prominent place on the platform; at one rally in Trafalgar Square where she and Eva both spoke, the *Irish Times* presciently reported that 'as in most other political agitations, the voice of Ireland was not silent'.[40] The friendships that Markievicz formed in Dublin's theatres and salons combined with her suffrage work in Sligo, Manchester, and London to effect a new political commitment: to an Irish republic in which men and women of all classes would enjoy the same liberty.

The issue of women's suffrage divided Irish nationalists. The Irish Women's Franchise League, founded in November 1908, was open to women of any political persuasion. Both Arthur Griffith, founder and President of Sinn Féin, and Maud Gonne, founder of Inghinidhe na hÉireann (the Daughters of Ireland), supported the league and stated unequivocally that suffrage was not a party question.[41] Markievicz vehemently disagreed. She argued in *Sinn Féin*:

> Let Irishwomen who are not admitted to the rights of British citizens rather glory in the fact and organise over here and join with those men who believe in Liberty in making Ireland ungovernable; let them fan the flame of Rebellion and Revolution, helping to intensify the aspirations of the whole people in the councils of their nation, that England daily more harassed and perplexed through the effects of her iniquitous foreign policy, towards free nations and towards nations subjected by her, will have to capitulate and accede to their demands.[42]

Markievicz alluded to the most famous quotation from the life of Wolfe Tone, the founder of Irish republicanism and leader of the 1798 Rising whose goal was 'To unite the whole people of Ireland'.[43] After his death in the rising, Tone fell into obscurity, but his legacy was resurrected by the poets of Young Ireland who found in the United Irishmen a model for Protestant nationalism.[44] Tone played a similar role for Markievicz, but for her he did not simply signify the leadership of the Anglo-Irish and

cooperation across sectarian lines; she fully espoused Tone's vision of a republic. Markievicz adapts his republican discourse to encode Irishwomen's suffrage in eighteenth-century political thought.

The Rising of 1798 is the subject of Constance and Casimir Markievicz's first major success for the Dublin theatres: *The Memory of the Dead* (1910). It was not the first of their collaborations to have a strong female role. *The Dilettante*, staged in 1908, has a feminist plot: an aristocratic widow (Constance Markievicz) and the daughter of the family's steward (Máire nic Shuibhlaigh) turn against the poet and cad Archibald Longhurst (J. M. Carré) who has been playing them both. At its core, *The Dilettante* is a society farce in which the female characters bridge class divides in order to overthrow the patriarchal figure, but the sexual politics of the play are diffused by other less defined ideas such as the question of the value of art over life. The *Irish Independent* recognised an Ibsenite tendency in the play but criticised, 'In thesis-drama, it is a serious blemish to have no revelation of the thesis.'[45] The *Memory of the Dead* is far more accomplished, but even here one thesis – national liberation – obscures the concomitant idea of female emancipation.

The Memory of the Dead opens with Colonel Charort (J. M. Carré) arriving at the Doyle family's cottage to request a guide to Donegal, where he will meet Napper Tandy, an actual historical figure who facilitated collaboration with the French in the 1798 Rising. All of the able-bodied young men have already left the village to join the uprising, so Norah Doyle (Constance Markievicz) disguises herself in male clothing and offers to assist him. The radical potential of this transvestitism is offset by Norah's assumption of conventional gender roles during the course of the action. When she and Charort meet a wounded soldier, Norah's former suitor James McGowan, Norah stays behind to nurse him. Similarly, the conclusion of the play follows gender norms. Norah's husband, Dermod O'Dowd, is killed; she throws herself between his body and the British Army officer and declares: 'My husband, you have not died in vain ... I swear that I will bring up your child to take your place, to live as you lived, to die as you died – a hero for our country!'[46] Importantly, Norah's revenge is not through militancy but through raising their child to follow his father's example. This may seem like a mixed message, but, in fact, it suggests that Norah is free to take on a conventionally male role and to function in society as a wife and mother. The feminist aspect of the plot was undermined by the play's setting in such an iconic historical event, which had been reinvigorated in the public imagination by the centenary commemorations just a decade before. It is unsurprising perhaps that the reception of the play focused exclusively on it as a nationalist melodrama.[47]

The Markieviczes may have also deliberately disclosed the gender politics of the play. Constance Markievicz was keenly aware that her support for suffrage was oppositional to the majority view of the Sinn Féin party. In February 1909, an anonymous article in the party organ asserted that there was no time to waste 'suffragetting': 'If we must contend let it be in seeing who'll be the most Irish.'[48] Markievicz published a rejoinder in the *Irish Nation* in which she conceded that a woman who lived by the national ideal 'will know that for Ireland's sake she must make her home life beautiful and ideal too'.[49] In a lecture to a Dublin branch of Sinn Féin, she made her views clearer: while there was a great deal of national work to be carried out in the home, 'she would rather see women working for the nation as comrades with men, each according to her own abilities and power'.[50] In light of her prominent statements on suffrage in *Bean na hÉireann* and the *Irish Nation*, when the National Literary Society invited Markievicz to speak in spring 1909, the audience expected that she would address suffrage overtly. Instead, she negotiated the tension between women's suffrage and the national question by again drawing from an Irish republican discourse of liberty.

Markievicz's speech was published in instalments as 'Irishwomen's Duty at the Present Time' and then by the Daughters of Ireland as the pamphlet, *Women, Ideals and the Nation*.[51] She situated Ireland in a broader imperial context alongside India, Egypt, and South Africa, but the greater part of her argument was dedicated to a discussion of Russia and Poland:

> In Ireland the women seem to have taken less part in public life, and to have had less share in the struggle for liberty, than in other nations. In Russia, amongst the people who are working to overthrow the tyrannical and unjust government of the Czar and his officials, and in Poland where, to be a nationalist, men and women must take their lives in their hands, women work as comrades, shoulder to shoulder with their men.[52]

Her anti-imperialist argument then took a surprising turn:

> Catholicism is an integral part of a Pole's nationality, the Orthodox religion an integral part of a Russian's, for all Poles are Catholic, all Russians Orthodox – and a Pole of the Orthodox religion would even now be regarded with suspicion in Poland and could not possibly enter any Polish National Movement; while a Russian who was a Catholic would find it difficult even to live in his country.[53]

Markievicz would convert to Catholicism in 1916, but in 1909 she did not believe that either Protestantism or atheism were incompatible with Irish nationalism, as the importance of 1798 to her political thought shows. Rather, religion serves to codify her suffrage politics in a discourse that is less polarising for her audience. She argues that suffrage and nationalism, like the Polish national identity and Catholicism, go hand in hand.

The allusion was clear to her audience; in the questions afterward, a representative of the Irish Women's Franchise League rose in objection, demanding that the vote was the most important political weapon and should be prioritised.

The Home Rule Bill brought the Daughters of Ireland and the Irish Women's Franchise League in alliance, along with other national women's organisations including the Irish Suffrage Federation and the Irish Women Workers' Union. The societies held a coalition meeting on 1 June 1912 to demand the emancipation of women in the Home Rule Bill.[54] In what appears to be a volte-face, Markievicz supported the coalition, but her support seems to have been a delicate political manoeuvre. Like Eva, Constance's suffrage politics were intertwined with a socialist commitment. By 1912, Markievicz endorsed James Connolly as leader of the Irish labour left and publicly espoused the socialism that he advocated. Connolly sent a message to the suffrage coalition in which he stated his opposition to Home Rule in principle, while allowing that 'A Home Rule Bill that excluded half of the people of Ireland from the franchise would be an anomaly in this age of progress and would be a poor recompense to the women of Ireland for all they have done and suffered in the past for the freedom of Ireland.'[55] Connolly and Markievicz were both aware that the Irish Parliamentary Party would never concede to the enfranchisement of women in the Home Rule Bill. By advocating the inclusion of suffrage in Irish Home Rule, they were implicitly discrediting any Bill that did not include suffrage. Therefore, Connolly and Markievicz's support of the suffrage coalition can be seen as part of their campaign to unite competing factions in the common cause of independence, as will be seen from the alliance of the Irish Citizen Army and the Irish Volunteers discussed further below. In the end, the failure of Home Rule to address the concerns of both suffragists and the labour left contributed to the radicalisation of Irish nationalism and the rise of militant separatism.

During this period of rapid widespread radicalisation, suffrage ostensibly disappears from Markievicz's writing. Yet, in fact, it becomes more deeply encoded. Key to recovering Markievicz's attitude to suffrage is her belief about the social construction of gender, which is very similar to Eva's idea of the dual nature of humanity. In her speech 'The Future of Irishwomen', delivered to the Irish Women's Franchise League in October 1915 and printed in the *Irish Citizen*, Markievicz argued that the Catholic and Protestant churches 'foster the tradition of the segregation of the sexes', and she stated, 'It would be well to aim at bringing out, as it were, the masculine side of women's souls as well as the feminine side of men's souls.'[56] In the same speech, she referred to the Council of Drumceat. Markievicz proclaimed that 'Ancient Ireland bred warrior women, and women played

a heroic part in those days. To-day we are in danger of being civilised by men out of existence.'[57] She asserted that the women in the labour movement and the suffragists embodied the ancient ideal. Auxiliary committees merely 'demoralise women, set them up in separate camps, and deprive them of all initiative and independence'.[58] Women must reject the notion that 'woman is merely sex and an excuse for a drink':

> Don't trust to your 'feminine charm' and your capacity for getting on the soft side of men, but take up your responsibilities and be prepared to go your own way depending for safety on your own courage, your own truth, and your own common sense, and not on the problematic chivalry of the men you may meet on the way.[59]

This is very similar to the ideas in Eva Gore-Booth's 'Comrades'.

Just as 'comrade' appears in Eva Gore-Booth's poetry as a substitute for gendered pronouns, it arises in Markievicz's propaganda. 'To the Citizen Army', published in the *Workers' Republic* in June 1915, is doggerel but is nonetheless enlightening for the way that it creates a collage of images that bring together facets of Markievicz's political thought. Although she uses the gendered cliché, 'keep your powder dry, my boys', this phrase is followed in the next stanza by, 'When comrade by comrade we stand on the day'.[60] The poem was published under the pseudonym 'Maca', the same name under which Markievicz published pro-suffrage essays in *Bean na hÉireann* and *The Irish Nation and the Irish Peasant.* The female authorship signified by the pseudonym changes the tone of a poem that would otherwise be read as masculine and hints at Markievicz's vision of men and women fighting together as comrades against the British Empire.

Similarly, 'The Call', published under Markievicz's own name in the *Workers' Republic* the week prior to the Easter Rising, is addressed to 'men of the Gael' and 'men of Irish blood', but the last stanza uses the collective pronoun 'we': 'We answer the call with a ringing cheer / With bayonets fixed we stand'.[61] Again, the female authorship is essential to reading the poem. Furthermore, the bayonets in the poem explicitly link the 1798 Rising with the Easter Rising that is about to unfold. This is more than simple use of a popular image. It evokes a historical event that is foundational to Markievicz's political thought and is essential to her vision for the role of women in the imagined republic.

Markievicz wrote prolifically for the *Irish Citizen* in 1915. One of her series of essays was 'The Women of '98' in which she writes short biographies of women from the whole of Ireland who took an active role in the Rebellion. The series emphasised the unity of social classes in the national struggle with lengthy anecdotes of well-educated women and the daughters of peasants fighting alongside the men. In her story of the peasant woman

Mary Doyle, who supplied cartridges to the rebels at the battle of New Ross, Markievicz imagines Doyle saying 'Boys, I will stay behind, no matter what happens to me, unless you take my dear little gun too.'[62] This essay informs Markievicz's use of 'boys' in 'To the Citizen Army' and the ostensibly male subjects of 'The Call'. She is not excluding women from the national struggle, nor is she privileging the national over the feminist. Helena Molony, Markievicz's friend and comrade in the Irish Citizen Army, believed that the ICA 'promoted an "idea of freedom [that] was the widest of its kind, the abolition of domination of nation over nation, class over class, sex over sex".'[63] Her emphasis reinforces this reading of Markievicz's codification of sexual equality in these poems.

Whereas Eva drew parallels between women from classical antiquity and the Irish past, Constance suggested that the stories of female combatants in ancient Ireland were exceptional. She manipulates suffragist icons in order to conjoin nationalist and feminist discourse, principally the figure of Joan of Arc. Molly Weston, who fought in the Rising, is described as

> Mounted on a spirited grey pony, dressed in green habit, and with the United Irishmen's cockade in her hat, she galloped up to the insurgents, and at once joined in the battle. There being no capable leader among the rebels, the girl, a farmer's daughter, placed herself at their head, and, with no weapon but a riding whip, led the patriots to the charge, not seeming to mind any danger, provided that she could rally the insurgents each time they were driven back, and lead them to the charge again and again.[64]

Markievicz allowed that it was not necessary for all women to become militants, but the tonality of her essays privileged the women who took up arms or who sacrificed their life in the struggle.[65]

Throughout 'The Women of '98', Markievicz argued that the 'rebel ranks' respected women and offered them greater opportunities than the British Army. This was another implicit argument that a free Ireland would offer female liberty while an Ireland joined to the Empire would lead to further oppression. There is a similar anti-imperialist argument at work in her series, 'Experience of a Woman Patrol', which ran simultaneously to 'The Women of '98'. In 'Woman Patrol', Markievicz modelled an active role for women in the public sphere, including the responsibility for policing, since, she implied, the Dublin Metropolitan Police did not act in the benefit of Irish society. She describes walking a 'beat' around the north city centre, where she saw the effects of Dublin's extreme poverty: drunkenness, vagrancy, and prostitution. She encourages her readers to reject the imperial war work that was now available to them and instead turn their attentions to the 'open sore' in their own city.[66] Just as the First World War

was facilitating Irish separatism, Markievicz also believed that the war was 'shaking women out of old grooves and forcing responsibilities on them'.[67] Her articles for the *Irish Citizen* are agitation-propaganda pieces, aimed at preparing Irish women for positions of leadership in the new Ireland that she imagined would liberate all classes and sexes. She demands, 'We have got to get rid of the last vestige of the Harem before woman is [as] free as our dream of the future would have her.'[68]

Markievicz thought that the Proclamation of the Republic declared at Easter 1916 was a fulfilment of the ambitions of the United Irishmen in 1798. This commitment to the Proclamation was the basis for her intransigent republicanism and the cause of her bitter disillusionment during the Irish Civil War and in its aftermath. In March 1922, Cumann na mBan member and anti-Treaty Sinn Féin TD (*teachta dála*, member of parliament) Kathleen O'Callaghan addressed the vote on women's franchise in which she declared, 'The brave men who put their names to the proclamation of the Irish Republic in Easter Week wanted to put the men and women on the same footing in the voting register.'[69] She proposed a Bill that would admit women to the parliamentary franchise on the same basis as Irish men. Markievicz rose in support:

> My first realization of tyranny came from some chance words spoken in favour of women's suffrage and it raised a question of the tyranny it was intended to prevent women voicing their opinions publicly in the ordinary and simple manner of registering their vote at the polling booth. This was my first bite, you may say, at the apple of freedom and soon I got on to the other freedoms, freedom to the nation, freedom to the workers ... I have a vote myself now to send men and women to the Dáil, and I wish to have that privilege extended to the young women of Ireland, whom I count in every way as my superiors ... Today, I would appeal here to the men of the IRA more than to any of the other men to see that justice is done to these young women and young girls who took a man's part in the Terror.[70]

Not only does Markievicz state unequivocally that the origins of her anti-imperialist politics were in the women's suffrage movement, she also repeats the phrase 'the Terror' in which she equates the 1916 Easter Rising with the French Revolution.

In an article for *Bean na hÉireann*, again written under the pseudonym 'Maca', Markievicz described Irish women as being 'double enslaved, and with a double battle to fight'.[71] This discourse of enslavement is part of a wider discourse of suffrage, from which Constance Markievicz and Eva Gore-Booth both drew. Similarly, both sisters looked to republican discourse for a language in which to address suffrage: the language of Revolutionary France and of the United Irishmen Rebellion of 1798. The sisters also addressed gender similarly; while Eva Gore-Booth's theosophical

pursuits led her to the dual nature of humanity, Constance Markievicz's writing reflects a belief in the flexibility of gender, epitomised in her ambition to cultivate the 'masculine side of women's souls' and the 'feminine side of men's souls'.[72] These principles are essential to understanding the way in which both sisters develop a poetics of suffrage that complements their political activism.

Notes

1 'Women's Suffrage', *Sligo Champion* (19 December 1896), p. 8.
2 Sonja Tiernan, *Eva Gore-Booth: An Image of Such Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp. 28–44.
3 The Irish Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association was founded in 1876; see Carmel Quinlan, *Genteel Revolutionaries: Anna and Thomas Haslam and the Irish Women's Movement* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2002).
4 Rosemary Cullen Owens, *A Social History of Women in Ireland, 1870–1970* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005), p. 13.
5 'Women's Suffrage', *Sligo Champion* (19 December 1896), p. 8.
6 Frederick Douglass, 'Men of Color, to Arms!', *Broadside* (Rochester) (21 March 1863).
7 'Women's Suffrage', *Sligo Champion* (19 December 1896), p. 8.
8 Sophia A. van Wingerden, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), p. 69.
9 Frederick Douglass, 'What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?' in Philip S. Foner (ed.), *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings* (Chicago, Ill.: Lawrence Hill, 1999), pp. 188–206.
10 'Woman's Suffrage Movement', *Sligo Champion* (26 December 1896), p. 8.
11 Eva Gore-Booth, 'In Praise of Liberty', in *Poems* (London: Longmans, Green & Co, 1898), pp. 4–5.
12 Gore-Booth, 'Prayer of the Modern Greek', in *Poems*, pp. 9–10.
13 Jennifer Harris, 'The Red Cap of Liberty: A Study of Dress Worn by French Revolutionary Partisans, 1789–94', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 14:3 (1981), 283–312.
14 Gore-Booth, 'Song of the Fair Exile', in *Poems*, pp. 52–4.
15 Gore-Booth, 'The Exile's Return', in *Poems*, pp. 55–7.
16 Tiernan, *Eva Gore-Booth*, p. 51.
17 W. B. Yeats to Susan Mary Yeats (16 December 1894), in *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, vol. I: *1865–1895*, ed. John Kelly and Eric Domville (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), p. 418.
18 David Gardiner (ed.), *The Maunsel Poets, 1905–1926* (Bethesda, Md.: Academica, 2003), p. 4.
19 Susan Mitchell, 'The Living Chalice', and Eva Gore-Booth, 'The Revolt Against Art' in George Russell (ed.), *New Songs: A Lyric Selection Made by Æ* (Dublin and London: O'Donoghue & Co. and A. H. Bullen, 1904), pp. 25 and 23 respectively.
20 Cathy Leeney, *Irish Women Playwrights, 1900–1939: Gender and Violence on Stage* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 71–2. Gore-Booth uses the spelling Cuculain in *Unseen Kings*, while Gregory spells it Cuchulain in *Cuchulain of Muirthemne*.
21 Eva Gore-Booth, *Unseen Kings: A Play in One Act and in Verse with Other Poems* (London: Longmans & Co., 1904), p. 20. Casimir Markievicz's Independent Theatre Company produced *Unseen Kings* in 1912, and Constance Markievicz played the part of the Stranger.
22 Gore-Booth, 'A Hermit's Lament for Maeve', in *Unseen Kings*, pp. 57–9.

23 Gore-Booth, 'To Maeve', in *Unseen Kings*, pp. 60–2.
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