

Constance Markievicz

IN THE CAUSE OF IRELAND

Painter, Actor, Wife and Mother



Constance Gore-Booth and Althea Gyle
in London circa 1893
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Sligo branch of the Women's Suffrage and Local Government Association and held a series of public meetings to start a local debate on women's suffrage and the widening of the franchise. At the Drumcliffe meeting she outlined how she saw the issue being progressed '*form societies to agitate... and force the government to realise that a very large class have a grievance and will never stop making themselves disagreeable till it is righted*'.

Constance enrolled in the Slade School of Art in 1893 as a result of applying herself to the practical study of art with Anna Nordgren, while in London the previous year. She was demonstrating to her family that this was what she wanted. There followed a period of attending lectures and living the life of a student, albeit a student with resources. Constance set to the task with a zest that reflected the way she was to treat all future challenges. If she was struck by someone that she could use as a model she would employ them. On one occasion a mother and her baby were recruited from the street because she was struck by the mother's beauty. While she had been afraid of failing she knew success would require effort.

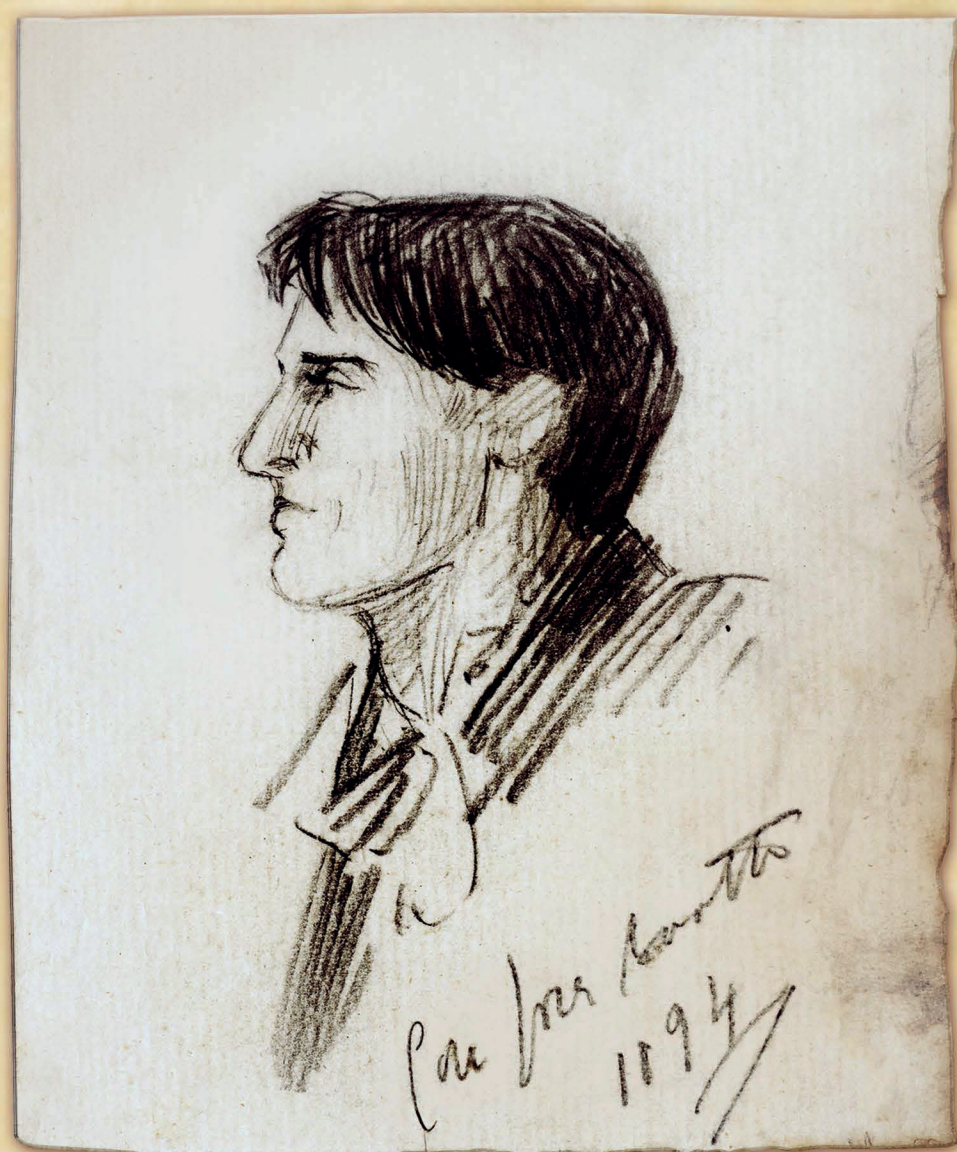
After the completion of her studies in the Slade School of Art, the bequest of an Aunt gave Constance a modest sum and with this and parental permission she travelled to Paris and enrolled in an art school there. It was here she met the self-styled Count Casimir Markiewicz. He was of Polish origin. The travails of Poland's history resulted, in the family, owning an estate in the Ukraine. His first wife having died he was a widow with a son being brought up at his maternal home in the Ukraine. Casimir was tall, handsome, talented and clever. When Constance's feelings became known, her family went to such lengths to investigate him that, he was for a time under surveillance by the Tzar's secret service.

When Constance decided that she wanted to marry him she went about soothing the family's fears and he met Sir Henry before his death. He travelled with Constance to Lissadell in 1900 and their engagement was announced in July. The wedding was held in London on the 29th September. They travelled to Paris to begin their married life after a honeymoon bicycling in Normandy. That autumn Constance and Casimir travelled to Ukraine to meet her stepson Stanislaus and the Markiewicz family and stayed until the following year. Here she and Casimir painted, hunted and enjoyed a similar life to the one in Lissadell.

Constance and Casimir in Paris dressed for bicycling
© Gore-Booth Family Collection

The first instance of Constance showing any interest in politics was in March 1891 when she attended, with her sister Eva, a meeting in Sligo Town Hall addressed by Charles Stewart Parnell. Parnell was in Sligo to campaign in a by-election in support of Valentine Dillon and was at this stage fatally damaged by the Kitty O'Shea scandal. His candidate lost. It was noteworthy for the local newspapers to record the presence of Constance and Eva.

Constance appears again, in 1896, in the local newspapers when she, Eva and Mabel set up a County



Sketch of W.B. Yeats
by Constance Gore-Booth
date 11/94 i.e. November 1894
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