

# Constance Markievicz

## I gCÚIS NA hÉIREANN

### Eagle Undone

She returned to London in June and there met her daughter Maeve whom she had not seen since her imprisonment in Cork. Maeve did not recognise her. In the election of 1924 Constance lost her seat. Of the people who voted, 466,419 voted for treaty candidates and 133,864 for anti-treaty candidates. The people wanted peace, a return to something that had not been felt since 1914.

Constance toured the countryside speaking, wrote articles and worked. Jeremiah Mee described her in 1924 at a meeting in Sligo as *'a careworn woman, broken, dispirited and sad'*. But she had enough spirit to fight for the legacy of James Connolly who was being besmirched as a Bolshevik; he had not lived long enough to know of them. She defended Connolly's beliefs and insisted that they were not in opposition to Catholic doctrine.

In June 1926 Eva, her sister, died and when asked about going to the funeral Constance said *'I simply cannot face the family'*. Was her grief so great that she could not encompass the loss she was experiencing? Eva, a pacifist, had committed her life to the emancipation of women, universal suffrage and the alleviation of poverty.



Full length photograph of Constance Markievicz to advertise a role  
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Mary Colum met Constance in George Russell's house at one of his gatherings in late 1926 and describes her as: *"sunk in dejection...What she has fought for had not really come into being..so romantic and heroic was it."*

In January 1927 her mother died, her mother had brought up Constance's daughter Maeve and allowed Constance to have a life of cultural and political involvement. She never openly supported Constance in her nationalist and republican activities. However, neither was she openly critical. Constance had a life, it was hers and as she herself made it. While the historical record is opaque in material terms, the loss of Eva and probably her mother appears to have left her financially destitute.

When her friend Dr. Kathleen Lynn examined her and recommended treatment for her appendix and asked her what hospital she wanted to go to she replied *'the cheapest, I'm a pauper'*. She developed peritonitis after the operation. She was now very seriously ill and close to death. Around her gathered her friends Helena Molony, Mary Perolz, May Coughlin and Florrie O'Connell. They were joined by Esther Roper and then by Casimir and Stanislaus Markiewicz who arrived from Warsaw. She was deeply appreciative: *"It is so beautiful to have this love and kindness before I go"*. She died on the 15<sup>th</sup> of July 1927.

Her funeral became a political event. Kevin O'Higgins, the Minister for Justice, had been assassinated on the 10th of July on his way to Mass by republicans. The Government refused the use of the City Hall or the Mansion House and her body was brought to the Rotunda where the Dublin that knew her kindness came to wish her farewell. The funeral cortege was followed by eight lorry loads of flowers and the organisations she had been part of marched behind: *Sinn Féin, Fianna na h'Éireann, Inghinidhe na hÉireann, Cumann na mBan, Fianna Fáil, ITGWU and the Irish Citizen Army*. They were followed by mourners. Sir Josslyn Gore-Booth attended her funeral.

It is perhaps appropriate to quote the words of Lady Augusta Gregory. She came from the same Anglo-Irish class as Constance, discovered a love of the native culture of Ireland and is herself chiefly remembered for her role in the establishment of the Abbey Theatre. On the death of Constance, Lady Gregory wrote in her Journal entry of 18<sup>th</sup> July 1927:

*"Poor Madame Markievicz has also gone...I remember one evening when I was coming from some hard hours work at the Abbey. I felt tired and jaded on the tram. And then she got in, tired and jaded also from drilling some of her Fianna. There was something gallant about her. We were each working for what we believed would help Ireland and we talked together."*

First day issue of stamps commemorating Constance Markievicz  
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