

## Speech by President Michael D. Higgins on Eva Gore-Booth

A chairde,

It is my great pleasure to have this occasion to honour the memory of Eva Gore-Booth. I am particularly pleased to be able to do so here, in Congress Hall, one of the emblematic seats of the cause of labour in Britain.

The rights of workers, particularly those of women workers, was a cause to which Eva Gore-Booth dedicated herself with energy, skill and humanity. It was a cause to which she offered her writing and poetry as weapons of peace, but also her talent for organisation, and that generous disposition for empathy and friendship which all those who knew her have described. The uncompromising ethical drive which distinguished Eva Gore-Booth's work for social reform was unique, making her a major figure in the history of these islands.

As many of you will know we, in Ireland, are commemorating this year the centenary of a milestone on our country's path to independence – the Easter Rising of 1916. These centenary celebrations have enabled us to salvage the memory of some of those forgotten people, many of them women, who carried forward Ireland's Revolution, but whose unyielding toil for emancipatory change has not always earned them the same recognition as that granted to the rebel leaders.

In my speeches at commemorative state ceremonies and community events alike, I have been seeking to do justice to the role of women in the struggle for Irish freedom. It remained of particular importance to me that adequate tribute be paid to Eva Gore-Booth as a remarkable, indeed quite extra-ordinary, figure, not just in Ireland's Revolution, but also in the international trade-union, suffrage and peace movements of the last century, and yet one whose memory has been somewhat obscured in orthodox Irish historiography. As Mary Condren, Professor of Women's Studies at Trinity College Dublin put it,

"When the history of those times was written, [Eva Gore-Booth] herself was relegated to being a mere afterthought to her more famous sibling. For Irish schoolchildren, her sister was the role model: Constance Markievicz – the sole woman to appear, complete with military weapons, in the iconography of Irish revolution."<sup>[1]</sup>

May I say once again, then, how much I welcome today's opportunity to recall and pay tribute to the life and achievements of Eva Gore-Booth, here in Britain, and with this particular audience for whom her life will have such significance.

It is not just the occasion to redress the oblivion of history that I welcome. More importantly perhaps, it seems to me that all of us can draw great inspiration from Eva Gore-Booth's integrated emancipatory instinct, from her unreserved commitment to the rights of the powerless and the disenfranchised. We can, too, recoup much needed courage and confidence in the knowledge that Eva Gore-Booth fought many battles against the dominant and distorting discourse of the established powers of her day – battles which, we know now, were pioneering, although she did not live to see most of them triumph. Her ability to respect and accommodate the views of other radicals was, in its eschewing of any suggestion of sectarianism, exemplary.

Indeed Eva Gore-Booth was a true revolutionary, who transgressed the boundaries of her time, sex and class. Born into the Anglo-Irish landed class, but perhaps also into one of its rare progressive parts in the West of Ireland, she became a trade-union founder and went to live with her life-long partner, Esther Roper, in a working class neighbourhood of Manchester. She was an ardent campaigner for women's suffrage and for gender equality in an age still ruled by patriarchal values. She was a prominent advocate of pacifism and a supporter of Conscientious Objectors throughout the heightened militarism of World War I, and, as we all know, she was also an Irish Nationalist – the daughter of a long line of landlords who yet embraced the cause of Irish independence.

It is those various strands of Eva Gore-Booth's life, a life lived in the public world, in the service of the public good, which I want to explore this evening. In doing so, I am indebted to the work of Sonja Tiernan, who produced, in 2012, the first biography dedicated entirely to Eva Gore-Booth: *Eva Gore-Booth. An image of such politics*,<sup>[2]</sup> as well as an excellent edition of Gore-Booth's *Political Writings*, published last year by the Manchester University Press.<sup>[3]</sup> Many of those writings were out of print and scattered across a variety of archival collections. They comprise poems, drama, journal articles, essays in philosophical prose, letters published by the newspapers of the day, most often the *Manchester Guardian*,<sup>[4]</sup> as well as penny pamphlets published by radical organisations. Gathered as they have been by Sonja Tiernan, those writings provide invaluable insight into the work of Eva Gore-Booth as a trade unionist, radical suffragist, pacifist, nationalist and prison reformer.

A defining event in Eva Gore-Booth's path to activism was her encounter with Esther Roper, whom she met in 1896, while recovering from illness in Italy. The two women would go on to share a house and work together over the subsequent three decades. Indeed they hardly ever spent any time apart from one another until Eva's death, in 1926. According to Sonja Tiernan, this life-long companionship between the two women, described by some of their contemporaries as "a pair of oddities", may be one reason why Eva's name has been overlooked in Irish popular memory.<sup>[5]</sup>

Esther Roper was herself a remarkable woman and a distinguished activist. Both her parents were from a working class background, and Esther was named after an aunt who had worked as a cotton weaver from the age of twelve. Her father, who had been a missionary in West Africa, died when Esther was nine-years-old. Her mother was the daughter of Irish immigrants and an advocate of female education who encouraged Esther to enter Manchester's Owens College, where the young woman became one of the first female students, to receive a BA degree in 1891.

Aged only twenty when her mother died, Esther took responsibility for her young brother, Reginald. She rapidly found employment as secretary of the Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage (MNSWS)<sup>[6]</sup> and began campaigning for the enfranchisement of all women, regardless of whether or not they owned property. Esther Roper also became involved with the Manchester University Settlement, which encouraged university staff and past students to provide classes and cultural activities for those with little or no access to education. The Settlement's Round House, in the area of Ancoats, thus became a thriving place – a common ground on which men and women of various classes would meet in goodwill and friendship, and learn from each other.

A year after their encounter in Italy, Eva Gore-Booth went to live with Esther Roper in a terraced, red brick house in Manchester. The Gore-Booth family had connections and property in Manchester, which Eva chose to ignore, preferring to share a house with Esther's brother and a couple whom they took in as lodgers. Manchester was then a city which concentrated the very quintessence of British industrial life.

How was the Industrial Revolution to be interpreted? This is a theme with which I engaged some years ago. Manchester was, to some, a shining citadel for the future, for others a devouring Minotaur of human life and experience. In 1977, my late friend and Professor of Sociology, Valdo Pons, presented a paper at Stanford University<sup>[7]</sup> in which he analysed the responses of British writers from the 1830s and 1840s – people such as Friedrich Engels, J.P. Kay, W. Cooke Taylor and others – to the "newness, enormity and dynamism" of Manchester at the turn of the 19th century.

Professor Pons showed how Manchester's status as a "new, unique element in British society – a factory town" was the object of differing interpretations, informed by different assumptions about the city and the wider society. These ranged from those who viewed the forces of radical change unleashed by industrial capitalism as an opportunity to "release 'potential man' in a classless society", to those who, alarmed by the evils of urban life, emphasised the value of charity and philanthropy – a philanthropy which influenced, for example, the Manchester University Settlement.

Valdo Pons' framework is a useful one to understand the divisions which traversed both the suffrage and labour movements in Eva Gore-Booth's time – divisions which set apart those, like Eva and Esther, who advocated for radical social and political reform, from those who were driven by middle-class moralism.

May I also recall how the Manchester of the late 19th century was home, as many of you will know, to tens of thousands of Irish people, some of whom hailed from Eva Gore-Booth's home county in Ireland. Many had reached Liverpool on board the steamship which, in the decades following the Great Irish Famine, departed Sligo Bay weekly, and they had then travelled the 30 miles to Manchester, where employment was found in abundance. By the early 1860s, more than 800,000 Irish people were living in England, of which almost half were concentrated in Lancashire and Cheshire.

Friedrich Engels has, in his writings, given us detailed, and somewhat unsympathetic, accounts of life in the ghettos of Manchester's New Town, known as the Irish Town, where people survived in squalid conditions. To make matters worse, the Irish, who, it was feared, would spread disease and work for lesser wages than their fellow English workers, were often viewed with hostility and fear. Understanding the world of these migrants, and their origin, was not an achievement of Engels. But Eva Gore-Booth had witnessed the Famine which revisited Ireland and Sligo in the years 1879-80. Then ten years old, she had, alongside her siblings, been involved in the distribution of her family's food stocks to tenants in need. Deeply aware as she was of the conditions from which those Irish migrants had fled, she was appalled by the environment that they now encountered in Manchester.

Eva Gore-Booth thus threw herself into social reform work in the very poor and densely populated working-class district of Ancoats, where 40% of the population were Irish. She was also drawn to the work of the University Settlement, setting up a dramatic society with women textile factory workers and organising dramatic evenings every Monday. In 1900, she was appointed as co-secretary of the Manchester and Salford Women's Trade Union Council (WTUC), which had been established a few years earlier, in an attempt "to bring trade-unionism within the reach of scattered individuals working in unorganised trades".[8]

Under the leadership of its two secretaries, Eva Gore-Booth and Sarah Dickenson, the WTUC helped to form trade unions for women, primarily for cotton operatives and weavers. But the formation of the WTUC was also a response to the reluctance shown by male-dominated unions to openly welcome female membership and take care of the specific issues faced by women workers. Some unions such as, for example, the bookbinders' union, would not allow women to become apprentices. As for the Manchester and Salford Trades' Council, many of its members feared the undercutting effect of women's low wages, and indeed its President of the day had publicly expressed the view that the proper place for women was not in the workshop but at home.

Eva Gore-Booth vehemently combatted such views, advocating for women's financial independence in numerous speeches, letters and pamphlets. If I may quote her words which poignantly evoke, not just the life of women of the previous century, but also the daily reality of so many women in our contemporary world:

"There is no poverty so crushing as the poverty of a family, where, through force of circumstances – as indeed often happens – a woman is the principal bread-winner. The theory that working men keep their families, and that the earning of women are merely an extra help to the family finances ... has often been quoted as a justification for the low wages of women, but it has grown to be wholly untrue to the facts of life.

Directly a girl is grown up, or, indeed, long before the age that is considered full grown amongst people who have leisure to grow up comfortably, she is expected to earn her keep. So many young children and old people are, of course, dependent on married women ... and there is not a working woman in the country, married or single, who does not know that, probably, for one reason or another, she will before the end be thrown on her own resources, and that there comes a time in most people's lives when only their capacity for wage-earning stands between them and the workhouse."[9]

In those years she spent living in Manchester, Eva Gore-Booth also dedicated herself to combating attempts at restricting women's employment. Working women, especially married ones, were viewed with suspicion at the turn of the 20th century. In 1905, a year when infant mortality rates had reached alarming heights in Britain and Ireland, married women working in factories became the object of a stringently critical public campaign, including from some in liberal circles. Socialist and trade-union activist John Burns, for example, thus described how,

"if mothers were working for nine, ten, or twelve hours in a factory, it not only contributed to producing a high mortality among their infants, but the effect on the children who survived was seen in gangs of anaemic, saucy, vulgar, ignorant, cigarette-smoking hooligans."

Eva Gore-Booth was incensed by John Burns' suggestion that married women who were working were the source of both infantile deaths and of Britain's social problems or anti-social attitudes. She publicly questioned Burns' notion that - I quote -

"the ideal woman of the working class is clean, sober, dependent and has a talent for cookery,"[10]

She argued for radical social reform as the only viable path, including the creation of "crèches with trained attendants, real projects for street and house sanitation, and a better food supply." In these years, Eva Gore-Booth also led a series of campaigns against legislative proposals aimed at limiting the access of women to certain categories of employment portrayed as harmful to their health and morals.

In 1908, for example, Eva Gore-Booth organised the Barmaids' Political Defence League to oppose the inclusion in the Licensing Bill of a section prohibiting women from working in licensed premises. The proponents of the ban - in particular temperance suffragists who viewed the Bill as protecting women from a path of moral ruin - were portrayed by Gore-Booth as "short-sighted philanthropists." [11]

Such views were of course part of the anti-urbanism that prevailed on both sides of the Atlantic. As Josiah Strong put it:

"God created man in a garden. The City is the result of the Fall."

Unexpectedly, Eva's vibrant barmaids' campaign claimed Winston Churchill as its main political casualty. During a whole day (and part of the night) before the 1908 by-elections, Constance Markievicz, who had rushed to the assistance of her sister, memorably drove a striking coach pulled by four white horses around the streets of Manchester, while Eva took to the roof of the coach and made a rousing speech about barmaids as Churchill was holding his own meeting at the Coal Exchange. Not only did the campaign cost Churchill his seat as MP for Manchester North-West, it also convinced PM Asquith to remove the entire section relating to women from the Licensing Bill.

It is important to state that Eva Gore-Booth was not hostile to legislative proposals aimed at protecting women workers; she was opposed, rather, to those sections in the Factory Acts which threatened the livelihoods of women by setting regulations that applied to them alone. She argued that similar restrictions should apply to men - thus ensuring that competition for jobs would be equal. These views were clearly outlined in a speech in which Eva Gore-Booth expressed her support to two other groups of vulnerable working-women, namely pit brow workers and women engaged in dangerous performances:[12]

"The Miners' Federation, horrified at the increase of female labour at the Pit Brow, does not appeal to parliament to protect the men's work, but they appeal on sentimental grounds that the women should be protected against the moral deterioration of the miners' conversation and the strain of hard work. The self-condemnation in the miners' first protest surely needs no comment. And there is something absurd in making the law to protect the women from the society of their own relations and friends.

(...) Mr. Gladstone also proposed to legislate against the employment of women in dangerous performances. Are then all the women circus performers, high divers, gymnasts, bicycle performers, and acrobats to be turned out of their work because one woman is killed by an accident with a parachute, an accident caused by a fault in the machine, not the performer? ... This is no sex question. If Mr. Gladstone's purpose is to protect the woman's life against her will, surely the man's life is of some account too. The laws of gravity apply to men and women alike.”[13]

Eva Gore-Booth's campaigns in support of pit brow workers and women performers also manifest her radical conception of gender equality. Indeed both Gore-Booth and Roper were pioneering, not just in their opposition to any kind of discrimination based on gender in the workplace, but in their view of gender performance as simply learned behaviour and convention. Eva Gore-Booth, whose health was notoriously delicate, went as far as to work as a pit brow lass to prove that there was no physical limitation to women's work.

1911, the year of the pit brow campaign, was also the year when Eva and Esther joined Thomas Baty's Aëthnic Union, which claimed that

"upon the fact of sex there has been built up a gigantic superstructure of artificial convention which urgently needs to be swept away."

Together with other members of the Aëthnic Union, they established the journal *Urania*, in which one can find articulated their view that<sup>9</sup>

“sex was an accident and formed no essential part of an individual's nature.”

These indeed are words that are uncannily similar to those that would be formulated by Simone de Beauvoir half a century later.

Another remarkable feature of Eva Gore-Booth's social and political activism is her connecting of industrial struggles and women trade-unionism with the political battle for women's suffrage. She was convinced that the position of women, both in the home and in the workplace, would not improve until they received the franchise. In other words, there was, in Gore-Booth's view, an intrinsic link between women's "political disability", their "exclusion from the responsibilities of national life", and the low wages which were the plight of working women. As she put it:

“Six or seven shillings a week is not a sufficient sum of money to live on. This is not the rate of wages that could possibly be enforced upon the enfranchised citizens of a free country. We feel ... that our industrial status is being brought down. It results from the fact that we have no political power.”[14]

While such connection between industrial and political issues might seem obvious to us today, this was far from evident in Eva Gore-Booth's time. The suffrage movement was traversed by similar divisions and conflicts as the trade-union movement. Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Roper were among the first to take the issue of women suffrage out of the preserve of middle-class concerns and to seek the enfranchisement of all women, regardless of their property qualifications.

Eva Gore-Booth had, in 1899, joined the executive committee of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), an umbrella organisation established to coordinate the work of Britain's 500 or so suffragist organisations. However, Eva Gore-Booth's position was more radical than that of the Union, which campaigned to secure votes for women on the same terms as successive Reform Acts had granted them to men who satisfied certain property qualifications. Extending the vote to women on such terms would do little to improve the lives of working-class women, few of whom owned or rented property in their own right. As Eva Gore-Booth's friend, Selina Cooper, put it in a speech summing up the position of their group of "radical suffragists":

“Women do not want their political power to boast they are on equal terms with the men. They want to use it for the same purpose as men - to get better conditions.”

Convinced that there was no resolution but political to the plight of millions of women employed in miserably paid trades such as folding and sewing, cigar making, cap making, fancy-box making, if not in outright sweated labour, Eva, Esther and their friends launched, in 1900, a large petition for suffrage.

Presented to the Lancashire MPs by Sarah Reddish, who had worked in the cotton mill factories from the age of eleven, this was the first petition of working women ever presented to the British parliament. Eva Gore-Booth described how “deputations of enthusiastic workers” arrived at the House of Commons and “could not believe in the indifference of the well-to-do world to the claims of the unenfranchised wage-earners.” The deputations “came back to Lancashire sadder and wiser women.”[15]

The women then looked to the recently formed Labour Representation Committee (LRC), which had demanded representation for working men in the House of Commons, as perhaps their best chance of gaining the franchise for women. The issue of women’s political representation was not, however, a consensual one amongst members of the LRC. This seemed all the more outrageous to the women as the textile trade unions to which the LRC was affiliated had a majority of female members, who were paying the same parliamentary levy as men.

Disappointed by the LRC, Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Roper formed a group to sponsor a candidate pledged to universal women suffrage in the 1904 election - The Lancashire and Cheshire Women Textile and Other Workers’ Representation Committee (LCWTOWRC). The writings of Eva Gore-Booth on behalf of this Women Workers’ Representation Committee are ones that powerfully speak to us today. In them we see how deep her rejection was of any form of aristocracy, not just of the old hereditary aristocracy, from which she had departed, but also of what she called “the new aristocracy of labour” living in the illusion that it could protect itself from “the multitude of helpless, outlawed, unorganised, and half-starved workers.”

These, of course, are issues that continue to challenge us in our own times, not just within our respective countries, but also as we respond to the urgent challenge of reorganising the labour movement at a global level. For Eva Gore-Booth, there was no doubt that the cause of labour was – had to be – the cause of the most vulnerable, that the chain of working people was “never stronger than its very weakest link”. If I may quote from the Manifesto of the Lancashire and Cheshire Women Workers’ Representation Committee:

“The Government says, ‘We have nothing to do with you, you can bring no pressure to bear on us’; but the nation says, ‘We feel the pressure of your poverty.’ In spite of the deafness of the political parties to human needs, working men everywhere are beginning to realise that the exclusion from all political rights of a body of 5,000,000 [women] workers is not only a source of industrial weakness and poverty to themselves. But a danger to the whole of the world of labouring people.”[16]

Eva Gore-Booth was also acutely aware that working women’s political disability made them an easy target for politicians during times of increased economic struggle. Had she lived amongst us today, I have no doubt that she would have been a voice for those new disenfranchised – strangers, migrants, and migrant women – who are, in our times, so easily blamed for providing “cheap labour” and for a whole range of other problems. As Eva Gore-Booth said,

“What the working class needs is not protection from one another, but protection from the evils of poverty.”[17]

These are words that resonate profoundly with our contemporary situation – words that can illuminate our continuing struggle for decent work for all.

We can also find inspiration, I believe, in another strand of Eva Gore-Booth's public work, namely her passionate commitment to the cause of peace throughout the years of World War One.

In 1913, Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Roper moved to 33, Fitzroy Square, just a few streets from here. The lower floors of their house harboured Roger Fry's Omega Workshop, and the two women soon began to mix with the so-called Bloomsbury group, people such as John Maynard Keynes, Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey, Vanessa Bell, who were challenging accepted views on economy, sexuality and patriotism, who were celebrating life in all its diversity and possibilities.

The outbreak of the First World War, in September 1914, caused most suffragist organisations to suspend their campaigns for women's enfranchisement, and join forces with the government in support of the British war effort. In contrast, while continuing her campaign for women's suffrage, Eva Gore Booth spent most of those years working for the cause of peace.

Impervious to the patriotic fever which held sway in the country, she supported those German citizens who had found themselves trapped in England by the outbreak of the War. She also participated in writing a collective letter, signed by 101 British and Irish pacifist women, which was sent to German and Austrian women at Christmas 1914 (and to which those women responded in the same spirit of peace and friendship).

Eva Gore-Booth was relentless in her denunciation of war as a destruction of everything that is of value to human life. Let us think of Syria and its people as I read her speech delivered to the National Industrial and Professional Women's Suffrage Society in December 1914. She said:

"We read in the papers every day ... of thousands of brave people of all countries shot dead or mutilated for life; we hear terrible tales of hardship, of the cold and wet, of the unbearable filth of the trenches ... Then we hear of a devastated country, town bombarded, villages burnt, crops destroyed and thousands of people face to face with all the miseries of famine and homelessness. In our country we are surrounded by mourners, by people who have lost all that made life worth living, whose nearest and dearest are lying dead among the unspeakable horrors of what is called the fields of honour.

Instances of heroism and self-sacrifice shown by soldiers on all sides have been quoted as a justification for war. But it only adds a little to the general tragedy to think that such fine qualities should be lost to the world, and lives that might have been so useful swept away in the universal and intolerable carnage."<sup>[18]</sup>

Eva Gore-Booth was relentless, too, in her denunciation of the failures of international diplomacy, describing – with words which must cause all of us to pause and reflect – how:

"We have surely reached the logical result of some wrong doctrine when we find the Governments of ten civilised nations forsaking their proper functions of caring for the welfare and happiness of the governed and straining every resource of science and knowledge to cause as much pain, on as big a scale as possible."

As the war went on, although deeply disturbed by the sinking of the Lusitania,<sup>[19]</sup> Eva Gore-Booth turned her efforts to the anti-conscription movement. In July 1915, she attended the Pacifist Philosophy of Life Conference, in Caxton Hall, London, where she befriended Fenner Brockway, editor of the Labour Leader, who published an appeal for Conscientious Objectors and established the No Conscription Fellowship (NCF). The Fellowship offered protection for young men who refused to take up arms on moral, religious or political grounds. Eva Gore-Booth immediately got involved with the Fellowship's campaign, passionately defending "man's right to his own soul and conscience."

By the end of the year 1915, the huge losses suffered by armies on all sides meant that the men killed or wounded on the front were not being replaced.<sup>[20]</sup> On 2nd March, 1916, for the first time in history, military conscription was introduced in Britain. The Military Service Act 1916 did contain a section allowing for individual exemptions due to conscientious objection, however the

process for gaining such exemptions proved particularly difficult, even stigmatising, for those who applied.

Like hundreds of other volunteers of the NCF, Eva Gore-Booth travelled across England to attend the work of the tribunals that were established to hear cases of conscientious objection.[21] She dramatised a day in the life of a 'watcher' in an emotional account, entitled *The Tribunal*, which provides a rare glimpse into the experience of those seeking an exemption from war service.

One cannot but admire the courage of Eva Gore-Booth in writing against militarism at the height of intense pro-war propaganda and in bravely identifying herself as the author of texts such as this pamphlet. (During the same time, Bertrand Russell, with whom she had become acquainted at the Caxton Hall conference, was arrested for writing a similar pamphlet and dismissed from his lectureship post at Trinity College, Cambridge). Indeed to dissent from Britain's war-fever was, perhaps, the hardest and most vital act of moral courage any citizen could undertake at that time, and it was particularly difficult for women to appear "ungrateful", as it would be put, towards the men then exposing themselves to mutilation and death.

While Eva-Gore Booth was immersed in the peace campaign in Britain, the wheels were in motion, in Ireland, for an armed uprising against British imperial rule. Eva was unaware that her own sister, Constance Markievicz, was centrally involved in preparing the military strike which broke out in Dublin during Easter Week 1916.

This is, as Sonja Tiernan puts it, perhaps surprising, considering the very close bonds which united the two sisters, who regularly visited and wrote to each other. During their childhood spent on the big estate of Lissadell, in Co. Sligo, the two had a deep friendship, which was sustained through both of their lives. Constance often illustrated her younger sister's poetry with watercolour paintings or line drawings – a collaboration which they resumed during Constance's imprisonment in 1916.

Eva and Constance, who had been presented at the court of Queen Victoria in 1887, both rejected the privilege of their upbringing and social circumstances. At a time of great change and political agitation in Ireland, when campaigns for tenants' rights were challenging the position of landlords, both sisters chose to put their lives in the service of the oppressed. They were driven by the same idealism, although they chose very different paths to achieve their ends. R.M. Fox, a friend of Eva Gore-Booth who had visited her shortly before her death, thus described the common passion for justice which animated the two sisters:

"The gap dividing the sisters is much smaller than many realise, though they seem at opposite poles. Both were rebels against all that they regarded as mean and unworthy. Their passionate, selfless sincerity drove them in different directions. One came out of the smoke and flame and handed her revolver to the commanding officer when the rebels surrendered; the other was a militant pacifist."

A pacifist at heart, Eva Gore-Booth nevertheless steadfastly defended, in her writings and speeches, the reputation and motivations of her friends who were involved in the Easter Rising. And while Eva Gore-Booth is too rarely acknowledged as an Irish patriot, her commitment to the cause of Irish freedom in fact predates the 1916 Rebellion.

In her early poetry we can see, already, how Eva's inspiration was republican and revolutionary, based on the ideals of the French Revolution and Wolfe Tone's non-sectarian principles.[22]

She was also an intrinsic part of the Irish cultural revival movement, the friend of such as George Russell (Æ) and W.B. Yeats, whom she knew from her teen years in Sligo and who had written encouragingly of her poetry. Throughout her life, Eva Gore-Booth published numerous volumes of poetry and drama, inspired by Ireland's ancient mythological figures, most notably Maeve, Queen of Connaught, whose burial ground, Knocknarea's flat-top cairn, overlooked the estate of Lissadell.

When the Rising broke out, in 1916, Eva Gore-Booth interpreted it, not as an act of war, but as an act of rebellion against British oppression. This is manifest, for example, in "Rhythms of Art," a pamphlet for the League of Peace and Freedom in which Eva wrote:

"The 'Dark Rosaleen' is a far more beautiful poem than 'Rule Britannia,' because the rhythm that finds vent in rebellion, imperfect as it must be, or else it could not find vent in violence, is still a more subtle and beautiful rhythm than the vibration that expresses itself in the ponderous pomposity and violence of Empire."

Such reading of the Easter Rising as a strike against imperial oppression is evident, too, in her "Holograph Account of a visit to Dublin in the Aftermath of the Rising", which she wrote after she had rushed to Dublin to visit her sister at Mountjoy Prison:

"As the Leinster steamed into Dublin Bay on that May morning of 1916," she wrote, "the world seemed transfigured with beauty and delight ... The sea shifted and glittered and dreamed. It was hardly possible to believe that any man could look upon the vessel's shining track merely as the road to Empire and domination. Yet, as the siren suddenly shrieked out its harsh warning, the sight of a great mass of khaki-clad soldiers crowding round the gangway shook the glamour of the scene and brought queer memories of past generations.

Soldiers of all times, of the same nationality and on the same quest. Soldiers in the queer bulky armour of the Middle Ages, soldiers in the gay colours of the Elizabethans, soldiers in Cromwell's drabs, soldiers in the stiff reds of the last century, and now soldiers in khaki...

Ten minutes after that the world turned black, as I read the words that shrieked in huge letters from every hoarding in the town: 'James Connolly shot this morning'."

Eva Gore-Booth was deeply shaken by the execution of James Connolly, whom she had met, together with Jim Larkin, during her visits to Dublin.[23] She especially liked and admired Connolly, a man who, as she wrote,

"had that quality, rare indeed among politicians, that however absorbed he might be in fighting for a cause, he did not forget to answer the appeal of individual suffering."

She also shared Connolly's Irish Citizen Army's vision of radical social reform, which included equality between the sexes as one of its central goals. Eva thus lost several friends in the Easter Rising, not just James Connolly, but also her very dear friend Francis Sheehy Skeffington, a suffrage activist and a pacifist, who was summarily executed by British soldiers on the third day of the Rising although he did not have any part in the fighting.[24] The murder of Francis Sheehy was seen by Eva Gore-Booth as emblematic of the brutal spirit of militarism. As she put it:

"In Sheehy-Skeffington militarism had struck down its worst enemy – unarmed yet insurgent Idealism."

Upon her return to London from Dublin, in the early summer of 1916, Eva Gore-Booth also passionately dedicated herself to the campaign for the reprieve of Sir Roger Casement, who had been arrested on Banna Strand, a beach off Ireland's West Coast in a failed attempt to ship weapons to the Irish Volunteers and advise against the Rising

The subsequent years of Eva Gore-Booth's life were punctuated by visits to her sister in various prisons, not just Mountjoy and then Aylesbury Prison, in Buckinghamshire, where Constance Markievicz was held until June 1917, but also Holloway Jail, where she was imprisoned in 1918 and 1919 alongside Maud Gonne and Kathleen Clarke, after the British Intelligence Service had claimed to have uncovered a Sinn Féin "German plot." [25] Eva's familiarisation with the world of prisons – which she described as

"all the same, built after the same dreary pattern. Very imposing and grand on the outside, they gradually get squalider and squalider the further you get into them" –

led her to espouse yet another cause, that of Prison Reform, which she championed alongside her campaign for the abolition of the death penalty, throughout the years of the Irish War of Independence.[26]

Dear friends,

It was on a visit to Peter O'Toole's house, Traynor House in Heath Street, in Hampstead, that I turned up a flyer asking local members of the Labour Party to assemble the following Saturday to clear up Eva Gore-Booth's grave. This was how my interest in Constance Markievicz's neglected sister was aroused. It would be such a travesty, it seemed to me, to continue to neglect Eva Gore-Booth's life's work. That is why we are all so indebted to Sonja Tiernan and those like her.

Eva Gore-Booth's extraordinary path of engagement is one that remains deeply inspiring to us today. Eva was not limited by any sectional views. She was never sectarian, dismissive or excluding. She was driven by an uncompromising ethical consciousness of universal human rights. She was a woman who felt compelled to engage with injustices wherever she found them, possessed as she was by a deep ethical concern for the value of each human life, for everything that makes human life worth living – solidarity, freedom, construction, joy and love.

And indeed it was words of love, those of the ancient Greek poetess Sappho, that Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Roper chose to be inscribed on the grave of St. John's Churchyard, where the two lie together:-

"Life that is Love is God"

Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir.

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[1] Mary Condren. 2002. "Theology and Ethics: The Twentieth Century", in Angela Bourke, Siobhan Kilfeather, Maria Luddy et al. (eds), *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing Volume IV: Irish Women's Writing and Traditions*. Cork University Press, p. 655.

[2] Sonja Tiernan. 2012. *Eva Gore-Booth. An image of such politics*. Manchester University Press. The subtitle of Tiernan's biography is obviously a reference to W.B. Yeats' rather acerbic poem, "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markievicz":

The light of evening, Lissadell,  
Great windows open to the south,  
Two girls in silk kimonos, both  
Beautiful, one a gazelle.  
But a raving autumn shears  
Blossom from the summer's wreath;  
The older is condemned to death,  
Pardoned, drags out lonely years  
Conspiring among the ignorant.  
I know not what the younger dreams –

Some vague Utopia – and she seems,  
When withered old and skeleton-gaunt,  
An image of such politics. [my emphasis]

[3] Sonja Tiernan. 2015. *The political writings of Eva Gore-Booth*. Manchester University Press.

[4] Eva Gore-Booth had a close relationship with the editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, C.P. Scott, who was instrumental in establishing the Manchester and Salford Women's Trade Union's Council and was a fervent supporter of women's suffrage and Irish nationalism. E.g. Scott commissioned J.M. Synge and Jack Yeats to produce articles and drawings documenting the social conditions of the West of Ireland at the turn of the last century. These pieces were published in 1911 in the collection *Travels in Wicklow, West Kerry and Connemara*.

[5] In their own time Eva and Esther were seen, as Gifford Lewis noted in her biographical study of the two, as "a pair of oddities." See Lewis, Gifford. 1988. *Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Roper: A Biography*. London: Pandora.

[6] In 1897 the MNSWS changed its name to the "North of England Society for Women's Suffrage" (NESWS) to show responsibility for all northern counties.

[7] This paper was published as an article entitled "Contemporary Interpretations of Manchester in the 1830s and 1840s", *Stanford Journal of International Studies*, Vol. XII, Spring 1978.

[8] WTUC. 1900. Sixth annual report.

[9] "Textile tracts – no.1: A Pamphlet on behalf of the LCWTOWRC", in Sonja Tiernan. 2015. *The political writings of Eva Gore-Booth.*, pp 19-23.

[10] Eva Gore-Booth, "The Symposium: Mr Burns and Infant Mortality," *Women's Tribune*, 23 June 1906.

[11] *Manchester Guardian*, 23 Dec 1903.

[12] In 1906, a legislative proposal was introduced to consolidate the Dangerous Performance Bill, meant as a measure of protection for female performers employed in theatres, music-halls and circuses, etc. In 1911, Gore-Booth campaigned in support of women working in the coal mines. Indeed, while the 1842 Act had banned women from working underground, tubshoving at the base of mines continued as an occupation for thousands of women, many of whom were Irish.

[13] Quoted in Sonja Tiernan. 2015. *Op.cit.*, pp. 35-36.

[14] Speech by Eva Gore Booth on behalf of the working women's societies of Lancashire at a meeting in London with liberal PM Campbell-Bannerman, as reported in the *Guardian*, 21 May 1906.

[15] Eva Gore-Booth, "The Women's Suffrage Movement among Trade Unionists," in Brougham Villiers (ed.). 1907. *The Case for Women's Suffrage*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, p.52.

[16] Eva Gore-Booth, *Ibid.*

[17] Eva Gore-Booth, "Women's Suffrage and the Laws of Supply and Demand," in *Nineteenth Century and After*, August 1914, quoted in Sonja Tiernan. 2015. *Op.cit.*, p. 124.

[18] "Whence come wars?", Speech delivered at the National Industrial and Professional Women's Suffrage Society in London, 12 December 1914.

[19] Eva Gore-Booth was shocked to learn that among the 1,200 people who lost their lives was Hugh Lane, a nephew of Lady Gregory who had been engaged to one of Gore-Booth's close friends, and who patronised young Irish artists such as Jack B. Yeats and William Orpen.

[20] One week after the Caxton Hall conference, PM Asquith proposed the creation of a national registry, which soon revealed that two million eligible men had not volunteered for war service.

[21] Eva Gore-Booth noted how the unpaid work of those tribunal members attracted enthusiastic supporters of the war, generally middle-aged and middle-class men, who had very little empathy for the feelings of the young men to whom they were supposed to give a fair hearing.

[22] This aspect is manifest, for example, in one of Gore-Booth's early poems, entitled "Tricolour":

In liberty of thought,  
Equality of life,  
The generations sought  
A rest from hate and strife.  
Hard work on common ground,  
Strong arms and spirits free,  
In these at last they found  
Fraternity.

[23] During their visits to Dublin, Eva and Esther stayed with Constance Markievicz, often at her Surrey House, Rathmines. It was in this house that Larkin hid in August 1913 to evade arrest. And the Workers' Republic, founded by Connolly, was also printed at that address for a time.

[24] The Death of Fionavar, a short play which Eva wrote after the Rising and which was illustrated by Constance Markievicz from her prison, was dedicated: "to the Memory of the Dead. The Many who died for Freedom and the One who died for Peace."

[25] Sinn Féin's victory in the December 1918 general election made of Markievicz the first woman ever elected to the British House of Commons. Markievicz received a letter from Lloyd George at Holloway Prison inviting her to the House of Commons for the opening day of Sessions and greatly enjoyed replying to it.

[26] During which war the number of executions of Irish men was rising at an alarming pace.