

## What to Wear for a Revolution? Countess Constance Markievicz in Military Dress\*

CONSTANCE MARKIEVICZ (1868–1927) remains a contentious figure in the memory of the 1916 Easter Rising, not least because of her wholehearted advocacy of violence. With such a legacy how should we understand her premeditated act of commissioning photographs of herself in military-style dress just weeks before the insurrection? What to wear for a revolution might appear to be a frivolous dilemma, but it preoccupied Markievicz in the run-up to the Rising. This essay argues that recognizing these military portraits as the conscious production of what historian Guy Beiner might label a prememory text—as an attempt to preempt history—offers a means of accessing the hopes and anxieties of those aspiring to shape history.<sup>1</sup>

By commissioning the self-portraits, Markievicz sought to write herself into history—and to control how that history would be remembered. How then is her performative act to be understood as a shaping of memory formation? Drawing on the affective quality of photography, Marianne Hirsch distinguishes between the lived memories of those who have experienced trauma and their descendants who are positioned by “generational distance” to be “attuned by narratives that preceded their birth”; Hirsch terms the memory of the latter “postmemory.”<sup>2</sup> Beiner offers a somewhat different conceptualization of postmemory, viewing its necessary counterpart to be pre-

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1. Guy Beiner, “Probing the Boundaries of Irish Memory: From Postmemory to Prememory and Back,” *Irish Historical Studies* 39:154 (2014).

2. Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 22.

memory. Memory, he argues, does not necessarily start after an event but rather is molded by preceding occurrences drawn upon with the intention of securing future remembrance. In other words, modern memory, which we can class as mediated memory, is never pure or neutral; it is constructed by reviving older memories with a view to affecting future recall. Here, Beiner, unlike Hirsch, contends that if we accept “that memory persists in a continuous present,” then “it also has a past in the form of prememory.” In short, “the vitality of memory is not dependent on proximity to historical events.”<sup>3</sup>

This essay explores how Beiner’s conceptualization of memory might contribute to an understanding of the historical photograph—a subject he does not himself consider. On one level, all photography is about postmemory, a conscious capturing of an image to construct future memories. Family photography, with its conventions of smiling faces and the recording of generational milestones, is an obvious example. The promise of the photograph might well constitute, according to Douwe Draaisma, “the immutability of what is stored as a memory,” suggesting a “memory that forgets nothing.”<sup>4</sup> However, despite such assumed promises of permanence, memory is far less reliable: it is a “narrative rather than a replica of an experience that can be retrieved and relived.”<sup>5</sup> Thus the anxiety of prememory, for Marita Sturken, is that “forgetting” is a necessary part of remembering.<sup>6</sup> The political or propaganda photograph, for example, suggests anxieties about guaranteeing memory in the future, for the creation of such photographs is prompted by a lack of assurance about postmemory. The focus of this essay will, therefore, be on the military portraits that Markievicz commissioned, as well as on other sorts of photographic portraiture through which she or others sought to create her public persona. Viewed together, these constitute alternative images of her in the immediate aftermath of the Rising.

3. Beiner, “Probing the Boundaries,” 302–3.

4. Douwe Draaisma, *Metaphors of Memory: A History of Ideas about the Mind*, trans. Paul Vincent (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 121.

5. Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 7.

6. *Ibid.*

## HAVING ONESELF PHOTOGRAPHED

As the Anglo-Irish daughter of the Gore-Booth family of Lissadell House, Co. Sligo, Markievicz was no stranger to photography. Both studio portraits and location shots by Lafayette Photography—photographer to royalty and elites—turn up frequently in the Gore-Booth archive. Notable are the variety of the poses that she adopted: the Irish colleen, the debutante, and the accomplished horsewoman. Other photographs illustrate her self-presentation as bohemian artist, Ukrainian peasant girl (on a visit to Zywtowka, the estate of her husband, Count Casimir Markievicz; see figure 1), and in the guise of a number of acting roles.<sup>7</sup> Markievicz commissioned the military portraits, however, not from Lafayette Photography but from the Keogh Brothers, a commercial firm that actively participated in constructing the visual representation of the Rising and catered to a lesser social strata than Lafayette.<sup>8</sup> By 1916 the Keogh Brothers had already photographed Markievicz in Irish-affiliated costume and in commemorative group portraits of Fianna Éireann, the Irish-nationalist youth organization that she had founded as the Red Branch Knights in 1908.

In commissioning images of herself in military dress while carrying a gun just weeks before the Easter Rising, Markievicz demonstrated a keen appreciation of the power of spectacle—undoubtedly gained through her early experiences being photographed, training as an artist, and being actively involved with Dublin theater. She was, in other words, well aware of the requisite staging of an image for public consumption. Jack Elliott suggests that Markievicz sought to shape the representation of herself circulated after the Rising as appropriately militaristic rather than reflecting her life as an ascendancy-class debutante.<sup>9</sup> Since her privileged Anglo-Irish background

7. See the examples in the Lissadell Papers (D4131/K/4/1/5, D4131/K/4/1/4, D4131/K/4/1/31-32, Public Records Office of Northern Ireland [hereafter cited as PRONI]).

8. See the essay in the exhibition catalogue for the Highlanes Gallery and Drogheda Arts Festival by Fionna Barber, “Constructing Constance (and Some Other Women),” in *Beyond the Pale: The Art of Revolution*, ed. Anthony Haughey, Pat Cooke, Aoife Ruane (Drogheda: Highlanes Gallery, 2016), 7–8.

9. Jack Elliott, “‘After I Am Hanged My Portrait Will Be Interesting but Not Before’: Ephemera and the Construction of Personal Responses to the Easter Rising,” in *Making 1916: Material and Visual Culture of the Easter Rising*, ed. Lisa Godson and Joanna Brück (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 91.



FIGURE I. Countess Constance Markievicz performing the Ukrainian peasant girl, Zywotowka photographer unknown, n.d. (Lisadell Papers, D 4131/K/4/1/32, Public Records Office, Northern Ireland). Image courtesy of Deputy Keeper of Records, Public Records Office, and Sir Josslyn Gore-Booth.

sat uneasily with her radical nationalism, causing suspicion about her commitment to the cause, the photographs in military costume were undoubtedly commissioned to disassociate herself from British oppression. They evidence Markievicz crafting a self-image, an anticipatory act controlling how memory will operate; in Beiner's words she was "predetermin[ing] how history will be remembered."<sup>10</sup>

10. Guy Beiner, "Making Sense of Memory: Coming to Terms with Conceptualisations of Historical Remembrance," in *Remembering 1916: The Easter Rising, the Somme and the Politics of Memory in Ireland*, ed. Richard S. Grayson and Fearghal McGarry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 21.

Various contemporary accounts evidence Markievicz's preoccupation with fashioning her image before the Rising. According to Kathleen Lynn, she anticipated that she would wear a green tunic with silver buttons and breeches. She replaced the "slouch hat with the red hand of Larkin's Transport and General Workers' Union" that she normally wore on Irish Citizen Army (ICA) parades with "her very best hat with the cock's feathers."<sup>11</sup> By April 1916, according to Anne Haverty, Markievicz had carefully constructed "an uncompromisingly soldierly rig-out": a "dark green woolen blouse with brass buttons, green tweed knee-breeches that could be concealed under a long skirt, black stockings, and heavy boots."<sup>12</sup> She also wore "a cartridge belt around her waist, with an automatic hanging from it on one side and a Mauser rifle on the other, a bandolier, and haversack on her shoulder."<sup>13</sup>

But Markievicz needed approval and sought a verdict on her military attire from Nora Connolly O'Brien, daughter of ICA leader James Connolly. Nora responded, "You look a real soldier, Madame . . . , and Madame beamed as if she had received a tremendous compliment." According to Connolly O'Brien, such encouragement prompted a change of headwear, with Markievicz now "putting on her best hat—a black velour with a heavy plume of coque feathers"—to complete her ensemble.<sup>14</sup> In the immediate run-up to the Easter Rising, she also displayed her intended outfit to Kitty O'Doherty, a woman reportedly "accustomed to her eccentricities."<sup>15</sup> On Good Friday, three days before the commencement of the Easter Monday insurrection, O'Doherty met Markievicz at the Liberty Hall, headquarters of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. There Markievicz revealed that under a skirt of short green material she was wearing "[b]reeches and puttees," explaining, "I could not fight in skirts"; O'Doherty noted she "was very proud of herself."<sup>16</sup> Nancy

11. Quoted in Constance Markievicz, *Prison Letters of Countess Markievicz* (London: Virago, 1986), xix.

12. Anne Haverty, *Constance Markievicz: Irish Revolutionary*, rev. ed. (Dublin: Lilliput Press, 2016), 153.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Quoted in Haverty, *Constance Markievicz*, 153.

15. Kitty O'Doherty's Witness Statement (hereafter cited as WS) 335, Bureau of Military History (hereafter cited as BMH), 24.

16. *Ibid.*

Wyse-Power recalls how on that same night, Markievicz “showed me her uniform in which she took childish delight.” This costume choice was made, as Wyse-Powers explains, surely with some understatement, when “ladies in trousers were less common then than now.”<sup>17</sup>

ICA member Helena Molony corroborated many of the above details that reveal how Markievicz adapted her clothing for the Rising. Until the week before the insurrection, Molony reports, Markievicz’s dress for ICA parades consisted of “a plain tweed costume with a Sam Brown belt and black turned-up hat, similar to the men’s, with a small bunch of cock’s feathers” on it. But for the anticipated rebellion she wore “the uniform coat of Michael Mallin,” the ICA commandant at St. Stephen’s Green, and purchased “a pair of breeches and a skirt.”<sup>18</sup> Significantly, accounts of the action at the Green, where Markievicz was a prominent combatant, foreground her appearance, not always positively. Geraldine Fitzgerald, an eyewitness to the fighting, disapprovingly characterized Markievicz as “such a specimen of womanhood.” She described “a lady in a green uniform the same as the men were wearing (breeches, slouch hat with green feathers, etc.), the feathers were the only feminine feature in her appearance”; but for Fitzgerald this one sign of gender conformity was discredited by Markievicz’s “holding a revolver in one hand and a cigarette in the other,” and later shooting a policeman and being allegedly glad about it.<sup>19</sup>

Accounts of Markievicz after the surrender continued to focus on her appearance, with the contemporary press voicing anxieties about a woman appearing in male-associated costume. The unionist-leaning *Weekly Irish Times* provided a detailed account of the Royal College of Surgeons after the St. Stephen’s Green garrison left it. Precisely recording the time of surrender at that building as 2:00 p.m., the newspaper noted that at this point Markievicz was “still wearing top boots, breeches, service tunic, and a hat with feathers.”<sup>20</sup> The inclusion of “still” suggests exasperation at such impropriety; presumably the newspapers and its readers would have been mollified if she had

17. Nancy Wyse-Power WS 541, BMH, 17.

18. Helena Molony WS 391, BMH 53–54.

19. Quoted in Ann Matthews, *Renegades: Irish Republican Women, 1900–1922* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2010), 129.

20. “Inside the Royal College of Surgeons: After the Rebels Left.” *Weekly Irish Times*, 20 May 1916, 11.



changed into the more feminine attire she wore in her Ascendancy days. Implicit in such description is the double censure—of transgressing both class and gender conventions. The *Irish Times*, equally preoccupied with Markievicz's appearance, depicted her, in Lauren Arrington's words, as "looking like an overgrown leprechaun" by its claim that she was dressed entirely in green.<sup>21</sup> This account recirculated, and by 20 May 1916 the *Leitrim Observer* emphatically identifies Markievicz as "one of the most striking personalities of the rebellion" before elaborating on the *Irish Times*'s description of her at the surrender as dressed "entirely in green—green tunic, green hat with green feather, green puttees, and green boots."<sup>22</sup> Thus within weeks of the failed uprising, Markievicz had been turned into a figure of fantastical excess. Although most of the claims were apocryphal, they suggest how any indication of gender and class slippage prompted accusations of a monstrous femininity.

Both convergences and slippages appear in the above accounts, offered after the event and sometimes decades later. My intention is less to discredit such claims, but rather to study how the relationship between recollection and the visible record of the photographs can validate or refute the past as it is understood as history. Markievicz's attire in these photographs is most clearly seen in a full frontal body shot: she wears an ICA tunic, verified by the insignia on the edges of the high collar (figure 2). It is buttoned from left to right, indicating that it had been made as a man's jacket and suggesting that it had indeed originally belonged to Michael Mallin. Around the jacket she wears a tightly fastened Sam Brown belt that exaggerates her waist. Below, she wears knee-length breeches, knee-high dark stockings, and heavily polished sturdy shoes. She stands with legs slightly astride to indicate that she is on the point of moving forward, and her weapon is held by her side—announcing an alert readiness for action. If the dark colored hat with a plume of feathers undermines the masculine, military effect of her attire, Markievicz's direct gaze to camera demands viewers' attention; her uncompromising expression conveys steadfast purpose.

21. *Irish Times*, 2 May 1916, 3, quoted in Lauren Arrington, *Revolutionary Lives: Constance and Casimir Markievicz* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016), 136.

22. *Leitrim Observer*, 20 May 1916, 6.



FIGURE 2. Signed publicity photograph of Constance Markievicz in military-styled costume, Keogh Brothers, Dublin, 1916 (NPA POLF 206, National Library of Ireland, Dublin). Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.





FIGURE 3. Publicity photograph of Constance Markievicz in military-style costume, posing with a gun, Keogh Brothers, Dublin, 1916 (KE 82, National Library of Ireland). Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

At the session at the Keogh Dorset Street studio producing the above image, Markievicz commissioned more than one photograph, with the series offering a narrative of preparedness for warfare. For an accompanying photo, she appears in the same attire as in figure 2, now posing semi-crouched on the studio floor with her upper body tilted so she can rest one arm on a studio plinth prop (figure 3). Holding an automatic gun in one hand, while the other mimics the act of pulling the trigger, she directs her gaze to the weapon rather than the viewer, conveying her military competence: that of a woman fighting like a man. For Jane Tynan, these photos also illustrate “a



FIGURE 4. Publicity photograph of Constance Markievicz in military-style costume posing with a gun, Keogh Brothers, Dublin, 1916 (NPA MGU, National Library of Ireland). Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

woman carefully crafting a revolutionary image.”<sup>23</sup> The portraits are therefore radical in more than one sense: Markievicz performs the action of political insurrection, but in combining a fashionable hat of the day with an acquired man’s military jacket, she also asserts a role for women in the forthcoming fighting—a role that will challenge fixed gender identities.

A third image in this series indicates some significant variants. Here Markievicz appears in a half-torso shot; she leans against the plinth prop, now upturned and on which she rests her arms to cradle a gun (figure 4). That this photograph was taken at a closer range than the earlier militarized figures 2 and 3 suggests its diminished associations with masculinized aggression. In failing to reproduce the whole body, the portrait mitigates anxieties surrounding female cor-

23. Jane Tynan, “The Unmilitary Appearance of the 1916 Rebels,” in Godson and Brück, *Making 1916*, 29.



FIGURE 5. “Your Soldier Son,” Nora Connolly in full Volunteer uniform, Reid, Belfast, ca. 1916 (17PC-1B52-06, Office of Public Works, Kilmainham Gaol Museum, Dublin). Image courtesy of Seamus Connolly and Kilmainham Gaol Museum.

5). Connolly’s portrait is notable for its static quality, whereas in her crouching pose Markievicz performs the action of warfare, prefiguring how she wished to be remembered. Her commissioning of these photos signifies both gender transgression (a woman taking on the role of the male soldier) and the announcement of a more equalitarian society as an outcome of revolution. Also appearing in full

porality. In profile, moreover, Markievicz gazes, seemingly wistfully, at a distant point outside the picture plane, undermining the impression of aggression conveyed by the now unlooked-at gun. The effect of the bleached-out background focuses the viewer’s gaze on her face, profiled by the dark plumed hat; arguably, the image reinstates some elements of conventional female portraiture. The gender instability evident in figures 2 and 3—conveyed by the portraits of a woman in uniform and carrying a gun—has been stabilized enough, if not to make Markievicz fully accommodated, at least to make her more containable. The differing registers of these three portraits suggest Markievicz’s awareness of a range of audiences, and the addition of her signature on figure 2 indicates that the portrait was intended for public consumption. Figure 4 evidences a similar intentionality, but now directed to less-militant viewers.

An image of Nora Connolly (later Connolly O’Brien) in Irish Volunteer uniform offers a striking contrast with Markievicz’s self-presentation in the Keogh Studio images (figure

male uniform, Connolly, however, attempts to suppress a smile—an expression that she explained in her recollection of the portrait session. The photograph was intended to be “a joke,” and after signing it “your soldier son,” she gave it to her father, James Connolly.<sup>24</sup> Although her commissioning and posing for the image also implies gender impersonation, the Connolly photograph was conceived with humor and circulated within a familial register—rather than, as in the case of Markievicz’s, as the conscious crafting of a prememory text.

Fionna Barber suggests that Markievicz, not content with “being the passive object of the camera’s gaze,” actively shaped her self-representation—particularly in “images intended for public display and consumption.”<sup>25</sup> As an experienced actress working with a group of nationalists on the Dublin stage, she was well aware of the importance of image and performance.<sup>26</sup> Fearghal McGarry’s study of the Abbey Theatre’s role in the Easter Rising aptly summarizes the connection between theatre and warfare in 1916: “Long before they fired a shot on streets, the revolutionary generation extensively rehearsed the insurrection on stage.”<sup>27</sup>

Competing with the public intent of the portraits, however, are contrary signals produced by their studio setting. The backcloth against which Markievicz poses eschews any connection with modern warfare, imagery that 1916 audiences would have easily recognized from newsreels and press photographs of the ongoing Great War. Instead, the backdrops of the photos in several of the figures invokes a tradition of art-history painting: an Arcadian landscape view that recedes to an arch in a viaduct and a classical hilltop temple. The bottom of the studio’s backcloth forms a banded pattern of swirling shapes reminiscent of stucco decoration in grand houses, and a faux classical pillar becomes the central prop for Markievicz’s performance of warfare. In figure 3, where she appears to pull the trigger of her gun, the edge of the carpeting is puckered, indicating its movement as she positions herself for the pose. Such typical back-

24. Nora Connolly O’Brien WS 286, BMH, 55.

25. Barber, “Constructing Constance,” 4–5.

26. Patrick Quigley, *Sisters against the Empire: Countess Constance Markievicz and Eva Gore-Booth, 1916–1917* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2016), 4.

27. Fearghal McGarry, *The Abbey Rebels of 1916: A Lost Revolution* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2015), 11.



cloths, along with the props and studio floor coverings, create disjunction between the subject photographed and the scene depicted.

Such a problematic disjunction among competing signs appears in the Keogh images when viewed as a whole. Comparing the militaristic poses (especially figures 2 and 3) with Markievicz in *báinín* (traditional Irish woollen cloth) emphasizes the visual disjunction the photos convey. In the *báinín* series the subject's feminine costume and passive pose reinforce a conventional—and nationalist-approved—Irish register (figure 6). Although the backcloth and prop are identical with those used in the military series, the camera is now positioned closer to Markievicz, with the photo highlighting not



FIGURE 6. Publicity photograph of Constance Markievicz in Irish-styled costume, Keogh Brothers, Dublin, ca. 1914 (NPA POLF 197, National Library of Ireland). This image was also produced in a postcard version. Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.



the full backcloth but an outline of trees and foliage. Such imagery accommodates nationalism's disassociation of Irishness from Englishness by equating Ireland with a rural wholesomeness—and England with urban decadence. Moreover, Markievicz's languid-seeming pose creates a register of passive Irish femininity, as if the subject is acquiescing to the nationalist gender ideology. The contrast between the two series of photos emphasizes the extent to which she sought to control her image in the military portraits.

Markievicz was no ingénue to the power of the publicity. Her experience in Irish theater brought her into contact with nationalist ideology but also schooled her in the uses of photography. In turning to military-dress portraits as a means of shaping her role in history, she was following a radical Irish-nationalist tradition in which the painted portrait and later the portrait photograph served as a support of physical-force nationalism.<sup>28</sup> Such awareness is evident in her willingness to be photographed on Easter Sunday when the ICA mobilized in uniform and paraded opposite Liberty Hall. Kathleen O'Kelly, a member of the Belfast branch of Cumann na mBan, the woman's auxiliary branch of the Irish Volunteers, photographed the event, prompting James Connolly to request a photo of himself and Markievicz to include with it a poem he had written for American sympathizers.<sup>29</sup> The Irish Volunteer Sean Cody recalled that on Easter Monday, the day the Rising commenced, the ICA were "lined up in deep formation" in front of Liberty Hall, where Connolly and Markievicz stood on the steps being photographed.<sup>30</sup> Such recollections again confirm the insurgents' awareness of photography's political uses. Sturken observes, however, that if photography "appears to hold memory in place," "memory does not reside in a photograph"; rather the "camera image is . . . a mechanism through which one can construct that past and situate it in the present."<sup>31</sup>

28. See Gail Suzanne Baylis, "The Photographic Portrait: A Means to Surveillance and Subversion," *Early Popular Visual Culture* 16:1 (2018): 8–10, 19–21.

29. Kathleen O'Kelly WS 180, BMH, 4–5. O'Kelly recalls that nothing came of the photographs, which she left at a Belfast chemist for processing: "I got all the snaps on the reel back from the chemist with whom I left them for printing except the two snaps I took at Liberty Hall."

30. Sean Cody WS 1035, BMH, 8–9.

31. Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 19–20.

## AFTER THE RISING: COMMODIFYING THE NARRATIVE

The commodification of the Easter Rising occurred swiftly, for within weeks photographic souvenir editions of the insurrection flooded the country.<sup>32</sup> As with Markievicz's act of commissioning photographs of herself prior to the event, an intentionality about the shaping of future memories appears prime—even if any similarities between images and convictions before the Rising and those circulated after were far from assured. Although the proclamation of the republic that Patrick Pearse delivered before the General Post Office enshrined equal rights for women and men, that egalitarian promise was not uniformly enforced even during the fighting.<sup>33</sup> And following the early May 1916 executions of the signatories, with a growing cult of martyrdom surrounding them, the Catholic church claimed these dead leaders as its own.<sup>34</sup> Throughout such memory-making, as Justin Carville observes, photographic images “shaped public consciousness . . . while bringing the past to the present and preserving it for the future.”<sup>35</sup>

A rapid silencing of memories about women's active participation in the Rising became evident. Only members of the military council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) signed the proclamation, and after their executions it was these men who swiftly became sanctified as martyrs for Ireland.<sup>36</sup> Following her trial and in her subsequent *Prison Letters*, Markievicz revealed—with an awareness of her

32. Stephanie Rains, *Commodity Culture and Social Class in Dublin, 1850–1916* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2011), 106–7.

33. Éamon de Valera refused to let women join the garrison at Boland's Mill. Nor were members of Cumann na mBan permitted to fight on the same terms as men, and even the ICA, the most gender equal of the fighting forces, instructed its female combatants to use firearms only as a last resort.

34. Clair Wills, *Dublin 1916: The Siege of the GPO* (London: Profile Books, 2009), 10.

35. Justin Carville, “Visualizing the Rising: Photography, Memory, and the Visual Economy of the 1916 Easter Rising,” in *Photographs, Histories, and Meanings*, ed. Marlene Kadar, Joanne Perreault, and Linda Warley (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009): 96–97.

36. Ruth Taillon notes the likelihood that Kathleen Clarke (wife of Thomas Clarke, the first signatory to the proclamation) had been sworn into the IRB. See *When History Was Made: The Women of 1916* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale, 1996), 8, 23. As Connolly's “ghost” on the IRB, according to Taillon, Markievicz may also have been privy to the plans for the event. However, shortly before the Rising, Clarke communi-

audiences and an anxiety about postmemory—that her active participation was unrecognized. Writing from prison, she asserted, “Many of us could almost wish that we had died in the moment of ecstasy when, with the tricolor over our heads, we went out and proclaimed the Irish Republic.”<sup>37</sup> Through such retrospective claims she wrote herself into history. Her use of the nongendered plural “we” affirmed agency for all the women participating in the insurrection: “with guns in our hands” we “tried to establish it.”<sup>38</sup>

But such female agency in the Rising proved problematic. Lisa Weihman suggests that the female insurgents’ willingness to take up arms shifted traditional gender alignment, effectively creating a crisis in “the symbolic economy of Irish nationalism” and producing “unstable markers of gender”—most notably with women in male clothing who carried guns.<sup>39</sup> In the immediate aftermath of the insurgency, an alternative representation of nationalist women’s commitment to the revolution developed. Weihman argues that republican men closed ranks, turning against female soldiers.<sup>40</sup> During the actual fighting, only two women had appeared in military uniform: Markievicz and Margaret Skinnider, her protégé, for whom she had purchased a uniform.<sup>41</sup> Skinnider, however, did not wear trousers, certainly an extreme marker of gender transgression in the period. Markievicz’s “celebrity” was therefore increased, argues Arrington, by the “lack of visibility of women in the fight” and by the many accounts of her appearance.<sup>42</sup> Of the 1916 insurgent leaders, according to Quigley, Markievicz attracted not only the most newspaper coverage, but also the most abuse.<sup>43</sup>

The patriotic culture emerging after the executions was in no small part the outcome of a “flood of rebel memorabilia,” which Peter Hart suggested was more influential than revolutionary ideology and

cated to William O’Brien: “I am very nervous about Madame Markievicz. . . . She is too talkative. She cannot keep a secret.” William O’Brien WS 1766, BMH, 73.

37. Markievicz, *Prison Letters*, 41.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Lisa Weihman, “*Doing My Bit for Ireland: Transgressing Gender in the Easter Rising*,” *Éire-Ireland* 34:3&4 (Fall/Winter 2004): 228.

40. *Ibid.*, 240–41.

41. Matthew, *Renegades*, 124.

42. Arrington, *Revolutionary Lives*, 136.

43. Quigley, *Sisters against Empire*, 48.

writing.<sup>44</sup> In the aftermath of the Rising a postcard series commemorating insurgents executed, fallen in combat, or interned as a result of their participation became an influential visual text engendering patriotic support.<sup>45</sup> Titled “Irish Rebellion, May 1916” and produced by the Powell Press of Dublin, the series provided portraits based on photographs of significant participants in the insurrection, including Markievicz. The Powell Press based the majority of its images on Keogh Brothers photos,<sup>46</sup> and the availability of the postcards, as well as their format and affordability, assured their key role in popular memory as indicated by various collectors’ accounts.<sup>47</sup> Since the Keogh Studio held the negatives for the Markievicz-in-military-dress images, along with other photographs of her previously discussed, the press’s choice of a Lafayette portrait for the postcard series is worth considering.

Assigned a variety of creation dates spanning 1903 to 1908, the Lafayette image is taken from a mid-distance point that draws attention to its setting. In this full-body shot of Markievicz in formal evening attire, she rests her arm against the mantle of an ornate fireplace (figure 7). Far from the most up-to-date likeness available, the photo’s details, including the furnishings of the room, reinforce the impression of opulence and leisured lifestyle, reflecting a period when Markievicz was still frequenting Dublin Castle’s Anglo-Irish social events. If, as Elliott maintains, Markievicz had herself photographed in military dress to counter any memory of her upper-class associations and Protestant roots, her intentions were clearly not being followed in the postcard series. Powell placed the title “Irish Rebellion, May 1916” at the top of each postcard, followed by a caption below the portrait indicating the name of the individual, his (or her) roles in the Rising, and the court’s sentence. In Markievicz’s case, the caption reads, “Countess Markievicz / (Who took a prominent part in

44. Peter Hart, *The IRA and Its Enemies: Violence and Community in Cork, 1916–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 207.

45. Gail Baylis, “Con Colbert’s Portrait: The Lives of a Photograph,” *History of Photography* 41:1 (2017): 50.

46. Gail Baylis, “The Easter Rising 1916: Photography and Remembrance,” in *Irish Studies and the Dynamics of Memory: Transitions and Transformations*, ed. Margu rite Corporaal, Christopher Cusack, and Ruud van den Beuken (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2017), 59.

47. *Ibid.*, 50–51.



FIGURE 7. “Irish Rebellion, May 1916,” postcard of Countess Markievicz. Photomechanical print from a Lafayette portrait, Powell Press, Dublin, 1916 (NPA POLF 199, National Library of Ireland). Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

the Rebellion, Stephen’s Green Area) / Sentenced to death / Sentence commuted to penal servitude for life.)” Yet only dissonance emerges from this image: these visual and linguistic signifiers, her “prominent part” and commuted death sentence, are modified by her appearance as a leisured aristocrat.

A commemorative postcard series produced by O’Loughlin, Murphy, & Boland, Ltd., also a Dublin printing and publishing firm, suggests yet another choice in post-Rising representations of Markievicz. As with the Powell Press selection of a photo, the firm did not choose one of the military portraits available from Keogh stock, turning instead to one of her in traditional Irish dress (figure 8). A seated Markievicz smiles directly into the camera and wears a large silver Tara brooch that secures a shawl-like *brat* to her dress. As Hilary O’Kelly notes, such iconic Gaelic costume signifiers reflecting Irish-Ireland ideology would have been clear to contemporary viewers.<sup>48</sup>

48. Hilary O’Kelly, “Dressing Rebellion: Nationalist Revival Dress and 1916,” in Godson and Brück, *Making 1916*, 164, 167.



A close study of the glass negative that served as the source for this postcard indicates that it was produced from a group portrait, for the outline of a coated figure is evident in the background. The time-consuming manipulation of a group photograph to produce a seemingly single portrait, we can conclude, was instigated to meet the demand for a safely nationalist and feminized representation of

Markievicz in the post-Rising period. The postcard includes the requisite visual symbols of Irish nationalism without any disquieting signals of gender slippage.

Markievicz's image, that of the only court-martialed woman, was included in a range of other memorabilia. One pictorial broadside produced by the Powell Press in 1916, "Irish Republican Army: Leaders in the Insurrection, May 1916," occludes the political differences between the ICA, the Irish Volunteers, and the IRB. Sixteen of the Powell postcards were photomechanically reproduced on the broadsheet, creating a typology for the Rising. However, as the only woman included, and because she is represented by the Lafayette portrait, Markievicz's presence registers not commonalities with the other insurgents, but exceptionalism and difference.<sup>49</sup> Another popular broadsheet, produced by Francis Rigney in 1916, offered what Beiner might term a prememory text of the insurrection. Titled "Who Fears to Speak of Easter Week? The Irish



FIGURE 8. Glass plate of Constance Markievicz taken from a group portrait, Keogh Brothers, Dublin, ca. 1916 (KE 79, National Library of Ireland). Prototype for postcard produced by O'Loughlin, Murphy, & Boland, Ltd., ca. 1916. Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

49. "Irish Republican Army: Leaders in the Insurrection, May 1916," Broadside, Dublin, Powell Press, ca. 1916 (Ephemera Collection, EPH F339, National Library of Ireland).

Rebellion of 1916 and Its Martyrs: Erin's Tragic Easter," it includes graphic illustrations, reproductions of portrait photographs, as well as photos of the key rebel sites: the General Post Office, Liberty Hall, St. Stephen's Green, and the Four Courts. To connect the 1916 Rising with the heroism of the failed 1798 United Irishmen rebellion, the broadsheet includes the popular 1843 ballad "Who Fears to Speak of '98." In addition, graphic portraits of a 1798 rebel and a 1916 Irish Volunteer in full uniform—as well as a reproduction of the 1916 proclamation and a copy of the Irish Volunteers service regulations—reinforce the celebratory relationship being established between the two failed rebellions.<sup>50</sup> On this broadsheet, Markievicz's role in the Rising is featured through its placement, but as the only woman, she is significantly differentiated from other combatants. Rigney selected the Lafayette portrait of her as an ascendancy socialite in a ball gown, rather than one of the Keogh images of her in an ICA-styled uniform. As with all Powell Press imagery of her, this artifact foregrounds her gender and class to distinguish her from the other combatants (figure 9).

By including the phrase "Erin's Tragic Easter" in the broadsheet's title, Rigney alluded to a key figure in the rhetoric of Irish nationalism. Erin often personified the Irish land under colonialism—a symbolic call for Irish men to take up arms in her defense. Markievicz's position as an active rather than passive female agent for Irish freedom is clearly displaced through this context. Although the motives for Powell and Rigney's selection of the Lafayette portrait can only be surmised, the choice of that image (rather than one of the Keogh military portraits) suggests how the visual memory of Markievicz's role in the Rising was rapidly being modified. That the related decision to pardon rather than execute her was motivated by her gender leads Margaret Ward to suggest an unwillingness "to undermine the foundations of a patriarchy that benefited all men, regardless of nationality."<sup>51</sup>

50. Francis Rigney, "Who Fears to Speak of Easter Week? The Irish Rebellion of 1916 and Its Martyrs: Erin's Tragic Easter," New York, Devin-Adair Company, 1916 (PD D 41, National Library of Ireland).

51. Margaret Ward, "Gender: Gendering and the Irish Revolution," in *The Irish Revolution, 1913–1923*, ed. Joost Augusteijn (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2002), 174.



## GENDER RECUPERATION AND PHOTOGRAPHY

A newly independent Ireland immediately set about re-traditionalizing gender roles. Or as Síghle Bhreathnach-Lynch puts it, a “self-conscious Gaelic masculinity assumed a hyper-masculinity” and constructed a reciprocal “hyper-femininity.”<sup>52</sup> Since the Rising had exposed an active female nationalism that unfixed such traditional gender assumptions, with the establishment of the Irish Free State traditional roles had to be re-secured. The speed with which this occurred must be emphasized, for before the close of 1916 an alternative representation of women’s role in the Rising was being visually constructed. The *Catholic Bulletin*’s Christmas issue, edited by J. J. O’Kelly, reveals how this narrative took hold. The journal’s 1916 issues from July through November focused on the insurrection; they provided hagiographic biographies accompanied by portrait photographs of the executed (many of them direct copies of Powell postcards) and of those killed in action. The November issue advertised, “We intend to publish in our Christmas number photographs of the widows and children of the men who lost their lives during Easter week.”<sup>53</sup> This notification indicates how rapidly women were being positioned firmly in relation to their husbands’ achievements. And even in death there was a pecking order, with the widows and children of the executed signatories appearing first, followed by the spouses of lesser figures and their dependents. Ostensibly published to raise funds for Irish National Aid and Volunteers’ Dependents’ Fund (editor O’Kelly was one of the fund’s honorary treasurers),<sup>54</sup> the Christmas issue of the *Catholic Bulletin* construct a familial narrative of women’s roles in the Rising.

The portraits that O’Kelly commissioned from the commercial Dublin photographer T. F. Geoghegan focus on the 1916 widows surrounded by their children (figure 10). The setting, poses, and props of these images adhere to the traditional gender format of studio portraiture, positioning the patriarch as the head of family. Thus the

52. Síghle Bhreathnach-Lynch, “Landscape, Space, and Gender: Their Role in the Construction of Female Identity in Newly-Independent Ireland,” *Canadian Women’s Studies/Les cahiers de la femme* 17:3 (1997): 27.

53. *Catholic Bulletin*, Nov. 1916.

54. Sinéad McCoole, *Easter Widows: Seven Irish Women Who Lived in the Shadow of the 1916 Rising* (Dublin: Doubleday Ireland, 2015), 277–78.





FIGURE 10. Kathleen Clarke and children, T. F. Geoghegan, Dublin, 1916 (TC 14, National Library of Ireland). “Mrs. Tom Clarke—John Daly Clarke, Tom Clarke, & Emmet Clarke” is written recto. Published in the *Catholic Bulletin*, December 1916. Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

husband’s absence in the photos calls attention to a missing link, underscoring national sacrifice. The mourning dress of the surviving women and Sunday-best outfits of their children emphasize the solemn celebration of remembrance. Orla Fitzpatrick speculates that O’Kelly, recognizing how “only a truly worthy cause would compel someone to endanger his life and leave his children fatherless,” used these portraits for their propaganda value.<sup>55</sup>

55. Orla Fitzpatrick, “Portraits and Propaganda: Photographs of the Widows and Children of the 1916 Leaders in the *Catholic Bulletin*,” in Godson and Brück, *Making 1916*, 85.



Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid concludes that the conservative *Catholic Bulletin* became a central player in the “sanctification” of Rising memories.<sup>56</sup> The journal’s display format for individual group portraits or sets of portraits featured Celtic-tracery border design, a choice that visually reinforced the traditional Irish identification of the subjects.<sup>57</sup> Imagery focused on Catholicism and women’s traditional roles, and, despite marked differences in the economic status among these women, the visuals produced homogeneity.<sup>58</sup> Stripped of individual agency and statically posed in widow’s robes, the women exist solely as custodians of their husbands’ legacy. Even those working in committed roles within the Volunteers’ Dependents’ Fund now claimed to be “acting as their dead husbands, sons, and brothers would desire.”<sup>59</sup> Such remembrance work obscured their active participation in the events of Easter Week and further assuaged anxieties about gender transgression. As Fitzpatrick writes, this Christmas issue of the *Catholic Bulletin* “prefigures the restrictive interpretation of women’s roles adopted by the state after the revolutionary period.”<sup>60</sup>

Imprisoned in England’s Aylesbury Prison and neither widow nor yet Catholic (converting only in 1917), Markievicz proved a contentious figure within Ireland’s reformulated representation of women’s roles. The country she returned to after her June 1917 release from prison was a very different place from the one she had been forced to leave in 1916; her earlier prememory text (her performance of militarism in the Keogh photographs) did not sit easily within such a changed context for memory-making. At the surrender Markievicz had already been singled out for censure for her appearance; for example, Brighid Lyons Thornton recalled how at the transfer to Kilmainham Gaol, Irish separation women objecting to the rebels directed their protest at Markievicz for her “breeches and puttees.”<sup>61</sup>

56. Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid, “The Irish National Aid Association and the Radicalization of Public Opinion in Ireland, 1916–1918,” *Historical Journal* 55:3 (2012): 723.

57. See, for example, *Catholic Bulletin*, Dec. 1916, 708.

58. Fitzpatrick, “Portraits and Propaganda,” 86–87.

59. Kathleen Clarke, president of the Committee of the Irish National Aid and Volunteers’ Dependents’ Fund, quoted in McCoolle, *Easter Widows*, 263.

60. Fitzpatrick, “Portraits and Propaganda,” 89.

61. Quoted in Kenneth Griffith and Timothy O’Grady, *Curious Journey: An Oral History of Ireland’s Unfinished Revolution* (1982; Cork: Mercier Press, 1998), 78. The

The *Catholic Bulletin* nevertheless capitalized on Markievicz's new popularity after her return to Dublin. The journal continued its "Events of Easter Week" commemorative coverage into 1917, expanding its reach to include brief sketches of some insurgent women involved, including, according to Senia Pašeta, Markievicz and Mrs. Joseph Plunkett (née Grace Gifford) following their conversions to Catholicism.<sup>62</sup> As with the earlier Christmas issue, women's activist roles again were recast within acceptable standards of femininity. To this end, the *Catholic Bulletin* now stressed how Markievicz was "above all pious and devotedly Catholic," thereby framing her presence in Ireland's 1916 narrative by, in Pašeta's words, "catholicising her."<sup>63</sup> Arrington observes that, although always a controversial figure, she now became absorbed into the nation's narrative as "a republican martyr and an unwavering servant of the poor,"<sup>64</sup> her radicalness and adherence to Connollyite socialism overwritten by a narrative of Christ-like service.

After the rebellion, with the sidetracking of women's issues, Markievicz identified with the reconstituted Irish Volunteers that transformed itself into the Irish Republican Army.<sup>65</sup> But the speed of the Rising's commodification through image and text—as evidenced by the widow-and-children portraits—makes clear the difficulty of narrating the image of a woman with gun into 1916 memory formation. Other factors intervened as well. If in 1916 Markievicz had commissioned the intentionally shocking image of a militarized woman, her action projected clear class signifiers as well. Her biographer Diana Norman observes that as the "daughter of Lissadell, Markievicz was more used to firearms than many of the men around her."<sup>66</sup> But such upper-class expertise did not necessarily court favor in nationalist circles, particularly in the refigured post-1916 period.

term "separation women" refers to women entitled to an allowance for their husband's service in the British Army during the Great War. The Rising disrupted the issue of this payment and fuelled these women's opposition to the rebels.

62. Senia Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900–1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 187.

63. *Ibid.*

64. Arrington, *Revolutionary Lives*, ix.

65. Quigley, *Sisters against the Empire*, 231.

66. Diana Norman, *Terrible Beauty: A Life of Constance Markievicz, 1868–1927* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1987), 105.

After 1917 Markiewicz produced a softer persona in portraits she commissioned for public circulation (figure 11). The powerfully aggressive signifier of the gun is now gone, but modified signs of militarism remain in her costume: a Fianna tunic with a Cumanna na mBan skirt. The format of these portraits adheres to studio conventions: a head-and-shoulder shot taken against a blank backdrop. A hatless Markiewicz poses with her hair pinned up in an acceptable feminine style of the day, while her downward or sideways gaze asserts no threat. However, the Fianna tunic was not without some potentially troubling suggestions. As president of the paramilitary boys' organization, Markiewicz had long worn this garment at Fianna meetings, not always with the approval of all youthful participants. A former Fianna member Sam Prendergast recalled the displeasure of some of the boys at her wearing "our uniform."<sup>67</sup> Although the Fianna tunic as gender signifier represented significantly less threat than the ICA uniform that Markiewicz attired for her 1916 Keogh Brothers commission, it still could generate disquiet.

## REMEMBERING

Roy Foster suggests that the disillusionment felt by many of the Irish revolutionary generation was "inseparable from a postrevolutionary cast of mind" that evaluated retrospectively.<sup>68</sup> And as Paul Connerton argues, those who are now "safely dead" are easier to construct in memory culture than those who survive and whose presence produces discomfort.<sup>69</sup> In memory formation, therefore, focusing on the dead of 1916 rather than on survivors—of whom Markiewicz was one—represented a safer choice. Indications of discomfort resurfaced frequently in the generational memory of Markiewicz and her involvement with 1916. With hindsight in 1927, W. B. Yeats characterized her as a woman who paid the cost for a too single-minded adherence to a cause.<sup>70</sup> Sean O'Casey, always mistrustful of Markiewicz's

67. Quoted in Fearghal McGarry, *Rebels: Voices from the Easter Rising* (Dublin: Penguin Ireland, 2011), 49.

68. R. F. Foster, *Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland, 1890–1923* (London: Penguin, 2015), 331.

69. Paul Connerton, "Seven Types of Forgetting," *Memory Studies* 1:1 (2008): 69.

70. W. B. Yeats "In Memory of Eva Gore-Booth and Con Markiewicz," in *W. B. Yeats Selected Poetry*, ed. A. Norman Jeffares (London: Macmillan, 1962), 141–42.



FIGURE 11. Publicity photograph of Constance Markievicz in Fianna tunic, A. H. Poole Studio, ca. 1917–27 (NPA POLF203, National Library of Ireland). Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

class background, stigmatized her in *Drums under the Windows* (1945) as a “spluttering Catherine-wheel of irresponsibility,” but more damningly as someone who ran around everywhere “in the suit of a harlequin.”<sup>71</sup> Here, he pointedly alluded to her reputation for costume, performance, and masquerade as indicating her inauthenticity. Sean O’Faolain, like O’Casey, was bitterly disappointed by the legacy

71. Sean O’Casey, *Drums under the Windows* (London: Macmillan, 1945), 249–50.

of 1916; as Markievicz's first biographer, he described her success with the Fianna as the outcome of her being "half-boy herself"—viewing her life's dedication to the principles of rebellion as producing "a disappointed, loveless woman."<sup>72</sup> Anxieties surrounding memory so evident in O'Faolain's account reveal the threat of gender transgression that she represented and, arguably, the inevitable costs of such transgression.

But for Beiner, the "cyclical nature of remembrance implies that, even when certain recollections lose their vitality within contemporary society, the decline of memory is not necessarily terminal. . . . [D]ormant memories can be rejuvenated."<sup>73</sup> Assuming the role of custodian of Markievicz's memory, Molony disputes O'Faolain's biography, claiming that he "wrote cattily of her life." She also refutes his focus on Markievicz's "fondness for showy uniforms."<sup>74</sup> Recent scholarship about Markievicz has indeed been rejuvenating important memories by emphasizing her major achievements: as the only female participant in the Rising to be court martialed, the first woman to be elected to the British Parliament, the first female minister of labor in an Irish government, and one of the few women in Europe to hold official office in the period.<sup>75</sup> However Markievicz still remains a problematic figure in the postmemory of 1916.

## CONCLUSION

Since Markievicz prioritized nationalism over gender in her revolutionary career, efforts to accommodate her within a feminist discourse of history remain fractured. Ward maintains that by supporting women's demands for equality yet failing to accept the suffrage demand for women's rights over the nation, Markievicz occupies an ambiguous position in Irish women's history.<sup>76</sup> Her complicity in a supposedly masculine acceptance of violence sits awkwardly for

72. Sean O'Faolain, *Constance Markievicz* (1934; London: Cresset Women's Voices, 1987), 86, 196.

73. Beiner, "Probing the Boundaries," 302.

74. Molony WS 39I, BMH, 53.

75. Barber, "Constructing Constance," 4.

76. Margaret Ward, *Unmanageable Revolutionaries: Women and Irish Nationalism*, repr. ed. (London and East Haven, CT: Pluto Press, 1995), 86.



many. However, for women in the ongoing republican movement, the memory of Markievicz as militant fighter—made evident through the Keogh photographs she commissioned in 1916—is reimagined on a number of murals in the North. There, she now serves as an iconic female revolutionary.<sup>77</sup>

In producing her prememory texts Markievicz was astute in recognizing that she was living in times where, in Martin Hand's words, "the convergence of photography within new communications networks" was making it the dominant technology of modernity and memory.<sup>78</sup> However, Sturken reminds us that photographs are not "vessels of memory in which memory passively resides so much as objects through which memories are shared, produced, and given meaning."<sup>79</sup> These effects are not static; therefore to understand the historical photograph as an affective memory object requires mapping its course in terms of its adaptive uses, realignments, and replacements to elucidate the trajectories of prememory and postmemory recall. This process also requires study of what is too often dismissed as insignificant: forms of popular culture such as commemorative souvenirs, propagandist photographs, broadsheets, and postcards.

The public persona constructed in Markievicz's military portraits, although overwritten by an alternative narrative after the Rising, need not be consigned to the dustbin of historical memory. As Beiner reminds us, "postmemory recharges older memories, using them as prememory for new reconstructions of memory."<sup>80</sup> Recognizing the military portraits as the conscious production of a prememory text intended for public consumption affords a means of accessing the hopes and intent of those who aspired to shape history. Just as memories do not stand still, neither do these photographs as new generations of scholars actively turn to them for their research and publications.

77. Sharon Crozier-De Rosa "Uncomfortable Feminist Icon: Constance Markievicz," *Australian Women's History Network* (blog), 26 March 2017, <http://www.aushn.org.au/blog/constance-markievicz>, archived at <https://perma.cc/KP7K-UYQK>.

78. Martin Hand, *Ubiquitous Photography* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2012), 132.

79. Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 9.

80. Beiner, "Probing the Boundaries," 302.