“John Bull’s Other Island” and British Identity in an Era of Imperialism: The Reactions of the Anglo-Irish Literary Elite to the Execution of the Leaders of the Easter Rising and Trial and Hanging of Sir Roger Casement (1916)

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Introduction

“Nobody in Ireland of any intelligence likes Nationalism any more than a man with a broken arm likes having it set. A healthy nation is as unconscious of its nationality as a healthy man of his bones. But if you break a nation’s nationality it will think of nothing else but getting it set again.”¹ So wrote George Bernard Shaw in “Preface for Politicians,” a 1906 addendum to John Bull’s Other Island, the only play in which the famous Anglo-Irish playwright directly grappled with the complex and often contentious relationship between his homeland and her British conqueror. Indeed, the enduring ambiguity of national identity in Ireland cultivated both armed and constitutional resistance to her place in the British Empire. Nationalists of both persuasions saw her as an exploited colony chained to British self-interest while Unionists regarded her as an integral part of the greater imperial whole.² The culmination of this centuries-old struggle for the political soul of Ireland reached its apex in the Home Rule Crisis of 1914 and in the Easter Rising of 1916, as the executions of the leaders of that failed rebellion “aroused a latent nationalism in Ireland,”³ which was to result ultimately in the severing of the Union in 1921 and the establishment of the fully independent Irish Republic in 1948. Certainly, the writings of such eminent historians as George Dangerfield and R. Dudley Edwards have well documented how the executions of the 1916 leaders, as well as of Sir Roger Casement, who was hanged as a traitor for enlisting German aid in the cause of Irish independence, had a radicalizing effect upon Irish identity during that

¹ George Bernard Shaw, John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians (New York: Brentano’s, 1913), xxxvi.
critical period. However, the repercussions of these events upon British identity have yet to elicit a careful study. Such neglect seems particularly pressing to correct, inasmuch as Ireland had been received into the United Kingdom by the Act of Union of 1800 and was therefore, at least technically, a core part of the British Empire. And yet, the persistent trouble that the “Irish Question” presented to the British government suggests that Ireland was considered distinct, apart from the other members of the United Kingdom, namely, England, Wales and Scotland. Indeed, the controversy among Irishmen surrounding Irish national identity was matched by a similar contest over British identity and Ireland’s place within it. Although scholarly literature examining the executions of the 1916 leaders and of Sir Roger Casement has acknowledged the British interest in these events by citing the obvious national security concerns of the British government, as well as the unforgiving mood of the British public at a time of war, it has failed to consider how the British reactions to the events of 1916 can speak to the question of national identity among the British themselves, who, defined in this paper as those living on the island of Britain as well as those in Ireland of British ancestry, possessed several ideas of “Britishness” as well as varying gradations of commitment to the idea of a “British Empire.”

The following pages, therefore, explore how the “Irish Question” can illuminate the concept of British national identity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in an era when imperialism was politically paramount, and yet threatened by a growing sense of national self-determination among many colonized peoples. The Anglo-Irish in particular, having one foot set in Ireland and another in Britain, seem especially suited to

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shed light on the matter, insofar as they seem to present in an ethnic microcosm the complexity of British identity in the context of the “Irish Question.” Thus, the focus of this paper will be a comparative study of the reactions of three well-known Anglo-Irish literary figures, Arthur Conan Doyle, George Bernard Shaw, and William Butler Yeats, to the execution of the leaders of the Easter Rising and the trial and hanging of Sir Roger Casement in 1916, in the hope that such an examination will yield a better understanding of how British national identity was conceived in an era of imperialism. From the correspondence as well as published works of these three men regarding the events of 1916, there emerges a vision of Ireland as a country treated as a colonial subordinate rather than an imperial equal, economically exploited and politically discriminated against by the Westminster government. And yet, the varying responses of the three authors to this perceived reality demonstrate the complexity of British identity. While Yeats concluded that such unequal treatment meant that Ireland would be better off as a fully independent nation, Doyle, fearful that Irish independence would lead to the dissolution of the Empire, maintained that Ireland should remain within the Union but be given the political and economic equality she had long been denied. As a more moderate voice between these two extremes, Shaw was convinced that Irish nationalism was primarily a symptom of British colonial maltreatment. Therefore, he encouraged the British government to treat Ireland as an integral part of the United Kingdom but sympathized with Irish nationalism if no reforms were enacted. Indeed, the collective agreement among the authors as to Ireland’s present colonial status, coupled with their differing responses to what this meant for Ireland’s aspirations of independence, reflects the tensions inherent in British identity at the beginning of the twentieth century: a time
when the ideas of racial superiority and a national need for maintaining and obtaining colonies invited British participation in the “scramble for Africa,” while a growing interest in human rights and self-determination of peoples encouraged the British government to take up the cause of the Congo Reform Association and thwart humanitarian abuses in the Belgian Congo.

Moreover, inasmuch as the literary elite of the early twentieth century were public celebrities and intellectuals who wrote on the political and national affairs of the day, Doyle, Shaw, and Yeats extended the reach and influence of their opinions to the British public at large. In this way, the unanimity of their perception that Ireland had not received the economic, political, and social benefits befitting her intrinsic position within the imperial core as promised by the 1800 Act of Union speaks to a fundamental failing of the British imperial project. Perhaps most importantly, however, the three authors’ varying opinions, gleaned from their reactions to the executions of the leaders of the Easter Rising and Sir Roger Casement, on what this failure of integration meant for the legitimacy of the British Empire illustrates that the concept of British identity even in 1916 was far from a monolithic idea. Indeed, although the popular understanding of British identity in the era of imperialism may regard the jingoistic works of Rudyard Kipling, in which Irish soldiers were “the most reliable and efficient vanguard of imperialism,” as its best encapsulation, the differing opinions of Doyle, Shaw, and Yeats regarding the events of 1916 demonstrate that the idea of “Britishness,” including the notion of “Empire,” was subject to a highly contested debate, revealing the tensions inherent among the various concepts of British identity at the turn of the twentieth century.

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Chapter 1 “Ireland Unfree Shall Never Be at Peace”: A Brief Overview of the History of Irish Nationalism (With a Concentration on the Contributions of the Anglo-Irish)

The sectarian violence between Catholic Nationalists and Protestant Unionists which plagued Northern Ireland up until the 1990s peace process has given rise to a widespread misconception that Irish nationalism is a political question cleanly divided along religious lines, with the desire for Irish independence being the exclusive prerogative of the native Catholic population and the wish to keep Ireland within the United Kingdom the particular domain of Anglo-Irish Protestants, descended from Ireland’s English conquerors. However, in contrast to this common assumption, the Anglo-Irish have played a pivotal role in the furtherance of modern Irish nationalism from its very beginning, indicating that the Anglo-Irish role in the debate over Ireland’s relationship to Britain has been historically far broader than parochial. The famed rebellion of 1798, the opening note of the militant strain of Irish nationalism, was the result of a plot by the Society of United Irishmen, a Protestant-dominated but nonetheless non-sectarian revolutionary organization,1 which sought to bring about a republican revolution in Ireland along the lines of those recently ignited in the American colonies and France. Inasmuch as the ill-fated leaders of the Society of United Irishmen, who were driven to suicide or execution in the aftermath of the rebellion’s failure, belonged to Ireland’s Protestant settler families, the Anglo-Irish class was truly the initial wellspring of modern Irish nationalism. Indeed, the Anglican Theobald Wolfe Tone, perhaps the

most prominent figure of the 1798 rebellion, articulated first the oft-quoted strategy for Irish nationalists that England’s difficulty was Ireland’s opportunity, while Robert Emmet, the Protestant leader of another failed rebellion in 1803, delivered a “speech from the dock” before his execution that has inspired generations of Irish separatists with the defiant request that his epitaph not be written until Ireland “takes her place among the nations of the earth.”²

The immediate consequence of the 1798 rebellion, however, was the undoing of the vision of Henry Grattan, another prominent member of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, for a politically independent Ireland, retaining her own Parliament with the power to legislate her own laws. In 1783, Henry Grattan had successfully campaigned against the British parliament’s right to legislate for Ireland,³ resulting in Ireland’s transformation from a subordinate to a semi-independent kingdom sharing the same royal family as its British neighbor.⁴ The 1798 rebellion, however, quickly convinced Westminster that political autonomy in Ireland constituted a grave and unacceptable political liability. Lying strategically upon Britain’s western flank, Ireland was too tempting an avenue through which foreign powers could attempt an invasion, as the late rebellion of 1798 had all too clearly shown. Moreover, inasmuch as the republican movement led by the American and French revolution threatened to sweep away the old, monarchic order of Europe, Westminster considered it essential that Ireland be brought firmly under British control. Therefore, William Pitt, the British prime minister, proposed in the aftermath of the rebellion that the Kingdoms of Ireland and Great Britain be unified with the abolition

⁴ Howe, Ireland and Empire, 35; McDowell, “The Protestant Nation,” 192.
of the Irish Parliament and the admittance of Irish MPs to the British Parliament at Westminster. In this way, the Protestant minority in Ireland would become a Protestant majority in the United Kingdom, thus guarding against the success of agitation in Ireland for the political emancipation of the Catholic majority, to whom disloyalty and sympathy for the French were often attributed. In addition, the joining of the legislative bodies of the hitherto separate kingdoms would ensure a harmonized response in the face of future national crises.\(^5\) Passed in 1800 after a fierce debate, the Act of the Union was largely ushered through the Irish Parliament on the understanding that the resulting political marriage would bring about a greater and more equitable position for Ireland within the British Empire.\(^6\) The perceived hollowness of the promise, however, among many Irishmen ensured that the specter of the “Irish Question” would continue to haunt British politics, culminating in the seminal events of 1916.

Indeed, following the Act of Union, Ireland still remained in many ways a distinct and subordinate entity within the United Kingdom, standing apart from the more successfully integrated countries of Scotland and Wales. In the political realm, the Lord Lieutenant headed the governmental administration at Dublin Castle and served as “the most clearly colonial feature of the Irish landscape.”\(^7\) The Irish police, in contrast to the organization of their British counterparts, were armed and subject to central rather than local authority, while the Irish legal system continued to be separate from that of Britain. In the economic sphere especially, the Union heralded an age not of integration but of sharpening division, as the northeast, particularly the city of Belfast, partook of the fruits of Britain’s industrial revolution, while the rest of Ireland languished as an

\(^6\) Howe, *Ireland and Empire*, 36.
\(^7\) Howe, *Ireland and Empire*, 37.
underdeveloped agrarian society. The west and southwest, where the Gaelic language and
other features of the native culture were still a part of daily life, were exceptionally poor,
insofar as the majority of the population consisted of small tenant farmers wholly
dependent upon the potato for survival. In truth, despite the success of Daniel
O’Connell’s campaign for Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the Act of Union ensured that
the resolution of such ills rested not in Irish hands but with the posture taken toward them
by the British Members of Parliament, who now enjoyed a 658 to 100 ratio to the Irish
representatives at Westminster due to the passage of the Act. Thus, when the Great
Potato Famine of 1845-8 struck the impoverished tenant class of Ireland, the slow and
inefficient British response seemed to expose the bankruptcy of the Union. Crippled by
an inflexible devotion to the principles of free trade, which discouraged governmental
intervention, as well as by a religious and racial bigotry which viewed the sufferings of
the Famine as divine penance or the result of an Irish proclivity to laziness, the British
policy response to the Famine resulted in overcrowded workhouses, disorganized public
works schemes, and a lack of food for those who desperately needed it. Many absentee
landlords also displayed a wanton disregard for their starving tenants, further
exacerbating the humanitarian crisis which resulted in the deaths of one million Irishmen
and the emigration of another million.

Following the tremendous social upheaval of the Famine, Irish society became
increasingly divided along sectarian lines, as the Protestant minority, comprised of the
landed gentry as well as Protestant workers and tenants in the prosperous northeast,

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8 Howe, Ireland and Empire, 37-8.
10 Howe, Ireland and Empire, 38-9.
championed Ireland’s link with Britain, while the Catholic majority, overwhelmingly lower and middle class, became increasingly suspicious of the Union and blamed Britain for Ireland’s economic troubles. However, even in a post-Famine society generally fractured along religious lines, the desire for an independent Ireland was not yet the exclusive claim of Irish Catholics, as Thomas Davis, the Anglican leader of the Young Ireland movement, illustrated. Founder of the influential Nation newspaper, Davis promoted Irish nationalism as an inclusive cause, open to all patriotic Irishmen regardless of class or religion. Although this idea had been articulated by earlier nationalists such as Theobald Wolfe Tone, Davis gave the doctrine its most lucid expression. In 1848, in the midst of the Famine, the Young Irelanders were responsible for yet another failed uprising to overthrow British rule in County Tipperary. Although the rebellion amounted to nothing more than a skirmish, the influence of Davis’ non-sectarian brand of nationalism as well as the armed resistance exhibited in 1848 had a profound effect upon future generations of Irish nationalists.

In the years immediately following the Young Irelander rebellion, however, the Anglo-Irish largely abandoned the physical force tradition in favor of constitutional nationalism. In a period when Protestant economic and political interests, especially in the North, seemed best served by keeping Ireland within the framework of the British Empire, constitutional nationalism allowed Protestants to maintain a dual identity which would be impossible if they took up arms against the Crown. Thus, violent resistance to British rule increasingly became the purview of Irish Catholic revolutionaries, the Fenians in particular. Staging another failed rebellion in 1867, this revolutionary group would also figure prominently in the events of 1916. The Anglo-Irish nationalists, in

contrast, overwhelmingly favored the political arena as the best venue in which to further Irish political autonomy.

Indeed, perhaps the most famous Protestant contributor to the annals of Irish separatism, was Charles Stewart Parnell, the Anglican leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, who nearly succeeded in procuring Home Rule for Ireland. Although a member of the landed gentry, Parnell sympathized with the plight of the tenant class and regarded Home Rule, or the campaign for an Irish Parliament, as the key to alleviating Ireland’s economic, political, and social problems. As President of the Irish National Land League, he became a primary political figure during the “land war” of 1879-1882. During those years, the Irish peasantry agitated against eviction and sought to reduce rents, with the overall intention of transferring land ownership from the landlords to the tenants. This growing unrest caused the British Prime Minister, William Gladstone, to usher through Parliament in 1881 a new land act, which attempted to placate the popular desire for reform with an overhaul of the Irish agricultural system based upon the “three F’s,” fair rent, free sale, and fixity of tenure. Breaking with previous custom, land courts, instead of the landlords, would now determine the amount of rent to be paid, while tenants gained the freedom to sell their leases to a third party. Moreover, the grounds for eviction were restricted to a failure upon the part of the tenant to pay his rent. Despite the reforms, Parnell and other land agitators would not be satisfied, as the National Land League maintained that anything short of full tenant proprietorship was insufficient.\(^\text{12}\) The British government, frustrated in the face of such continued defiance, arrested the prime leaders of the movement, including Parnell. However, Prime Minister Gladstone, conscious of

the unsavory public image created by imprisoning such an influential Member of Parliament, later made further concessions to the land agitators in what became known as the Kilmainham Treaty of 1882, releasing Parnell in exchange for his declaring the end of the “land war.”

After the success of the land reform movement, Parnell reorganized the Irish National Land League into the more simply-titled Irish National League, in order to champion his next great cause, Home Rule for Ireland. Functioning as highly efficient “electoral machinery”\textsuperscript{13} for Parnell’s Irish Parliamentary Party, the Irish National League mobilized mass support for the Home Rule campaign, resulting in an overwhelming victory in the 1885 elections for the Parnellites in Ireland, where every seat went to a Home Ruler candidate except in eastern Ulster and at Dublin University. His own Liberal party the recipient of electoral success in Britain, Prime Minister Gladstone regarded the success of Parnell and other members of the Irish Parliamentary Party as an unequivocal popular mandate for Home Rule in Ireland.\textsuperscript{14} Coupled with the fact that Parnell’s Irish Parliamentary Party now held the balance of power at Westminster, Gladstone’s conviction propelled him to propose his first Home Rule Bill in 1886. Calling for the establishment of an Irish Parliament and the consequent cessation of Irish representation in the British Parliament, the Bill gave Ireland control of her internal affairs but reserved questions of foreign policy, defense, and trade for Westminster.\textsuperscript{15} Although the Conservative Party could not defeat the Bill on its own, a significant number of MPs from Gladstone’s own party, known as Liberal Unionists, rebelled against the policy of

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their leader, fearing that the proposed political devolvement would threaten the integrity of the British Empire, as well as the welfare of the Protestant minority in Ireland. As a result, the 1886 Home Rule Bill was defeated. In 1893, Gladstone presented a second Home Rule Bill, but the recent revelation of Parnell’s affair with a married woman, Kitty O’Shea, had shocked a devoutly Catholic Ireland and lost him considerable support among his home base, as well as among British noncomformists, who had been his most ardent champions within the Liberal Party.\textsuperscript{16} Although Gladstone urged Parnell to resign his leadership of the Irish Parliamentary Party, Parnell, stubborn and proud, refused to do so, precipitating a split within the Party which continued for several years after his death in 1891. Nonetheless, Gladstone guided the Home Rule Bill to a vote in 1893, where it passed in the House of Commons only to be defeated in the House of Lords. Despite the failure of Parnell to oversee the successful passage of Home Rule, he has been lauded throughout Irish history as a brilliant politician who brought Ireland closer to her dreams of self-government than anyone else up until the fateful year of 1916. Commonly referred to as “the uncrowned king of Ireland,” Parnell confirmed the significance of the Protestant contribution to Irish nationalism, illustrating the complexity surrounding ethnic, religious, and political identities within the British Empire at the turn of the twentieth century.

Chapter 2 “A Terrible Beauty is Born”: The 1916 Easter Rising

Despite the setbacks dealt by the death of Parnell and the defeat of the 1893 Irish Home Rule Bill, the Irish Parliamentary Party finally seemed on the verge of realizing its ambition following the passage of the Parliament Act of 1911, which, by restricting the veto power of the House of Lords, removed the last political impediment to the legislative enactment of Home Rule. Recognition of this change in political circumstance galvanized Irish Unionists into establishing a vigorous opposition to the third Home Rule Bill of 1912.¹ In 1911, Unionists formed the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force, displaying their willingness to employ military means to preserve the Union. In 1912, the Ulster Unionist Council, which had been established in 1905 in order to coordinate resistance to Home Rule, made preparations for a “provisional government” should Home Rule take effect, in addition to importing arms for the Unionist cause.² Indeed, by the fall of that year, the Council organized a massive public ceremony at Belfast City Hall, in which 200,000 men³ signed the “Ulster Solemn League and Covenant,” pledging to utilize “all means which may be found necessary to defeat the present conspiracy to set up a Home Rule Parliament in Ireland.”⁴ Thus was there little doubt that Irish Unionists, particularly in Ulster, where they were the majority, were prepared to violently oppose any act of parliament severing their close link with Britain.⁵

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¹ David W. Miller, Queen’s Rebels: Ulster Loyalism in Historical Perspective (Dublin: Gill and MacMillan, 1978), 87.
⁴ “Ulster Solemn League and Covenant,” quoted in Miller, Queen’s Rebels, 97.
In 1913, Irish nationalists reacted to the growing militancy of Irish Unionism by forming their own paramilitary organization, the Irish Volunteers, “to secure and to maintain the rights and liberties common to all the people of Ireland.”\(^6\) Although ostensibly established under the auspices of the moderate Home Ruler, Eoin MacNeill, a professor of early Irish history at University College Dublin, the organization was from its very start the target of covert infiltration by the Irish Republican Brotherhood (I.R.B.), a republican secret society dedicated to the overthrow of British rule in Ireland through force of arms. Aware that their embrace of the physical force tradition of Irish nationalism was still an extreme and unpopular view in the Irish population at large, the leaders of the I.R.B. sought to use the Irish Volunteers as an organizational “front,”\(^7\) in which they could recruit new members and expose their current members to valuable military drills and exercises. However, John Redmond, the leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party and thus the figurehead of constitutional Irish nationalism, found the Irish Volunteers’ unfettered status on the eve of the Home Rule Bill’s 1914 enactment to be dangerously unacceptable. Consequently, he brought the Irish Volunteers under his own authority, despite vehement objections by some of the I.R.B. men in the organization.\(^8\) The avoidance of a split within the nationalist community by sacrificing the Irish Volunteers’ autonomy proved well-justified, as the success of the Howth gun-running, in which Irish Volunteers managed to land German guns outside of Dublin in order to counter an earlier gun-running by the Ulster Volunteers, inspired fresh confidence in the organization and swelled the ranks of the Irish Volunteers to 160,000

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\(^7\) Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 320.

\(^8\) Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 326.
by July of 1914. However, as the first rumbles of the “guns of August” announced the outbreak of World War I in 1914, Irish nationalists faced yet another divisive choice: either support the British war effort and hope to win political independence through a demonstration of loyalty or take up arms against the crown and follow Wolfe Tone’s hallowed dictum that England’s difficulty is Ireland’s opportunity.

Before the transformative year of 1916, the second option, an armed struggle against British rule, held no appeal for the Irish population at large. Indeed, they were averse to the idea. As the nations of Europe mobilized their armies in late 1914, the demands of an empire at war stimulated an economic prosperity not only in England, but in Ireland as well. Jobs were created in industries that were crucial to the war effort, and “farmers…reaped the reward of food scarcity and high prices….” Reports on the Irish economy, which was largely agricultural outside of Ulster, proclaimed that “industrial employment is very fair and wages are good” and “agricultural interests were never so prosperous.” Thousands of Irishmen responded to the call of John Redmond to fight for Britain and thus prove Ireland’s worthiness of Home Rule, which had been suspended for the duration of the war, and the money they sent home to their families further added to the economic benefits Ireland was receiving from the global conflict. In this favorable economic climate, Redmond’s influential endorsement of the British war effort only solidified the Irish public’s initial enthusiasm for Irish enlistment and distaste for rebellion. While visiting the front in November 1915, Redmond argued that the sacrifice

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9 D. George Boyce, Nationalism in Ireland (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 283.
11 Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine, 359.
13 Choille MacGiolla, ed., Intelligence Notes, 1913-1916, 205, quoted in Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine, 359.
14 Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine, 359.
of Protestants and Catholics, North and South, in the fields of France would only strengthen the bonds among his countrymen once the hostilities were over and Home Rule was enacted: “Let Irishmen come together in the trenches and spill their blood together and I say there is no power on earth that when they come home can induce them to turn as enemies one upon another.”15 However, the optimism of such a statement had already proved false by October 1914, when Redmond’s championing of Irish recruitment to the British cause prompted 13,500 of the more extreme Irish Volunteers to split from the main body of 188,000 still loyal to Redmond, who were henceforth known as the National Volunteers.16 Although Eoin MacNeill assumed leadership of the dissidents, becoming Chief of Staff of the “new” Irish Volunteers, he recognized the relative contentedness of the population at large: “I am certain…that the only possible basis for successful revolutionary action is deep and widespread popular discontent. We have only to look around us in the streets to realize that no such condition exists in Ireland. A few of us, a small proportion, who think about the evils of English government in Ireland, are always discontented. We should be downright fools if we were to measure many others by the standard of our own thoughts.”17 Indeed, despite anxiety over the possible introduction of conscription in Ireland and the mustering of the Ulster Volunteer Force to oppose Home Rule, the Irish population remained relatively quiet and complacent, confident in Redmond’s ability to ensure Home Rule after the war and not willing to risk their recent economic gains for the bloodshed of revolution.

15 John Redmond, quoted in Boyce, Nationalism in Ireland, 284.
As the First World War descended into industrialized slaughter and a bloody stalemate emerged on the Western Front, however, the initial popular enthusiasm to fight on behalf of the British Empire quickly faded. Coupled with a growing belief that the Ulster Unionists had the sympathy of Westminster, throwing the post-war implementation of Home Rule into doubt,\textsuperscript{18} the appalling carnage of the conflict produced a feeling within the Irish populace that the heavy cost in human life was not theirs to bear when there was such uncertainty attached to their own future as a nation.\textsuperscript{19} Reflecting the stark transformation in public opinion, the number of Irishmen enlisting in the British army suffered a precipitous decline. From August until December 1914, 43,000 young men answered Redmond’s call to wartime service, while an additional 37,000 enlisted between January and August 1915. The following eight months, however, produced only 12,000 volunteers.\textsuperscript{20} In addition to the waning public support for Irish involvement in the war which these figures indicated, they also heightened the possibility that Britain, facing a prolonged conflict and burgeoning casualties, might impose conscription upon Ireland. Having been met with much resentment in England, conscription was sure to be received with even more hostility in Ireland, where the perceived stake in the outcome of the war was far less. Indeed, at the end of 1915, Sir Matthew Nathan, Permanent Under-Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, observed that the looming threat of conscription was undermining support for the Irish Parliamentary Party and facilitating the rise of extremism.

\textsuperscript{19} Lyons, \textit{Ireland Since the Famine}, 360.
By the early months of 1916, the Irish Volunteers were defiantly conducting military drills and parades in public. Nevertheless, despite the popular discontent which these maneuvers illustrated, the Easter Rising itself was unmistakably the product of a “small minority within… [a] small minority.” The leaders of the I.R.B, known as the Military Council, were the conspirators behind the insurrection, having carefully infiltrated the Volunteers organization from the highest to the lowest levels so that they could thoroughly rely on them as a fighting force when the anticipated rebellion occurred. On several occasions, Eoin MacNeill, the Volunteers’ Chief of Staff, had declared his opposition to any wartime insurrection save if the British introduced conscription or tried to disband the Volunteers. And yet, the deception that the I.R.B. Military Council undertook was so deliberate, that its leading members, Patrick Pearse, Joseph Plunkett, and Thomas MacDonagh, who also held influential positions on the Volunteers’ Provisional Committee, all repeatedly denied any plans for a rising in the face of direct questioning by Eoin MacNeill, despite being intimately involved in and primarily responsible for them. However, informants eventually confirmed MacNeill’s suspicions a mere few days before the set date of the impending rebellion, Easter Sunday of 1916. Furious, MacNeill confronted Pearse and threatened to issue a countermanding order to the Volunteers to thwart their participation in any sort of insurrection. When told of Sir Roger Casement’s imminent landing of arms from Germany though, MacNeill resigned himself to the seeming inevitability of the plans already set in motion and allowed the preparations for the revolt to continue. News of Casement’s capture and the failure of the

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arms landing, however, prompted MacNeill to once again warn Pearse that he would issue a countermanding order, to no avail. Pearse would proceed anyway. Consequently, on Easter Sunday, the date of the proposed rising, MacNeill published a countermanding order in the *Dublin Sunday Independent*, which ran: “Owing to the very critical position, all orders given to the Irish Volunteers for tomorrow, Easter Sunday, are hereby rescinded and no parades, marches, or other movement of Irish Volunteers will take place. Each individual Volunteer will obey this order strictly in every particular.”

MacNeill’s action wreaked irrevocable havoc on the hopes of the conspirators for a nationwide revolt. Although Pearse, in an effort to contain the damage, postponed the date of the rising and issued secret instructions to the Volunteers to mobilize on Easter Monday instead, the confusion wrought by the various contradictory orders ensured that the rising would essentially be limited to Dublin and its immediate surroundings. Moreover, even in Dublin, the last-minute change in plans resulted in not all of the Volunteer units, as well as those of the Citizen Army, a labor militia which was also to participate in the revolt, being notified in time. Acutely aware that these difficulties would severely weaken the numerical strength of the rebels, the leaders of 1916 decided to proceed with the insurrection anyway, knowing that it was predestined for failure.

With military success no longer an option, they were left only with their conviction in the power of “blood sacrifice” as a justification for their rebellion. By shedding their own blood, they hoped to galvanize the Irish nationalist spirit, and ultimately succeed in establishing an independent Ireland by inspiring those who came after them. Thus, as a small force of Irish rebels commandeered the Dublin General Post Office on Easter

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Monday to the bewilderment of witnesses, proclaiming the birth of an Irish republic from its steps, their courage found necessary strength in the belief that they were to die in “bloody protest for a glorious thing.”

Due to the small turnout among the Volunteers and the Citizen Army on the morning of Easter Monday, only about 1,600 at most, the general strategy which the leaders adopted was to occupy key buildings throughout the city of Dublin. In addition to the General Post Office, which was to serve as a military headquarters for the insurgents, the rebels also attempted to seize the strategic locations of the Four Courts, the South Dublin Union, the Mendicity Institution, Jacob’s biscuit factory, Boland’s Mills and St. Stephen’s Green. Unfortunately, errors due to military amateurism compounded the daunting odds which the rebels faced due to their numerical weakness. For example, the Citizen Army officer, Michael Mallin, spent precious time digging trenches in the Green, while buildings, perfect for snipers, surrounded it on all sides. Even when he realized his strategic blunder, withdrawing his men to the College of Surgeons on the western end of the park, he failed to occupy the tallest building in the area, the Shelbourne Hotel. As a result, British troops were able to move into the Shelbourne and exploit its commanding position overlooking the rebels’ garrison.

Nevertheless, despite being overwhelmingly outnumbered, twenty to one after forty-eight hours of fighting, the rebels managed to display some remarkable resistance, most notably in the Battle of Mount Street Bridge. On Wednesday, April 26, the Sherwood Foresters, British reinforcements marching from Kingstown, attempted to cross the Bridge, which provided the most direct avenue into the city. Although only a

29 Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine, 366-7.
dozen Volunteers defended the bridge, they courageously managed to stave off the Foresters’ repeated assaults, inflicting almost half of the casualties suffered by British soldiers during that Easter week.\textsuperscript{30} Again and again, the British troops charged across the bridge, only to be met with a deadly torrent of bullets, which left their comrades lying dead in piles around them. Ultimately, however, having withstood the British onslaught throughout the day, the Volunteers were compelled to retreat, overrun through sheer force of numbers.

Indeed, as the British reinforcements continued to enter Dublin from other areas of Ireland as well as from across the Irish Sea, the situation for the insurgents turned increasingly bleak. With the General Post Office in flames and the rebels hopelessly pressed on all sides, Patrick Pearse and James Connolly, the leader of the Citizen Army, determined that they could no longer encourage their men, who had fought bravely against overwhelming odds, to prolong the struggle. Accepting a cease-fire with the stipulation of unconditional surrender, the 1916 leaders laid down their arms and sent messages to the various rebel outposts throughout the city for their occupants to do the same. By May 1, the Easter Rising was over. However, certain measures taken by the British military in its aftermath would ensure that the most severe repercussions had yet to come.

In the initial days following the suppression of the rebellion, public opinion in Ireland was extremely hostile to the rebels and their cause. Viewed as reckless fools who had embarrassed Ireland on the eve of Home Rule and in the midst of world war, the insurgents were also bitterly faulted for the civilian deaths and destruction of property suffered by Dublin City. According to the disinterested contemporary account of the

\textsuperscript{30} Lyons, \textit{Ireland Since the Famine}, 371-2.
Canadian journalist, F.A. McKenzie, “the open and strong sympathy of the mass of the population was with the British troops.”\[^{31}\] Within the nationalist community itself, the *Irish Independent*, which reflected the opinion of Catholic businessmen in Dublin to a large degree,\[^{32}\] went so far as to declare that “leniency will be interpreted as a sign of weakness”\[^{33}\] and called for appropriate punishment to be dispensed to the rebels.

Certainly, the immediate public response to the Rising presented the British government with an unparalleled opportunity to banish any allure which extremist nationalism might hold for the Irish people. Given a sort of political carte blanche with the imposition of martial law, the British military was determined to fulfill this mission. However, its choice weapons of indiscriminate heavy-handedness and unmerciful ruthlessness, rather than alienating Irish men and women from extremist nationalism, encouraged them to sympathize with it instead.

Indeed, once the rebels had accepted defeat and surrendered to the British forces, British Major General Sir John Maxwell ordered widespread arrests in and outside of Dublin, as well as the establishment of general courts-martial. 3,430 men and 79 women were detained as a result of these sweeps.\[^{34}\] Inasmuch as only 1,600 men at most had participated in the Rising, it was clear that most of those who were arrested were not guilty of direct involvement. Consequently, most were released after further investigation, but the seed of political radicalism was planted in many of those who endured the trauma of temporary imprisonment, as well as their families and friends. Undoubtedly, however,


\[^{32}\] Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 375.


\[^{34}\] Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 374-5.
the most egregious miscalculation which the British military made in its handling of the aftermath of the crisis was its decision to execute the leaders of the Rising. Originally, ninety prisoners were condemned to death, but seventy-five of those had their sentences reduced to terms of penal servitude. The remaining fifteen, the principal organizers and leaders of the insurrections, were executed over successive days from May 3 to May 12. The chilling and brutal manner in which these executions were conducted, coupled with the unrelenting and drawn out timing of the deaths, was instrumental in turning Irish public opinion firmly against the British government and in sympathy with the rebels. Several of the condemned, such as Michael Mallin and Edward Daly, had fought fairly and courageously as soldiers and arguably did not deserve the severe punishment meted out to them.35 As for the seven original conspirators, they could rightly be viewed as traitors, having signed the Proclamation of the Irish Republic and solicited the help of Germany through Casement’s failed expedition. However, once reports surfaced that James Connolly, too grievously wounded to stand, had been tied to a chair before being shot by firing squad, the Irish public, already uneasy about the executions, repudiated whatever legal right the British had to execute these men, being thoroughly repulsed by such cruel and blatant callousness.

Ultimately, the deaths of the 1916 leaders succeeded in doing what the Rising by itself could not. The public backlash against the executions coalesced around a new popular radicalism, which echoed the dead men’s call for a liberated Irish republic independent of Britain. Home Rule was no longer enough. The Irish Parliamentary Party, which had supported the Asquith government despite the growing outcry over the executions, lost what little remained of its credibility when Westminster nearly imposed

35 Lyons, *Ireland Since the Famine*, 376.
Irish conscription in 1918, and Sinn Fein, binding itself to the new republican vision, rose to take its place. In 1921, after a prolonged and bloody guerilla war between Irish and British forces, the Anglo-Irish Treaty gave Ireland, excluding the North, dominion status within the British Empire, which nationalists accepted as a “freedom [adequate enough] to achieve freedom.”36 Indeed, by 1949, Ireland had succeeded in severing the last political link with her neighbor and finally constituted herself as an independent republic. Although this full manifestation of the “triumph of failure”37 was not yet anticipated in Ireland or Britain in 1916, the executions of the leaders of the Easter Rising certainly invigorated the perennial debate concerning Ireland’s proper relationship to Britain. But it was the trial and execution of Sir Roger Casement which gave the question a new urgency in the British mind, since Casement was not merely a native Irishman, cursed with a proclivity for treacherous behavior, but rather a British civil servant, who had been knighted for his contributions to the Empire. He was one of their own.

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Although Sir Roger Casement became the paragon of a British civil servant through his exposure of human rights abuses in the Belgian Congo and Peru, his familial roots sprung not from English but from Irish soil. Born in the Sandycove suburb of Dublin in 1864, Casement belonged to an Anglo-Irish family which had been established as rural gentry in County Antrim since the eighteenth century. In addition to pursuing other prestigious careers in medicine, law, and the Church of Ireland, members of the family had a tradition of serving as administrators in the colonial government or officers in the British army and navy. Casement’s father, also named Roger, followed this latter path, accepting a commission as a Cornet with the Third Dragoon Guards and spending most of his military career in India. Once discharged, he married Casement’s mother, Anne Jephson, whose family originated in Hampshire and Leicestershire but had resided in Ireland since the middle of the seventeenth century.  

Although Anne, a Catholic convert, deferred to her husband as well as to her social class by allowing her children to be raised as Protestants, she secretly had Roger as well as her two other sons baptized as Catholics while vacationing with them in Wales without her husband. This childhood incident would have important repercussions for Roger Casement later in his life, as he increasingly moved away from identifying with the Protestant Unionist Ascendancy in favor of the Irish nationalism endorsed by the majority of his Catholic countrymen.

As a young man, however, Casement enthusiastically embraced the project of Empire, abandoning his mundane clerkship at the Elder Dempster shipping line in

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Liverpool to work as a volunteer in The Congo International Association. Ostensibly established as a humanitarian project aimed at bringing the benefits of “civilization” to the indigenous populations of Central Africa, the Association was the imperial brainchild of King Leopold of Belgium. Displaying a cunning and manipulative diplomacy, Leopold assuaged the political fears of the other European powers in the midst of the notorious “scramble for Africa” by declaring that the Association was nothing more than a manifestation of his disinterested concern in the Congo. At the 1884 international conference convened in Berlin to address the issue, Leopold suggested that the Association be given sovereignty over the African interior for the sole purpose of improving the social, political, economic, and moral welfare of the inhabitants, as well as opening up the region to free trade.\(^2\) Disarmed by the noble and non-threatening nature of the proposal, the European powers agreed to invest the Association with a mandate over the Congo, thus instituting the Congo Free State in 1885. Allowing Leopold to exercise “personal” sovereignty over the new state,\(^3\) they were unaware that the King’s professed benevolence was really a political façade, masking his sordid ambition for imperial wealth and power.

Indeed, deceived along with the rest of Europe, Casement became an efficient and well-respected agent in Central Africa, conducting a survey for a railway line to be built across the Free State and managing a trading station on the Upper Congo.\(^4\) Upon meeting Casement in the port of Matadi in 1890, Joseph Conrad, who would later gain fame for the book he based upon his African experience, *Heart of Darkness*, was favorably impressed: “There is a touch of the conquistador in him…for I’ve seen him start off into

an unspeakable wilderness swinging a crook-handled stick for all weapons, with two bulldogs, Paddy (white) and Biddy, (brindle) at his heels, and a Loanda boy carrying a bundle for all company. A few months afterwards it so happened that I saw him come out again, a little leaner, a little browner, with his stick, dogs and Loanda boy, and quietly serene as though he had been for a stroll in the park.” Unlike other European surveyors, Casement shunned the use of force while mapping hitherto unexplored areas of Africa, preferring to win over the natives through kindness rather than hostility. His sympathetic methods worked so well that by 1895 the administrator of the British Niger Coast Protectorate forwarded his reports to the British government, which published them as a White Paper. Having secured the confidence of Whitehall, Casement was appointed as Her Majesty’s Consul in Portuguese East and then West Africa, where, despite the tedious nature of the duties, he distinguished himself as a diligent and astute representative of the government. In fact, one might even say that Casement exhibited a zealous fealty to Queen and Empire in this period, inasmuch as he offered to lead a commando operation against the Boers during the South African War. Devised to disrupt potential gun running by demolishing a bridge on the Netherlands Railway line between Lorenzo Marques and Pretoria, Casement’s plan was daring and even reckless. Consequently, despite initial approval, it was canceled due to the prudent reconsideration of the British military leadership in Cape Town, although Casement received the Queen’s South African medal for his efforts.

The enterprise which brought Casement to celebrated prominence within the British civil service, however, was undoubtedly his investigation of alleged human rights

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5 Joseph Conrad, quoted in Inglis, Roger Casement, 31-32.
6 Inglis, Roger Casement, 42.
abuses in the Congo Free State. In 1903, the Foreign Office appointed Casement to the new consulate at Boma, the capital of the Free State, discreetly instructing him to inquire into sinister reports emerging from that region that the natives were being cruelly treated and exploited. Indeed, although many governmental officials were initially dismissive of such claims, the mounting complaints by such men as Edward Bannister, the vice-consul in Loanda in 1892, as well as Consul Alfred Parminter, who had served at Lorenzo Marques, convinced the African Department of the Foreign Office that further review was necessary.8 Examining the Free State’s trade returns, Casement discovered that vast quantities of lucrative rubber was being shipped to Antwerp with only guns and ammunition being sent in return. From this strange disparity, he was able to conclude that the Free State officials were in fact enslaving the natives and compelling them, as forced labor, to harvest the rubber.9 Moreover, from personal interviews with the natives as well as visits to their villages, he found, to his horror, that the Congolese were being subjected to fear and torture, having their hands cut off when they did not meet their rubber quotas and being forced to go deeper and deeper into the jungle to find rubber vines, where many died from starvation, exposure, or attacks from wild animals.10 Filled with a righteous rage when confronted with the evidence of such atrocities, Casement sent dispatches detailing the horrors he had uncovered back to the British Foreign Office.

In 1904, the Office released a White Paper based upon Casement’s reports, but its decision to substitute the names of the perpetrators, victims, and missionaries as well as the villages Casement visited with a capital letter led to such ridiculous sentences as “I

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8 Sawyer, Casement: The Flawed Hero, 34-5.
9 Inglis, Roger Casement, 49.
10 Inglis, Roger Casement, 71.
am N.N. These two beside me are O.O. and P.P., all of us Y.”11 Casement bitterly complained, “Ringing changes on the alphabet cannot produce the same effect as putting the alphabet to its right use.”12 He was right. The report did not produce the public outrage that its revelations warranted. In addition, King Leopold issued a rebuttal to Casement’s accusations, attributing the Congolese population loss to sleeping sickness and framing the cases of mutilation as isolated instances.13 Despite Casement’s plea, the Foreign Office refused to use evidence from its Congo Atrocity files to discredit the king, claiming that such an action would expose the British government as well to charges of indefensible neglect of human rights.14 The “realpolitik” reluctance of the Foreign Office to not only come to Casement’s defense but also that of the oppressed Congolese caused a profound disillusionment within Casement, which a promotion to the consulship at Lisbon did little to dispel. Frustrated with the ineffectiveness of diplomatic channels, he joined forces with the British journalist, Edward Morel, to form the Congo Reform Association, in an effort to bring public pressure to bear upon the issue. Due in no small part to the efforts of the Association, a burgeoning outcry in both Europe and the United States compelled Leopold to set up a Commission of Inquiry, which finally vindicated Casement with its findings in 1905. Although Leopold had attempted to manipulate the Commission by instructing his agents in the Congo to withhold evidence of atrocities, the Commissioners had felt morally obligated to travel to the places which Casement had described in his report. Once there, they had met missionaries who corroborated Casement’s testimony, as well as native Congolese, who presented their mutilated limbs

11 1904 White Paper, quoted in Inglis, Roger Casement, 85.
12 Roger Casement, quoted in Inglis, Roger Casement, 86.
13 Brian Inglis, Roger Casement, 86-7.
14 Sawyer, Casement: The Flawed Hero, 41.
as graphic confirmation of the cruel treatment they had suffered.\textsuperscript{15} With Leopold’s own Commission verifying Casement’s claims, Casement was elevated from “embarrassment” to “hero” within the British civil service. Lord Lansdowne, the British Foreign Secretary, informed him that he was to be made a Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George.

However, far from eagerly accepting such an honor, Casement shrank from it, having developed a renewed interest in his native Ireland in the period before the publication of the Commission’s report. Indeed, before the Commission of Inquiry validated Casement’s findings, Casement returned to Ireland, frustrated by the Foreign Office’s heavy editing of his dispatches and by his colleagues’ reticence to defend him against King Leopold’s rebuttals. While there, he attended a \textit{Feis}, or Festival, of the Glens in the spring of 1904, during which Ulstermen came together to promote and learn about the Irish language. Due in large part to this event, Casement became passionate about the revival of Gaelic within Ireland and even tried to learn the language himself. He donated money to a school in the province of Munster which taught Irish to its students and traveled to the rural west of Ireland to hear native speakers, whose conversations he proudly reported that he could somewhat understand.\textsuperscript{16} Now that Casement was immersed in one of the principal efforts of the Gaelic revival, it was not an unnatural progression to have such cultural nationalism cross over into the political sphere. Thus, when he received word that he was to be made a Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George, he was reluctant to take such a title because it would result in his being

\textsuperscript{15} Inglis, \textit{Roger Casement}, 117.
\textsuperscript{16} Inglis, \textit{Roger Casement}, 113-4.
“regarded askance in every reputable [i.e. nationalist] quarter in Ireland.”17 Nevertheless, despite shifting loyalties, Casement ultimately accepted the decoration, foreshadowing his similar assent to the knighthood which was offered him in 1911, in gratitude for another exposure of human rights abuses which he conducted in the Peruvian Putumayo. Although the receipt of such commendations for service to the Empire identified Casement as the consummate British civil servant, his personal misgivings indicated his increasing interest in Irish nationalism, which was to eventually compel him to play his own part in the events of 1916.

Indeed, the horrors Casement witnessed in the Congo and the Putumayo dealt a fatal blow in his mind to the moral legitimacy of the imperial project. Not only had the atrocities in the Congo and the Putumayo left him with unmistakable evidence of the cruelty that Europeans, protected under the patriotic cloak of imperialism, could inflict upon a helpless native population, but the reluctance of the British Foreign Office to intervene in the Congo, except when politically convenient, seemed to demonstrate the inherently self-serving nature of bringing “civilization” to remote areas of the globe. Far from a noble attempt to better the material, economic, and social welfare of the native inhabitants of the conquered region while creating new economic opportunities for the home country, imperialism was simply a greedy political structure aimed at the economic exploitation of the region under its control. As Casement returned between 1907 and 1911 to an Ireland in the midst of the Home Rule crisis on leave, to await appointments to new consulates, or recover from illness, it is not altogether surprising that he would soon compare Ireland’s relationship with Britain to that of the imperial victims of the Congo and the Putumayo. As the Congolese had been exploited as rubber gatherers to fatten the

17 Inglis, Roger Casement, 121.
pockets of King Leopold, so, Casement believed, had the Irish been reduced to marginal tenantry to benefit the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy and the Westminster government. A recent commission of inquiry only strengthened Casement’s hypothesis, inasmuch as it declared that since the Act of Union, the Irish, rather than receiving financial aid, had been overtaxed, relative to the English, by approximately £2.5 million a year; although an inconsequential amount for the English budget, it was quite significant for the Irish one.\textsuperscript{18}

By the time of his assignment in the Putumayo, Casement was freely likening his fellow Irishmen to the persecuted Indians in Peru, writing that “the ‘white Indians’ of Ireland are heavier in my heart than all of the Indians of the rest of the earth.”\textsuperscript{19}

Thoroughly disillusioned with the politics of empire, Casement retired from the consular service in 1913 to devote himself wholeheartedly to the cause of Irish independence. Alongside Eoin MacNeill, he was instrumental in the founding of the Irish Volunteers, and he traveled throughout the country, giving speeches to attract new recruits. While on a visit to the United States in 1914 to raise funds for the organization, he was greeted by enthusiastic crowds of Irish-Americans, who lauded him for his principal role in planning the Howth gun-running.\textsuperscript{20} Conscious of the history of the Irish nationalist movement, which was filled with Protestant martyrs and heroes, such as Tone and Parnell, Casement emphasized his Anglo-Irish heritage. Writing to Alice Stopford Green, the nationalist historian whom he counted as a dear friend, he enthused, “I can see from the way they all greet me that they are setting their hearts on a Protestant leader, and they think, poor brave souls, I may be the man….they are mad for a Protestant leader.”\textsuperscript{21}

\textsuperscript{18} Inglis, \textit{Roger Casement}, 125.
\textsuperscript{19} Roger Casement, quoted in Sawyer, \textit{Casement: The Flawed Hero}, 92.
\textsuperscript{20} Inglis, \textit{Roger Casement}, 265.
\textsuperscript{21} Roger Casement, quoted in Inglis, \textit{Roger Casement}, 270.
As World War I suddenly ignited the map of Europe in August 1914, Casement believed that he had been presented with a unique opportunity to rise to these expectations. A Germanophile, he saw Germany as the men of ’98 had seen France: as a potential ally who could liberate Ireland from England’s chains. Consequently, he planned to travel to Germany and seek assistance there, specifically by raising an Irish brigade from captured prisoners of war. Such a brigade, he believed, could spearhead a wartime invasion which would cast off British rule in Ireland once and for all. Although John Devoy, Casement’s host in the United States and the leader of Clan na Gael, an Irish-American organization affiliated with the revolutionary I.R.B, was not entirely receptive to the idea, he ultimately gave it his approval and promised Casement that the Clan would provide financial support for the venture. Thus, on October 15th, Casement set sail for Germany.

Initially, Casement seemed poised to orchestrate a remarkable triumph. Germany’s Under-Secretary of State, Count Artur von Zimmerman, gave him a warm welcome, and Count George von Wedel, the head of the German Foreign Office English Department, consulted with him about the particulars of his recruitment campaign among the prisoners of war. Publicly, the German government declared that the “the well-known Irish nationalist, Sir Roger Casement” was in Berlin and issued a statement disavowing any imperial intentions toward Ireland. On the contrary, the government sought only Irish “national prosperity and national freedom.” The early success which Casement enjoyed, however, faded once he journeyed to Limburg, where the Irish prisoners of war had been collected in preparation for his appeal. As Casement stood before the prisoners, denouncing Redmond’s support for the British war effort and calling

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22 Sawyer, Casement: The Flawed Hero, 117.
23 German Announcement of Roger Casement’s Arrival, quoted in Inglis, Roger Casement, 281.
24 German Statement of Intent, quoted in Inglis, Roger Casement, 282.
for volunteers to form an Irish Brigade, he was greeted with stony silence and even
outright hostility. As veterans of decorated Irish regiments who knew that Home Rule
was already on the statute book, they viewed Casement as a traitor and believed their loyalty to Ireland was not diminished by their loyalty to the British Empire. Proclaiming that “in addition to being Irish Catholics, we have the honour to be British solidiers,” they overwhelmingly refused to join Casement’s Irish Brigade. Thoroughly disheartened by such a failure, Casement wrote in his diary: “I despair of any patriotic act coming from such men…”

By early 1916, the I.R.B. leadership had approached the German government in anticipation of the Easter Rising, asking for a shipload of arms accompanied by a U-boat and German soldiers. When Casement received word of this development, he traveled to Berlin, where he discovered that the Germans planned to send only enough aid to instigate the Irish rebellion as a diversion, rather than as a success. Offering to send 20,000 rifles and ammunition, far less than was requested by the I.R.B., the German government revealed that it had no real interest in Irish independence after all, only a desire to see British forces diverted from France. In Casement’s own words: “They may or may not keep faith today; but I have no reason to believe that in anything they do they ever think of us, or of others, but only of themselves…they have shown me repeatedly that they cannot keep faith and have no feeling about Ireland at all, that in anything they promise now, they seek only what ends of their own they are after.”

Recognizing that the Rising was doomed from the start, Casement was adamant that his meager Irish

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25 Sawyer, Casement: The Flawed Hero, 118.
26 Inglis, Roger Casement, 287-8.
27 Roger Casement, quoted in Reid, The Lives of Roger Casement, 250.
28 Sawyer, Casement: The Flawed Hero, 124-5.
29 Roger Casement, quoted in Inglis, Roger Casement, 308-9.
Brigade should not be involved in such a hopeless undertaking. However, motivated by a desire to secretly warn the rebels in Dublin of the paucity of German assistance and the futility of the Rising, he requested that he himself be allowed to board the U-boat which was to escort the ship landing arms in Ireland. Moreover, despondent over the failure of his German mission, Casement longed to return to his native land, even if by so doing, he risked imprisonment and even death.

Tragically for Casement, imprisonment and death were indeed what awaited him in Ireland. On April 20th, the Aud, carrying the shipment of arms from Germany, arrived off the Kerry Coast. The I.R.B., however, having delayed the date of the Rising until Easter Monday, failed to send men to receive the arms according to the previously agreed upon schedule. As a result, the Aud, after waiting over twenty-four hours to establish contact, was intercepted by the HMS Bluebell and scuttled. Meanwhile, the U-boat carrying Casement, having unsuccessfully tried to meet up with the Aud, dropped him off in a collapsible boat, which capsized off of the Banna Strand in Tralee Bay. Exhausted after making his way to shore, Casement sought refuge in an old rath known as McKenna’s Fort, where he was soon discovered by a local policeman and ultimately transferred to the Tower of London.

Although the British public had looked upon Casement with a bemused curiosity before the Easter Rising, afterward, they viewed him as the most perfidious of traitors. His solicitation of the German government to aid the radical nationalist movement in Ireland when thousands of British soldiers were dying from German bullets in the

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trenches of World War I seemed nothing less than a stab in the back. Moreover, inasmuch as Casement had not only belonged to His Majesty’s civil service but also accepted a knighthood for his work in the Putumayo, his actions in Germany seemed all the more egregious. Thus, the British government, aware that the case would cause an international sensation, deliberately chose to have Casement answer the charge of treason in a civil trial rather than military court, so that the proceedings would be more conspicuously transparent, impressing not only the British public but neutral countries as well.33

Despite suffering from near universal vilification, Casement was not entirely bereft of supporters. Indeed, Mrs. Alice Stopford Green, the Irish historian and nationalist, approached several friends, such as William Cadbury, asking for donations for Casement’s defense. In addition, John Devoy, who had assisted Casement during his American tour and approved of his mission to Germany, wrote a check for $5000 on behalf of Clan na Gael.34 Perhaps the most famous contribution that Casement received, however, was from George Bernard Shaw, the noted Irish playwright. Although he refused to donate monetarily to Mrs. Green’s fund, he supplied a written defense instead, urging Casement to plead not guilty and contest the charge of treason on the grounds that he was only an Irish patriot and “no more a traitor than any Bulgarian captured by the Turks.”35 Casement deeply appreciated Shaw’s effort, but disagreed with the literary icon on one fundamental point: “I shall be so grateful if you will convey to Bernard Shaw my warmest thanks. His view is mine, with this exception—that I should never suggest to an

32 Inglis, Roger Casement, 319.
33 Reid, The Lives of Roger Casement, 367.
34 Reid, The Lives of Roger Casement, 368.
35 George Bernard Shaw, quoted in Reid, The Lives of Roger Casement, 377; Shaw’s letter to Casement will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.
English court of jury that they should let me off as a prisoner of war, but tell them “You may hang me, and be damned to you.”36 Notwithstanding Casement’s defiance, the aftermath of the Easter Rising raised Casement’s hopes that although he would unquestionably be found guilty, he might not be executed after all: “The English mob and vast majority of the people would like to see me hanged and want it badly. The British Government dare not hang me….They would willingly bring back to life poor Sean MacDermott, Connolly, Pearse, Colbert (and the other victims of their military autocrats of Easter Week) and they are assuredly not going to add to the roll of victims, me. They know quite well what the world would say of that, and what America would say of it.”37

Unfortunately for Casement, however, the infamous Black Diaries,38 personal journals detailing his clandestine homosexual encounters, would soon frustrate his expectation of clemency. Indeed, having obtained the diaries after Casement’s capture, the British government showed them to prominent members of society as well as the press in a deliberate attempt to smear Casement’s reputation and discourage lobbying on his behalf. In recognition of Casement’s previous good service in the Congo and elsewhere, several famous and respected figures, such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, appealed for mercy following his sentencing, but to no avail. In the trial itself, the Attorney-General had cunningly worked in mention of the diaries, provoking the Chief Justice to ask, “Mr. Attorney, you mentioned a passage in the diary? Is there any evidence as to whose diary it is?” The Attorney-General replied, “It was a diary. I will give your Lordship the evidence of it. It was a diary found.” When pressed further by the

36 Roger Casement, quoted in Inglis, Roger Casement, 329-30.
37 Roger Casement, quoted in Inglis, Roger Casement, 333-4.
38 Whether or not these diaries are authentic or forged as instruments to discredit Casement has been a long-standing dispute among Casement’s biographers.
Chief Justice, the Attorney General prevaricated, “My Lord, I did not say it was a diary of any particular person. I said ‘the diary.’ By ‘the diary’ I mean the diary which was found, as in evidence as having been found.”39 Although the Attorney-General never directly said that the diary was Casement’s, the implication was all too clear. After only an hour of deliberation, the jury returned the verdict of “guilty.”

Given the opportunity in his “speech from the dock” to explain why he should not be executed as the law demanded, Casement anticipated the death sentence pronounced upon him, proclaiming himself the heir of a long and proud tradition of Irish martyrdom: “Ireland has seen her sons-aye, and her daughters too-suffer from generation to generation always from the same cause, meeting always the same fate, and always at the hands of the same power; and always a fresh generation has passed on to withstand the same oppression….The cause that begets this indomitable persistency, the faculty of preserving through centuries of misery the remembrance of lost liberty, this surely is the noblest cause men ever strove for, ever lived for, ever died for….I stand in a goodly company and a right noble succession.”40 Facing his execution date of August 3rd calmly, Casement used his remaining time in Pentonville Prison to reconcile himself to the Catholicism held by the majority of his countrymen: “In Protestant coldness I could not find it, but I saw it in the faces of the Irish. Now I know what it was I loved in them. The chivalry of Christ speaking through human eyes.”41 Though such a conversion was no doubt spiritually motivated, one might also suspect that it was an attempt upon Casement’s part to identify himself more closely with the Irish people, for whom he was

39 Attorney-General and Chief Justice at Casement Trial, quoted in Inglis, Roger Casement, 349-350.
40 Roger Casement’s “Speech from the Dock,” quoted in Reid, The Lives of Roger Casement, 405-6.
41 Inglis, Roger Casement, 370.
about to die. Indeed, unlike the Dublin rebels of Easter week, Casement straddled the two worlds of Irish nationalism and British imperialism. Thus, his trial and execution would bring about a range of reactions, some similar and some dissimilar, to those elicited by the executions of the Easter rebels.
Chapter 4 The Quest for “Romantic Ireland”: W.B. Yeats and Irish Nationalism

Born in Dublin in 1865, William Butler Yeats was the descendant of an Anglo-Irish family of Protestant merchants and clergy.¹ As a child, he spent his summers with his mother’s family in County Sligo, where the beauty of the Irish countryside cultivated a nascent pride in the land of his birth, famously illustrated in “The Lake Isle of Innisfree.” In the poem, Yeats, walking along the “pavements grey” of London, longs to return to Ireland and the “bee-loud glade” of Innisfree, where “peace comes dropping slow.”² As a young adult, this appreciation of Ireland’s natural wonders would crystallize into a “conscious” nationalism,³ due in large part to his friendship with John O’Leary, the venerable Fenian who spent fifteen years in exile for his part in the 1867 Irish rebellion. Recognizing Yeats’ emerging literary talent, O’Leary encouraged the aspiring poet and playwright to contribute to a cultural revival in Ireland, which, O’Leary believed, must be the vanguard to any successful political revolution there.⁴

Indeed, enchanted with Ireland’s rural charms, Yeats shared O’Leary’s conviction that Ireland was “a revolutionary country for the very reason that it was, in the oldest sense, a traditional one.”⁵ In contrast to her ruler, England, the very birthplace of the Industrial Revolution, Ireland was a country as yet unspoiled by the industrialization of the modern world. The ancient folklore still lived in the minds of the people, and both Yeats and O’Leary held a deep appreciation for this popular memory. They hoped that its

¹ Dangerfield, The Damnable Question, 32.
³ Dangerfield, The Damnable Question, 32.
⁴ Dangerfield, The Damnable Question, 32.
tales of mythic heroes would inspire future revolutionaries to fashion a “Romantic Ireland” founded upon noble ideals, where “if there are few rich, there shall be nobody very poor.”

Thus, Yeats composed works such as “Cuchulain’s Fight with the Sea,” which retold ancient Irish legends in a poetic form that was appealing to modern audiences. His unrequited love for Maud Gonne, a fervent republican, only intensified Yeats’ nationalism, spurring him to write the famous play, *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, with Gonne intended for the title role. In this play, Yeats adopts the traditional idea of Ireland as an old woman, except that the willingness of the young men of Mayo to join the 1798 rebellion transforms her by the play’s end into “a young girl” with the “walk of a queen.”

The effect upon the audience of this transfiguration of personified Ireland, accomplished through the sacrificial deaths of the Mayo youth, was profound. Later, after the events of 1916, Yeats would reflect upon the influence his play had upon the imagination of the Irish revolutionaries, asking, “Did that play of mine send out/ Certain men the English shot?”

Nevertheless, in 1913, Yeats remained pessimistic that the Irish people had any desire to move toward the ideal Ireland championed by O’Leary. The Catholic middle class, in particular, Yeats considered to be so many “Paudeen[s]” hording their coins in the “greasy till.”

Disgusted with what he perceived as their greedy and all-consuming materialism, Yeats bitterly lamented in his poem, “September 1913,” that “Romantic

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6 W.B. Yeats, 1903 speech in New York, quoted in Dangerfield, *The Damnable Question*, 33.
Ireland’s dead and gone/ It’s with O’Leary in the grave.”

O’Leary, the old Fenian, had died in 1907. Indeed, reverting back to the prejudice of his class, Yeats maintained that the only hope for the emergence of an independent “Romantic Ireland” was one still ruled by the Protestant Ascendancy, which, “best knit to the best,”

would lead the nation, in the words of Seamus Deane, “in the great Romantic battle against the industrial and utilitarian ethic.” The deaths of the Easter rebels, however, caused Yeats to reconsider this oligarchic view of Irish nationalism, as well as his famous lines proclaiming the demise of “Romantic Ireland.”

When the Easter Rising occurred, Yeats was in England, visiting the Rothensteins in Gloucestershire. Influenced by Lady Gregory, with whom he had co-founded Dublin’s Abbey Theatre in 1904 to stage works of the Irish Literary Revival, Yeats had largely favored Irish participation in the British war effort as a measure to ensure Home Rule.

However, once he learned of the events of the Rising as well as the subsequent executions, his initial shock gave way to sorrow and a grudging admiration. In a letter to Lady Gregory dated May 11, 1916, one day before the final executions of James Connolly and Sean MacDermott, he confided, “I had no idea that any public event could so deeply move me—and I am very despondent about the future.” Declaring “I have little doubt there have been many miscarriages of justice,” he announced that he was trying to write a poem about the executed men: “terrible beauty has been born again.”

Two days later, writing to John Quinn, a personal friend in the United States, he stated that

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13 Deane, Celtic Revivals, 39.
“this Irish business has been a great grief. We have lost the ablest and most fine-natured of our young men. A world seems to have been swept away.”\textsuperscript{16} Indeed, the struggle against overwhelming odds and the deaths suffered by many of the participants in the Easter Rising seemed in continuity with the sacrificial history of the mythic heroes and Irish rebels who had gone before, and evoked the traditional image of mother Ireland being defended by her patriotic sons. Gone was the country that Yeats had criticized as being preoccupied with a base and materialistic greed, adding “halfpence to the pence.”\textsuperscript{17} Through the patriotic sacrifice of the 1916 rebels, Ireland had been redeemed.

And yet, Yeats was very much at the vanguard of what would later be viewed as the galvanizing effect of the rebels’ “blood sacrifice.” The Irish public, although greatly disturbed by the events of the Easter Rising, still trusted in the ability of Redmond to bring about Home Rule following the conclusion of the war. It would not be until conscription was made a condition of Home Rule in 1918 that the nationalism awakened by the Easter Rising hardened into a popular desire for complete independence from Britain.\textsuperscript{18} For Yeats, however, the implications of the Rising for the fate of Ireland were already clear. Thus, in addition to his personal correspondence, he composed three poems, two in 1916 and one in 1917, in which he pioneered the redemptive view of the Rising and the executions of its leaders. The influence he enjoyed as the foremost figure in the Irish Literary Revival allowed him to play an instrumental role in transforming the rebels from reckless fools into public martyrs.

In his first public expression of this transformative sentiment, Yeats wrote the poem, “Easter 1916,” in which he described greeting the dead men before the Rising with

\textsuperscript{16} W.B. Yeats to John Quinn, 23 May 1916, in \textit{The Letters of W.B. Yeats}, ed. Allan Wade, 614.
\textsuperscript{17} Yeats, “September 1913,” 51.
\textsuperscript{18} Dangerfield, \textit{The Damnable Question}, 251.
“polite meaningless words” as he strolled past “grey/ Eighteenth-century houses.” The drabness of his interaction with them, as well as of the scenery, is “changed, changed utterly” by their part in the Rising: “A terrible beauty is born.” Even John MacBride, whom Yeats bitterly calls a “drunken, vainglorious lout” for his marrying Maud Gonne, the object of Yeats’ long unrequited love, is “number[ed]…in the song…He, too, has been changed in his turn, /Transformed utterly:/ A terrible beauty is born.” Indeed, in the willing “blood sacrifice” of the Easter rebels, Yeats saw a modern incarnation of Romantic Ireland, worthy of her ancient heroes and natural beauty. And yet, Yeats acknowledged the darker side of such political fanaticism, warning that it makes “a stone of the heart,” dogged in its aims and incapable of compromise or flexibility. Such rigidness upon the part of the rebels blinded them to the possibility that “England may keep faith/ For all that is done and said.” If England implemented Home Rule after all, Yeats mused, were the deaths of the Easter rebels “needless?”

Yeats’ contemplation of this question is to be found in the second poem he wrote in 1916, entitled “Sixteen Dead Men.” In this poem, Yeats claims that the ruthlessness exhibited by the British government in the aftermath of the Easter Rebellion makes the calls for peace until the conclusion of World War I ring hollow. Although the compromise of Home Rule, the “talk of give and take,” suggests that “we should still the land/ Til Germany’s overcome,” Yeats maintains that the executions of the “sixteen dead men” make such a bargain deplorable. Deliberately attempting to unsettle the reader with unflinching and grotesque images of death, he rhetorically asks, “But who is there to argue that/ Now Pearse is deaf and dumb?/ And is their logic to outweigh MacDonagh’s

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bony thumb?” For Yeats, the executions of the 1916 rebels unmask the disingenuous intentions of the British government toward Ireland, while also serving as a catalyst to awaken the Irish people from their complacent slumber. Pearse, MacDonagh and the rest of the Easter dead are now identified with the heroic revolutionaries of years before: “How could you dream they’d listen/ That have an ear alone/ For those new comrades they have found/ Lord Edward and Wolf Tone…” Having witnessed the brutal treatment of their countrymen, the Irish people should reject the bloodied hand which the British government has insincerely extended to them, and instead, take up the cause of those who now “converse bone to bone.”

But perhaps the most explicit expression of Yeats’ linking the well-being of the Irish nation with the “blood sacrifice” of the Easter rebels is in “The Rose Tree,” written in 1917. Formulated as a conversation between Patrick Pearse and James Connolly, two of the most prominent leaders of the Easter Rebellion, the poem imagines Ireland as a lovely Rose Tree, “withered” by the “politic words” of constitutional nationalism and the British “wind that blows/ Across the bitter sea.” Suggesting to Pearse that the Rose Tree “needs to be but watered…To make the green come out again/ And spread on every side,” Connolly symbolically articulates Yeats’ view that the political health of Ireland depends upon the flourishing of its nationalism, traditionally associated with the color green. However, inasmuch as the “wells” have been “parched away” with the obsequious conciliation of the Home Rule movement, Pearse tells Connolly that “There’s nothing but our own red blood/ Can make a right Rose Tree.” As the last couplet of the poem, these

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lines dramatically present the “blood sacrifice” offered by the Easter rebels as a redemptive act, purging Ireland of its servility and restoring its pride and dignity. Indeed, Yeats would later laud the “martyrs” of 1916 as introducing into Ireland the concept of “the mystic victim.” Earlier revolutionaries, such as Wolfe Tone, “had served their cause and met their deaths, but they had not deliberately sought suffering…. ” The Dublin rebels, however, did, and their deaths were more powerful as a consequence: “The man who dedicates his suffering is more powerful than any orator, because we measure his love by his suffering. We say he could not [have] endured all this if [he] had not loved that country or that cause with a passion so great nothing else could weigh against it; and then, that we may be completely alive, we want to share his love.”

Unlike his reaction to the executions of the Easter rebels, Yeats’ response to the trial and execution of Sir Roger Casement did not manifest itself significantly until many years after the events had taken place. At the time of Casement’s death sentence for treason, Yeats, in deference to Maud Gonne’s wishes, signed a petition on Casement’s behalf and wrote to Eva Gore-Booth that “the argument for clemency is so strong that the government cannot disregard this argument…. ” However, despite these initial expressions of sympathy, Yeats did not immediately distinguish Casement with the poetic laurels he bestowed upon Pearse, MacDonagh, Connolly, and even MacBride, his arch nemesis in affairs of the heart. Rather, Casement was relegated to anonymity as the sixteenth man in “Sixteen Dead Men.” Inasmuch as Yeats had known Pearse, MacDonagh, and MacBride personally, he was acutely attuned to what he perceived as

their radical transformation. When compared to these figures whom Yeats had “met…at the close of day/ Coming with vivid faces…,” Casement, whom Yeats did not know, seemed a distant, if tragic, figure. Thus, it would not be until November of 1936 that Casement finally seized Yeats’ imagination with the publication of William J. Maloney’s book, The Forged Casement Diaries, which alleged that the infamous Black Diaries, supposedly containing personal accounts of Casement’s clandestine homosexual encounters, were nothing more than an elaborate ruse upon the part of the British government to discredit Casement and ensure his execution. In the words of William Maloney, “…the British government…forged, planted, published, authenticated, and used this atrocity diary to destroy their Irish enemy…”

Upon reading this book, Yeats was filled with a vehement moral indignation, as illustrated in a November 1936 letter to Ethel Mannin:

“I am in a rage. I have just got a book published by the Talbot Press called The Forged Casement Diaries. It is by a Dr. Maloney I knew in New York and he has spent years collecting evidence. He has proved that the diaries, supposed to prove Casement ‘a Degenerate’ and successfully used to prevent an agitation for his reprieve, were forged. Casement was not a very able man but he was gallant and unselfish, and had surely his right to leave what he would have considered an unsullied name. I long to break my rule against politics and call these men criminals but I must not. Perhaps a verse may come to me, now or a year hence.”

Indeed, a verse did come to him less then two weeks afterward, and he sent another letter to Dorothy Wellesley to tell her the news: “…Yesterday was a most eventful day….I sent off a ferocious ballad poem written to a popular tune, to a newspaper. It is on ‘The Forged Diaries of Roger Casement,’ a book published here, and denouncees by name — and — for their share in abetting the forgeries. I shall not be happy until I hear that it is

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26 William J. Maloney, quoted in Steinman, Yeats’s Heroic Figures, 154.
27 W.B. Yeats to Ethel Mannin, 15 November 1936, in The Letters of W.B. Yeats, ed. Allan Wade, 867.
sung by Irish undergraduates at Oxford….It is a stirring thing….My ‘Casement’ is better written than my ‘Parnell’….”

In a second letter to Ethel Mannin, Yeats enclosed a copy of the ballad poem, as well as an elucidation of his political motives:

“If my rage lasts I may go on in still more savage mood….Some day you will understand what I see in the Irish National movement and why I can be no other sort of revolutionist—as a young man I belonged to the I.R.B. and was in many things O’Leary’s pupil. Besides, why should I trouble about communism, fascism, liberalism, radicalism, when all, though some bow first and some stem first but all at the same pace, all are going down stream with the artificial unity which ends every civilization?…My rage and that of others like me seems more important—though we may but be the first of the final destroying horde. I remember O’Leary saying, ‘No gentleman can be a socialist though he might be an anarchist.’”

Believing the allegations made by William Maloney to be true, Yeats regarded the Black Diaries as yet the latest and most depraved example of British perfidy, which he had originally observed in the executions of the Easter rebels.

The poem which Yeats had referred to in his letters to Ethel Mannin and Dorothy Wellesley was finally published in Eamon DeValera’s Irish Press in February 1937. Simply entitled, “Roger Casement,” it also carried a specific subtitle stating that it was composed “after reading ‘The Forged Casement Diaries’ by Dr. Maloney.” In it, Yeats begins by identifying Casement with the centuries-old tradition of Irish revolutionaries who were prepared to die for their cause: “I say that Roger Casement/ Did what he had to do/ He died upon the gallows/ But that is nothing new.” Then, addressing the present Black Diaries controversy directly, he brazenly declares that the British government,

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29 W.B. Yeats to Ethel Mannin, 30 November 1936, in The Letters of W.B. Yeats, ed. Allan Wade, 869.
30 Contrary to William Maloney’s allegations, it is now generally accepted among historians that the Casement diaries are genuine.
31 Steinman, Yeats’s Heroic Figures, 158.
anxious lest “Time” facilitate the growth of public support for a Casement reprieve, “turned a trick by forgery/ And blackened his good name.” Indeed, Yeats argues that the character assassination of Casement is so contemptibly ignoble as to be “something new,” a hitherto unattained level of malfeasance upon the part of the British government. After implicating by name Sir Cecil Arthur Spring-Rice, the British ambassador to the United States, in the crime, Yeats finishes the poem by calling upon all of the perpetrators to confess their guilt and make amends for their grave misdeed: “Come Tom and Dick, come all the troop/ That cried it far and wide,/ Come from the forger and his desk,/ Desert the perjurer’s side….”32 Just as in “Sixteen Dead Men,” in which he used the graphic image of “MacDonagh’s bony thumb”33 to shock his readers, Yeats contrasts in the last stanza the heroic nobility of Sir Roger Casement with his degrading burial at Pentonville Prison in order to emphasize the utter injustice of his fate: “Come speak your bit in public/ That some amends be made/ To this most gallant gentleman/ That is in quick-lime laid.”34

The last public commentary Yeats made on the trial and execution of Sir Roger Casement was the poem, “The Ghost of Roger Casement,” written between October 1936 and January 1937 and published in the 1938 Cuala New Poems.35 A companion to the earlier “Roger Casement,” it condemns what Yeats perceived as the moral corruption of the British state, which the defamation of Sir Roger Casement’s good name seemed to exemplify. The repetitive refrain, “The ghost of Roger Casement/ Is beating on the door,”

34 Yeats, “Roger Casement,” 305-6.
35 Steinman, Yeats’s Heroic Figures, 162; Cuala was a private press established by Elizabeth Yeats with support of her brother, William Butler Yeats. It played an important role in the Gaelic Revival.
structures the poem around the haunting image of Sir Roger Casement’s avenging shade, persistently calling the British government to account. In the first stanza, Yeats describes the house of the British empire as under siege by Casement’s specter: “O what has made that sudden noise?/ What on the threshold stands?” He continues by portraying the decline of British power, stating that the “sea’s roar” is a “roar of mockery” since John Bull no longer controls the seas. Turning from foreign to domestic policy, Yeats declares that high ideals espoused by British Parliamentarians to gain the public’s support are no more than empty rhetoric: “John Bull has stood for Parliament/ A dog must have his day,/ The country thinks no end of him/ For he knows how to say/ At a beanfeast or a banquet,/ That all must hang their trust/ Upon the British Empire, Upon the Church of Christ.”

Moreover, British moral decay is not limited to the United Kingdoms of Britain and Ireland. In India, as well, a British colony, the government has practiced a shameless exploitation under the guise of noble motives: “histories are there to prove/ That none of another breed/ Has had a like inheritance, Or sucked such milk as he/ And there’s no luck about a house/ If it lack honesty.” Having steadily made his criticism of the British government ever more blatant, Yeats reaches the crescendo of his censure in the last stanza, in which he likens the British Empire to a once mighty family undone by the moral degeneracy of its latter generations. Visiting the “family tomb” in the shadows of a “village church,” Yeats finds the names of “many a famous man,” but “fame and virtue rot.” Therefore, in the closing lines of the poem, Yeats urges “beloved and bitter men,” men of conscience and nobility of feeling, to “draw round” and “raise a shout,” denouncing British iniquity and more broadly the project of empire itself. And all the while, “The ghost of Roger Casement” continues “beating on the door.”36

Indeed, the executions of the Easter rebels as well as of Sir Roger Casement precipitated a transformation not only in Irish public opinion at large, but also in Yeats himself. Before the “terrible beauty”\textsuperscript{37} of the “blood sacrifice” of 1916, Yeats had despaired of the survival of Romantic Ireland and regarded the Irish Catholic masses as too greedy and materialistic to care for the political and moral dignity of their country. His only hope for the preservation of Romantic Ireland lay with his own privileged Anglo-Irish class, which he considered to be “the best knit to the best.”\textsuperscript{38} This exclusive nationalism would be fundamentally undermined by the Easter Rebellion, many of whose leaders, such as Patrick Pearse and Joseph Plunkett, were devout Catholics. Moreover, the ruthless fate which befell the Easter rebels, as well as Sir Roger Casement, convinced Yeats, who had hitherto identified as a Home Ruler,\textsuperscript{39} to renounce any sort of political compromise with the British government and join the ranks of extreme nationalism. To him, the executions of the Dublin rebels and Sir Roger Casement painfully and starkly illustrated that England never intended for Ireland to assume an equal place within the British Empire. Ireland was to be forever kept in colonial servitude, denied the political independence which any other nation with its own culture, tradition, and language, had a right to demand. As a result of this realization, Yeats concluded that the only way for Ireland to gain her rightful autonomy was to sever her link with Britain. In this way, Yeats became a full-fledged Irish Nationalist, lending his literary talents to the myth of Irish martyrdom as well as the overthrow of British rule.

\textsuperscript{37} Yeats, “Easter 1916,” 85-87.
\textsuperscript{38} Yeats, “Upon a House Shaken by the Land Agitation,” 44.
Chapter 5 “The Clumsy Thumb of English Rule”: G.B. Shaw and Irish Nationalism

Born in Dublin in 1856, George Bernard Shaw, like William Butler Yeats, was of Anglo-Irish lineage and could count the baronet, Sir Robert Shaw of Bushey Park, as his father’s second cousin. Despite this genteel heritage, however, Shaw grew up on the margins of the Protestant Ascendancy in relative poverty. After retiring from the civil service, his father had invested his pension in a milling business, an enterprise which fared poorly. As a result, the family income had to be supplemented by his mother, who gave singing lessons. These humble circumstances, exacerbated by his father’s alcoholism, did not encourage Shaw to harbor any sort of affection for Dublin, his native city. On the contrary, he viewed the Irish capital with disdain, as he wrote in the 1921 Preface to his first novel, Immaturity: “When I left Dublin I left (a few private friendships apart) no society that did not disgust me. To this day my sentimental regard for Ireland does not include the capital. I am not enamored of failure, of poverty, of obscurity, and of the ostracism and contempt which these imply; and these were all Dublin offered to the enormity of my unconscious ambition.”

Spurred by this hostility toward the place of his birth, Shaw left for London in 1876 and did not return to Ireland until over thirty years later, in 1908, by which time he had become a noted playwright and literary critic.

Nevertheless, despite a long physical absence from his homeland, Shaw was not bereft of political opinions regarding Ireland’s relationship with Great Britain. Indeed, he addressed the “Irish Question” directly in his 1904 comedy, John Bull’s Other Island. A

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1 Ivor Brown, Shaw In His Time (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1965), 9.
2 Brown, Shaw In His Time, 1.
damning critique of British hypocrisy and economic exploitation in Ireland,\(^4\) the play also serves as a “realist” refutation of Yeats’ Romantic Ireland,\(^5\) emphasizing the misery and greed of Irish rural life, rather than its unspoilt charms. The two protagonists, Thomas Broadbent, an Englishman, and Lawrence Doyle, an Irishman, are partners in a civil engineering firm, and they travel to the rural Irish town of Rosscullen, where Doyle was born, to develop an estate there. Proclaiming that “an Englishman’s first duty is his duty to Ireland,”\(^6\) Broadbent basks in self-satisfaction over what he perceives as his altruistic plan to develop Rosscullen, or, in his own words, “to take a little money out of England and spend it in Ireland.”\(^7\) A sentimentalist enchanted by the beautiful Irish scenery, he immediately proposes to Nora Reilly, the girl who has loved Doyle faithfully for eighteen years, as she waits at the moonlit Round Tower outside of the town for Doyle’s arrival. Doyle himself, in contrast, having personally experienced the poverty-ridden wretchedness behind Rosscullen’s rural charm, abhors the place as a quagmire of “dullness…hopelessness…ignorance…[and] bigotry….\(^8\) As he explains to Broadbent, “Live in contact with dreams and you will get something of their charm: live in contact with facts and you will get something of their brutality.”\(^9\) Whereas the smitten Broadbent gushes about Nora, declaring that she is “one of the finer types: a type rare in England, excepts perhaps in the best of the aristocracy,” Doyle derides such a view as foolishly maudlin: “You compare her with your Englishwomen who wolf down from three to five meat meals a day; and naturally you find her a sylph. The difference is not a difference of


\(^{5}\) Frederick P.W. McDowell, “Politics, Comedy, Character, and Dialectic: The Shavian World of John Bull’s Other Island,” in PMLA, Vol. 82, No. 7 (December 1967), 551.

\(^{6}\) Shaw, John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians, 8.

\(^{7}\) Shaw, John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians, 9.

\(^{8}\) Shaw, John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians, 18.

\(^{9}\) Shaw, John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians, 28.
type: its the difference between the woman who eats not wisely but too well, and the woman who eats not wisely but too little.”

Shaw’s archetype of the “real Irishman,” Doyle, having successfully left the impoverishment of Rosscullen through his own industry, has no patience for those who would idealize such a background. To him, Nora is no Cathleen ni Houlihan, but a country girl whose futile vigil awaiting his return, despite his giving no indication that he would come back to her, represents a large part of what is wrong with his native country. Rejecting the Romantic Ireland of Yeats, populated by a noble peasantry descended from a proud and ancient race, he scoffs at Broadbent’s affinity with such a sentimental mentality: “When people talk about the Celtic race, I feel as if I could burn down London. That sort of rot does more harm than ten Coercion Acts. Do you suppose a man need be a Celt to feel melancholy in Rosscullen? Why, man, Ireland was peopled just as England was; and its breed was crossed by just the same invaders.” By living within their imaginations, which are filled with ideas of nationalism, victimhood, and silent sacrifice, the Irish, according to Doyle, have become either passive, provincial dreamers, like Nora Reilly, or embittered, avaricious peasants, whose ambition does not extend beyond eking out a meager living on their land. Indeed, the latter group, hardened by life-long oppression, seems no better than the greedy Anglo-Irish landowners from whom they had recently acquired their land in the Land Purchase Act of 1903. As Doyle exclaims to one of the newly independent farmers, “Do you think, because youre

11 McDowell, “Politics, Comedy, Character, and Dialectic,” 551.
12 McDowell, “Politics, Comedy, Character, and Dialectic,” 552.
poor and ignorant and half-crazy with toiling and moiling morning noon and night, that
youll be any less greedy and oppressive to them that have no land at all than old Nick
Lestrange, who was an educated travelled gentleman that would not have been tempted as
hard by a hundred pounds as youd be by five shillings?"15 Thus, Doyle approves of
Broadbent’s development scheme to turn Rosscullen into a “garden city”16 for tourists, if
only because he regards the plan as an antidote to the pensive and selfish provincialism
which currently characterizes Rosscullen’s inhabitants.17

Broadbent, a caricature of Liberal England, rejects Doyle’s analysis and
stubbornly refuses to look underneath the romantic sheen which gives a superficial luster
to Rosscullen’s rural life. Although seemingly a benevolent figure with his desire to
develop Rosscullen, he is in fact a sinister representation of the hypocrisy of English
Liberalism, which, while professing altruistic motives, is really only concerned with its
own economic interest. The persuasiveness of Broadbent is only strengthened by the fact
that he has deceived even himself into believing that his program for Rosscullen
represents a radical departure from the vicious cycle of exploitation that has gripped the
town for centuries.18 Unconscious of the true consequences of transforming Rosscullen
into a “garden city,” he jovially flatters the inhabitants to win them over to his scheme,
telling them that “as an Englishman…[he] blush[es] for the Union” when he thinks of the
“decadent Imperialism”19 with which England has treated Ireland in the past. Indeed,
Broadbent goes so far as to disingenuously renounce any sort of personal interest in the
local Parliamentary election while insinuating that an English “man of some means, able

17 McDowell, “Politics, Comedy, Character, and Dialectic,” 551.
18 McDowell, “Politics, Comedy, Character, and Dialectic,” 548.
19 Shaw, *John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians*, 75.
to help the locality instead of burdening it"\textsuperscript{20} would be the ideal candidate. Of course, no one in Roscommon fits this description except himself. With Broadbent’s election to Parliament all but assured, Father Keegan, the defrocked Catholic priest who functions as the prophetic Cassandra of the play, laments what Broadbent’s developmental “progress” will do to the town of Rosscullen: “…you will have promised me that when I come here in the evenings to meditate on my madness; to watch the shadow of the round tower lengthening in the sunset; to break my heart uselessly in the curtained gloaming over the dead heart and blinded soul of the island of the saints, you will comfort me with the bustle of a great hotel, and the sight of the little children carrying the golf clubs of your tourists as a preparation for the life to come.”\textsuperscript{21} Indeed, Father Keegan alone recognizes that Broadbent’s transformation of Rosscullen into a “garden city” will cleanse only the outward appearance of the economic situation in Rosscullen, while the internal injustice will remain. Instead of digging potato patches, the townspeople will look after golf courses,\textsuperscript{22} and they will be at the mercy of Broadbent’s development as they were at the mercy of their Protestant landlords in centuries before. Father Keegan even predicts that Broadbent’s Land Syndicate, concerned not for the betterment of Ireland but for the fattening of English investors’ pockets, will purposely go into a second bankruptcy and “liquidate” its assets “efficiently” to make even more money out of the venture, forcing the people of Rosscullen to either immigrate to America or become “slaves” in a “busy mint”\textsuperscript{23} dedicated to Broadbent’s accumulation of wealth. Truly, Broadbent behaves just as Doyle had predicted that an Englishman, and particularly a Liberal Englishman, would:

\textsuperscript{20} Shaw, \textit{John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians}, 76.
\textsuperscript{21} Shaw, \textit{John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians}, 115.
\textsuperscript{22} Ochshorn, “Colonialism, Postcolonialism, and the Shadow of a New Empire,” 189.
\textsuperscript{23} Shaw, \textit{John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians}, 121-2.
“…the Englishman does what the caterpillar does. He instinctively makes himself look like a fool, and eats up all the real fools at his ease while his enemies let him alone and laugh at him for being a fool like the rest.”24 As a condemnation of the exploitative nature of British rule in Ireland as well as the romantic escapism promoted by the Gaelic Revival, John Bull’s Other Island calls a pox upon both houses, illustrating the ambiguity with which Shaw viewed the question of Anglo-Irish relations.

Two years later, in 1906, Shaw spelled out his complex position regarding Ireland’s relationship with Britain even more explicitly in an addendum to John Bull’s Other Island entitled “Preface for Politicians.” At the beginning of this political essay, Shaw lays out the reasoning behind his Irish nationalism with a paradoxical statement of identity meant to shock and initially confound the reader:

“When I say I am an Irishman I mean that I was born in Ireland, and that my native language is the English of Swift and not the unspeakable jargon of the mid-XIX century London newspapers. My extraction is the extraction of most Englishmen: that is, I have no trace in me of the commercially imported North Spanish strain which passes for aboriginal Irish: I am a genuine typical Irishman of the Danish, Norman, Cromwellian, and (of course) Scotch invasions. I am violently and arrogantly Protestant by family tradition; but let no English government therefore count on my allegiance: I am English enough to be an inveterate Republican and Home Ruler.”25

Indeed, by justifying his Irish nationalism with an appeal to his English identity, Shaw turns the traditional incompatibility between Irish self-rule and loyalty to the British Empire on its head. Having declared his support for Irish Home Rule as well as his love of England, Shaw explains his seemingly contradictory stance by arguing that “the real Irishman…is the Englishman of tradition, whilst the real Englishman is the traditional

24 Shaw, John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians, 25.
25 Shaw, John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians, viii.
theatrical foreigner.”26 Citing the historic examples of Wellington and Nelson, the famous British heroes of land and sea, Shaw contrasts the “theatricality” of Nelson, that “intensely English Englishman,” with the “contemptuous disgust” of Wellington, that “intensely Irish Irishman,” who looked upon such blatant boasting as an “insufferably vulgar affectation.”27 Upon viewing Nelson’s self-glorification, Wellington would have exclaimed, “Sir: dont be a damned fool.”28 Such a rebuke, according to Shaw, “is the formula of all Irishmen for all Englishmen to this day.”29 In truth, Shaw contends that the very qualities which the English claim to admire are those found not in themselves, but in the Irish. While the English are prone to an excessive sentimentality and a stubborn willfulness, the Irish possess a discerning and practical intellectuality, which allows them to see the world as it really is.30 The material comforts and success which the English enjoy have lulled them into a political complacency, in which politicians strengthen “[their] vulgarities by sharing them.” In contrast, the Irish, trapped in political servitude with no significant military or economic assets, “must deal in ideas and political principles since…[they] cannot deal in bayonets…. [Irish] leaders must be not only determined enough, but clever enough”31 to compensate for Ireland’s relative weakness compared to Britain. Consequently, the intellectual skills and political virtues of the Irish are still sharp, not yet dulled by the privileges of power.

Moreover, the Irishman’s acute awareness of his subservient position within the British Empire makes political autonomy for his homeland uppermost in his mind.

26 Shaw, John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians, xiii.
27 Shaw, John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians, xi-xii.
28 Shaw, John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians, xii.
29 Shaw, John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians, xii.
30 Shaw, John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians, xiv.
31 Shaw, John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians, xv-xvi.
Inasmuch as any Englishman jealously protects his hard-won liberty, so the Irish are naturally anxious to obtain theirs as well. Indeed, succumbing to his Protestant prejudice, Shaw posits that it is entirely unnatural that the Protestant, “theoretically an anarchist,” should represent the status quo in Ireland, while the Catholic, “theoretically a Collectivist, a self-abnegator,” should represent the party of revolution. In his view, the British government, which offers democratic participation in the House of Commons and protects free speech, should be much preferred to the Catholic Church, which emphasizes obedience and silences dissent. Thus, the decision of the vast majority of the Irish people to ally themselves with the Church instead of the Government can only be explained by a “violent external force” of “gross economic oppression and religious persecution,” which Shaw identifies as “the clumsy thumb of English rule.”

But even if the English could rightly claim that their rule was just, the Irish would still yearn for political independence. Political autonomy is a universal political sentiment: “When we want an arbitrator or an umpire, we turn to a stranger: when we want a government, a stranger is the one person we will not endure.” In a powerful simile, Shaw likens a “conquered nation” to “a man with cancer…[who] can think of nothing else, and is forced to place himself, to exclusion of all better company, in the hands of quacks who profess to treat or cure [the] cancer.” Ireland, suffering from the “cancer” of British rule, has placed herself in the hands of Republican “quacks” in a desperate attempt to acquire the health of self-governance. Until this “natural right” is granted, the Irish people will not care for any other political issue or be pacified by any other

32 Shaw, John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians, xx.
33 Shaw, John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians, xxi.
34 Shaw, John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians, xxviii.
35 Shaw, John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians, xxxv.
36 Shaw, John Bull’s Other Island With Preface for Politicians, xxxviii.
concession. Thus, Shaw concludes, it is in Britain’s national interest to grant Home Rule to Ireland, insofar as such political autonomy will rid Ireland of her nationalist fever, reconcile her to the British Empire, and allow her to address other pressing political problems, which are the primary political concerns of other independent nations.37

The executions of the 1916 Easter rebels only confirmed Shaw in his perception that the British government was guilty of egregious mismanagement in Ireland. In 1903, thirteen years before the Easter Rising, Shaw had mocked the Republican idea of an armed struggle against British rule as a foolishly hopeless enterprise. In the Preface to “The Revolutionist’s Handbook,” an appendix to his play, *Man and Superman*, Shaw had written:

“I make a present of all these admissions to the Fenian who collects money from thoughtless Irishmen in America to blow up Dublin Castle; to the detective who persuades foolish young workmen to order bombs from the nearest ironmonger and then delivers them up to penal servitude….But of what use is it to substitute the way of the reckless and bloodminded for the way of the cautious and humane?....No; what Caesar, Cromwell and Napoleon could not do with all the physical force and moral prestige of the State in their mighty hands, cannot be done by enthusiastic criminals and lunatics.”38

Or can it? The horror with which Shaw received the news of the Easter rebels’ executions dispelled his earlier skepticism and replaced it with an ominous foreboding of the emotive power which the rebels would now hold over the Irish population. In a letter to *The Daily News*, which appeared on May 10, 1916, while the executions were still being carried out, Shaw forcefully argues that the prisoners should be spared, warning that their deaths would give them even louder voices than if the British government decided not to silence them. Citing first their capture and surrender, Shaw contends that the rebels are

“prisoners of war” and therefore do not deserve to be shot in “cold blood.” Moreover, having taken up “arms to achieve the independence of...[their] country,” they have conducted themselves as any honorable Englishmen would if England had been “invaded and conquered by the Germans in the course of the present war.” Truly, the Easter rebels are patriots, to be praised by “[their] compatriots and...[by] the disinterested admirers of patriotism throughout the world.” Consequently, Shaw concludes, “it is absolutely impossible to slaughter a man in this position without making him a martyr and a hero, even though the day before the rising he may have been only a minor poet. The shot Irishmen will now take their places beside Emmet and the Manchester martyrs in Ireland, and beside the heroes of Poland and Serbia and Belgium in Europe; and nothing in heaven or earth can prevent it.”

Indeed, the bloody brutality of the British government had managed to accomplish what the Rising by itself could not. Rather than condemn the Rebellion and its authors in ignominious failure, the crude ineptitude of British policy had elevated them to hallowed greatness within the annals of Irish nationalism. As one more notorious blunder in the narrative of Anglo-Irish relations, the executions of the 1916 rebels solidified Shaw’s poor view of British rule in Ireland, a view which was to become even more critical with the trial and execution of Sir Roger Casement.

In contrast to the Dublin rebels, who had been summarily executed out of public view, Casement, as a former distinguished servant of the British Empire, was paraded before the public in a civil trial which attracted worldwide attention. Designed to serve as an example to other traitors against the Crown as well as foster a perception of

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transparency, the public trial also left the British government susceptible to popular pressure favoring the grant of clemency. Shaw himself first became involved in the grassroots effort upon Casement’s behalf when he and his wife attended a luncheon with Beatrice Webb, the noted English economist, and Alice Green, the Irish historian and close friend of Casement’s. Both Webb and Green urged the Shaws to contribute to a defense fund being raised for the “unhappy rebel.” Although the eyes of Shaw’s wife, Charlotte, “flashed defiance” when the issue of Casement’s treason was raised, Shaw would not allow her to donate, stating that he did not wish “to waste our money on lawyers.” Instead, Shaw proposed using his considerable literary skill to compose a written defense for Casement, which, he claimed, “will thunder down the ages.” As Beatrice Webb wryly noted in her diary, “He as usual had his own plan. Casement was to defend his own case, he was to make a great oration of defiance which would ‘bring down the house.’”

Indeed, after urging Casement in a letter to defend himself personally, Shaw “told him to plead Not Guilty; to admit all the facts and proffer himself as a Crown witness if necessary to save trouble.” In addition, he was to explain his solicitation of German aid as the result of a sincere conviction that the only way Ireland could gain her independence was by a guarantee by one of the great powers, as well as her own neutrality. Shaw also encouraged Casement, in a similar line of reasoning to that employed in his public statement about the Easter rebels, “to claim that he was a prisoner

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40 Reid, The Lives of Roger Casement, 367.
42 Inglis, Roger Casement, 327.
of war and no more a traitor than any Bulgarian captured by the Turks....”

Caught up in his impassioned defense of Casement, Shaw momentarily forgot that he was telling Casement what to say and reverted to the first-person in the letter’s conclusion:

“I am neither an Englishman nor a traitor; I am an Irishman, captured in a fair attempt to achieve the independence of my country; and you can no more deprive me of the honours of that position, or destroy the effects of my effort, than the abominable cruelties afflicted six hundred years ago on William Wallace, in this city, when he met a precisely similar indictment with a precisely similar reply, have prevented that brave and honourable Scot from becoming the national hero of his country.”

Upon receipt of Shaw’s defense, Casement was pleased to see that it was very similar to the one which he had composed himself. Thus, on June 29th, after being convicted of treason and sentenced to death, Casement echoed in his famous “speech from the dock” the same sentiment expressed in Shaw’s letter, namely, that a patriot owes his ultimate loyalty to no other country but his own: “In Ireland alone, in this twentieth century, is loyalty held to be a crime....Ireland is being treated today among the nations of the world as if she were a convicted criminal. If it be treason to fight against such an unnatural fate as this, then I am proud to be rebel, and shall cling to my ‘rebellion’ with the last drop of my blood....”

After Casement was pronounced guilty of treason and his execution date set for August 3rd, the loss of an appeal on July 18th redoubled the efforts of his supporters to win him clemency. Several petitions were circulated among influential members of...
society, including one authored by the famous mystery writer, Arthur Conan Doyle.\(^{46}\)

Upon being approached to sign this document, Shaw demurred, perceptively recognizing that his signature might repel more potential signatories than it would attract.\(^{47}\) Instead, he personally wrote to the British Prime Minster, Herbert Asquith, stating that Casement was not yet a canonized figure in the minds of the Irish people, but warning that, “There is, however, one infallible way in which that can be done; and that way is to hang him. His trial and sentence have already raised his status in nationalist Ireland; but it lacks the final consecration of death. We urge you very strongly not to effect that consecration.”\(^{48}\)

After sending this petition to the very head of the British Government, Shaw also appealed directly to the British people, publishing a letter entitled “Shall Roger Casement Hang?” in the July 22\(^{nd}\) edition of the *Manchester Guardian*. Stating his intention to “extricat[e] the discussion completely from the sentimental vein,” Shaw warned that Casement’s execution would raise the ire of the Irish public, insofar as other rebels currently awaiting their punishments, such as the Boer leader, Christian De Wet, were likely to be spared. Indeed, the “exceptional” treatment of Casement would convince the Irish people that Casement was hanged “not because he is a traitor, but because he is an Irishman.” Moreover, the “group of unconvicted, and indeed unprosecuted, traitors whose action helped very powerfully to convince Germany that she might attack France without incurring active hostility,” namely, the Ulster Unionists,\(^{49}\) would demonstrate that

\(^{46}\) This petition will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.


\(^{49}\) On March 20, 1914, the commander of the Curragh army base, Sir Arthur Paget, was ordered to prepare for potential violent resistance by the Ulster Volunteer Force if the third Home Rule Bill for Ireland was passed. Aware that the Ulster Unionists had vowed to oppose the implementation of Home Rule through force of arms, he gave his officers the choice of resigning rather than fight against their fellow Unionists. This incident would later be known as the “Curragh Mutiny.” One month later between April 24\(^{th}\) and 25th,
Casement’s “real offence is not merely that of being an Irishman but of being a nationalist Irishman.” Such selective discrimination upon the part of the British government, Shaw contends, would confirm to Irish nationalists that the British did not look favorably on granting political autonomy to Ireland, thus driving them into further political violence and extremism. Recounting the inflammatory effects of past actions taken by the British government in its dealings with Irish rebels, Shaw concludes the article by urging the current government to learn from history and show restraint:

“In Ireland he will be regarded as a national hero if he is executed, and quite possibly as a spy if he is not. For that reason it may be well be that he would object very strongly to my attempt to prevent his canonisation. But Ireland has enough heroes and martyrs already, and if England has not by this time had enough of manufacturing them in fits of temper experience is thrown away on her, and she will continue to be governed, as she is at present to so great an extent unconsciously, by Casement’s countrymen.”

Such a warning clearly repeated the point Shaw made in his “Preface” for John Bull’s Other Island, in which he warned that until the Ireland gained her political autonomy, England would be relentlessly distracted by the “Irish Question”: “Every election is fought on nationalist grounds; every appointment is made on nationalist grounds; every judge is a partisan in the nationalist conflict; every speech is a dreary recapitulation of nationalist twaddle; every lecture is a corruption of history to flatter nationalism or defame it; every school is a recruiting station; every church is a barrack….” Moreover, the Irish Parliamentary Party, holding the balance of power between the Liberals and the Ulster Unionists, emboldened by the government’s decision to back down and reinstate the objecting officers, illegally smuggled arms from Germany to arm the Ulster Volunteer Force in what was later termed the “Larne gun-running.”

51 Shaw, John Bull's Other Island With Preface for Politicians, xxxvi-xxxvii.
Tories at Westminster, was perhaps the most visible manifestation of the powerful influence which the “Irish Question” exerted over British politics.

At first glance, the forceful arguments against the executions of the Dublin rebels and Sir Roger Casement which Shaw articulates in this chapter might seem to place him, alongside Yeats, in the category of unfettered Irish Nationalism. However, his emphasis upon the calamitous effect which these executions would have on Anglo-Irish relations, or more specifically, Irish attitudes toward the British government, rather than on the moral reprehensibility of the killings as such, suggest that Shaw remained a Home Ruler despite the crises of 1916. Indeed, his repeated warnings, trying to dissuade the British government from committing political blunders which would only further the cause of Republican separatism, strongly indicate that he wanted to advise England on how to keep Ireland satisfied within the framework of the British Empire, namely, through Home Rule. Shaw himself, in a statement given to Julius Klein for a proposed book in 1934, proclaimed that he “did not agree with Casement’s policy” and was “therefore in no sense a Casementite….” However, inasmuch as “the crucial issue was whether Casement was or was not a prisoner of war in a struggle for the independence of his country,” Shaw was “strongly of…[the] opinion”52 that Casement, as an Irishman fighting for Ireland, was both a patriot and a prisoner of war. By such an explication of his political stance, Shaw committed himself to the political middle ground, subscribing to Irish political autonomy while rejecting the “Casementite” severance of the link with Britain. Through this Home Ruler stance, Shaw remained true to the ambiguous view of the Anglo-Irish relationship,

fully supportive neither of nationalism nor of unionism, which he had held since the days of *John Bull’s Other Island*. 
Chapter 6 The Union Jack and “The Green Flag”: Arthur Conan Doyle and Irish Nationalism

Unlike Yeats and Shaw, Arthur Conan Doyle did not belong to the Anglo-Irish Protestant Ascendancy. Rather, the Doyles were an Irish Catholic family who had been in Britain for several generations. Conan Doyle himself was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, the son of a civil servant whose father, a successful artist in high society, considered the family to be members of the Anglo-Catholic elite.\(^1\) Distressed by his inability to achieve the successful careers enjoyed by his artistic father and brothers, Conan Doyle’s father, Charles Doyle, took to drink, retreating from emotional intimacy with his family as he succumbed to a disappointed depression. Fortunately for Conan Doyle,\(^2\) his mother, Mary Doyle, née Foley, possessed great resilience and determination, holding her large family together despite their poverty. In fact, Conan Doyle would remain very close to his mother throughout her life. Attributing his literary talents to her, he was also conscious of the Irish roots from which she came: “My real love for letters, my instinct for storytelling, springs from my mother, who is of Anglo-Celtic stock, with the glamour and romance of the Celt very strongly marked.”\(^3\)

Despite the great affection which Conan Doyle felt for his mother, however, he did not agree with her politics concerning the family’s ancestral homeland. While Mary was sympathetic to the Irish Nationalist cause and supported Home Rule, Conan Doyle, fearful that the granting of political autonomy would incite civil conflict in Ireland as well as seriously undermine the perpetuation of the British Empire, strongly opposed any

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2 Although Conan Doyle originally went by the single surname of his parents, “Doyle,” he later added his middle name, “Conan,” to his surname.
weakening of Ireland’s political connection to Britain. Indeed, in the parliamentary election of 1886, which was dominated by Prime Minister Gladstone’s first Home Rule Bill for Ireland, Conan Doyle, not yet the creator of Sherlock Holmes, publicly spoke out in favor of Liberal Unionism in a letter to the *Evening News* in Portsmouth, England, where he had set up his medical practice. Referring to the contemporaneous Land War in Ireland as a “long succession of crimes against life and property,” he condemned the failure of the Irish Parliamentary Party to speak out against the “murders and maimings” which had been committed by angry tenants against landlords and landlords’ agents. In Conan Doyle’s eyes, the silence of the Irish Parliamentary Party was a manifestation of its low “political morality,” which made its members “unfit to be trusted with the destinies of a country,” namely, Ireland. Moreover, although he agreed that Ireland “ought to have the same privileges as England, Scotland, or Wales,” within the Empire, Conan Doyle viewed Home Rule as the granting of “more [privileges] than [those possessed by] the three law-abiding countries.” Thus, to enact Home Rule would be to “hamper…[the] just and symmetrical design” of the “grand scheme of Imperial Federation…by which every country should manage its own local affairs, leaving Imperial matters to a central Parliament” and “in which every division of the Empire should be represented.” Regarding this current “Imperial Federation” as the political institution most conducive to “the strength or prosperity of…[the] Empire,” his principal aim, Doyle could not assent to Home Rule, which, he believed, would seriously threaten it.

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By 1900, Conan Doyle had achieved fame for his brilliant detective, Sherlock Holmes, as well as a reputation for honor and bravery for his service as a surgeon in the Boer War, in which the British fought against Dutch Boer settlers in South Africa. His high standing among the British public caused both the Liberal and Conservative parties to court him for candidature in the general election of October 1900. The election turned on three main issues, Irish Home Rule, free trade, and the future of Empire. Opposed to both Home Rule and free trade, Conan Doyle strongly believed in the concept of Empire, which he regarded as an institution beneficent to colonizer and colonized alike, fostering democracy, liberal values, and the spread of wealth and knowledge. Inasmuch as the Boer War overshadowed the election, Conan Doyle decided to join the Conservatives, whose determination to persevere in the war until a British victory was in keeping with his Imperialist ideology. The historic Conservative opposition to Irish Home Rule also appealed to Conan Doyle’s pro-Empire sympathies. Thus, he stood as a Conservative candidate for Central Edinburgh, where he was supported by several prominent citizens, among them, Joseph Bell, the inspiration for Sherlock Holmes. However, Conan Doyle’s preoccupation with national, rather local issues, as well as an anti-Catholic campaign against him, resulted in his losing the election to his Liberal rival, George Mackenzie Brown. Indeed, the bigoted anti-Catholic crusade waged against Conan Doyle revealed that despite his personal identification as a stalwart British loyalist, others still saw him as an untrustworthy “outsider,” in this case, a seditious Irish Jesuit opposed to the Scottish Kirk and Covenant. Although Conan Doyle wrote a letter to the Scotsman condemning the unsavory tactics being used against him and professing only a “Reverent Theism,” the political damage was too great to overcome.  

The staunch Unionism displayed in this unsuccessful political run began to waver a decade later, when Conan Doyle met Sir Roger Casement in 1910, right before Casement was to depart for the Putumayo. Both heavily involved in the Congo Reform Association (Conan Doyle had written a book publicizing the atrocities, *The Crime of the Congo*, in 1909), Conan Doyle and Casement took an instant liking to each other. Upon Casement’s departure for Peru, Conan Doyle wrote to him, “Goodbye, my dear Casement. It has been a real pleasure & privilege to make your acquaintance. May our friendship survive all geographical separation.”

Maintaining a written correspondence with the crusading civil servant during his mission to Peru, Conan Doyle used Casement as the inspiration for Lord John Roxton, the debonair adventurer in his novel, *The Lost World*. Relating his experiences in combating Peruvian slave traders, Roxton states, “I was the flail of the Lord up in those parts, I may tell you…..” Inasmuch as Casement was himself investigating human rights abuses against the native population in Peru at the time of the book’s composition, Conan Doyle’s acknowledgement is obvious.

Under Casement’s influence, Conan Doyle abandoned his earlier Unionist position and embraced Home Rule, albeit with an imperialist slant. To Conan Doyle, Home Rule was an acceptable political development if such a concession would ensure Ireland’s loyalty to the British Empire, as well as the cessation of political violence in Ireland.

In 1911, Conan Doyle wrote a letter to the Belfast *Telegraph* announcing his conversion to Home Rule. Citing the success of Home Rule in South Africa, to whose “boiling racial passion” the “animosities in Ireland are tepid,” Conan Doyle also

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9 Booth, *The Doctor, the Detective and Arthur Conan Doyle*, 305.
mentioned that the support which “every State of the British Empire” offered in the recent Boer War had convinced him that Ireland could “never break away from the Union.” Indeed, Conan Doyle proclaimed his conviction that “a solid loyal Ireland is the one thing which the Empire needs to make it impregnable,” and so if Home Rule is the thing which would bring this loyalty about, so be it. As for the Ulster Unionists, “the men of the North,” Doyle expressed the hope that they would have “a patriotism so broad and enlightened” that they would “sacrifice for the moment their racial and religious feelings in the conviction that by so doing they are truly serving the Empire, and that under any form of rule their character and energy will give them a large share in the government of the nation.” Having successfully implemented Home Rule in Canada and South Africa, Conan Doyle believed that the British Empire could safely implement it for a third time in Ireland, where “after a experience of a united friendly Ireland nothing would induce the North to go back to the old conditions.”¹⁰

However, lest the public mistake his new endorsement of Home Rule as a critique of the project of Empire, Conan Doyle wrote a letter to the *The Irish Times* in April of 1912, in which he bluntly stated, “I am an Imperialist because I believe the whole to be greater than the part, and I would always willingly sacrifice any part if I thought it to the advantage of the whole.” As a man of Irish extraction and a loyal citizen of the British Empire, Conan Doyle was quick to point out the significant contribution and therefore vested interest which Ireland had in the British Empire: “More Irishmen have died for that flag [the Union Jack] than men of any other race in proportion to numbers. It is the

sign of the Empire which Ireland has helped to build, and which, be the local exception what it may, has stood for freedom and progress all the world over.”

Indeed, about a decade earlier, in 1900, Doyle had addressed this very theme in “The Green Flag.” In this short story, C Company of the Royal Mallows, an Irish regiment full of rebellious Fenians and discontented tenant farmers, “dry-rotted with treason and with bitter hatred of the flag under which they served,” engage, along with other British soldiers, an Arab army in the Nubian Desert. At first, the Irishmen are reluctant to fight the Arab host and in response to their officers’ pleadings and cajoling shout, “A black curse on the Impire!” Meanwhile, other British soldiers fall in bloody piles around them. Finally, a Private Connolly, foremost in sedition and insubordination within the Company, has a change of heart as he sees the Arab warriors enthusiastically killing the other regiments. “And were these the Allies of Ireland,” he asks himself. Attaching the green flag of Erin to the end of his bayonet, he dramatically plants it in the sand and calls to his countrymen, “Bhoys, will ye stand for this?” Seeing the green cloth fluttering in the breeze, his fellow members of C Company rally around it and make a heroic stand against the much larger Arab force. Taking the “whole brunt of the attack,” they give the other British soldiers time to reform back into a protective square, thus saving others’ lives while losing their own. A moving tale of patriotism and sacrifice, “The Green Flag” illustrates the camaraderie of Empire at its best.

By 1914, however, the Home Rule Crisis which erupted over the third Irish Home Rule Bill had made Doyle reconsider his earlier support for unequivocal Home

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Rule for Ireland. Writing in to *The Times*, he urged the implementation of a “compromise,” which would “give Ireland something less than Ireland and Ulster something less than Ulster,” in other words, partition. Although “every Irishman would hope that the day would speedily come when the tolerance and loyalty of Ireland would be so unquestionable that Ulster’s present fears would pass for ever and the island be reunited by the voluntary adhesion of the north-eastern countries,” the signing of the Ulster Covenant and the Howth gun-running suggested to Doyle that the wisest course at present would be to divide Ireland and give the South its political autonomy while keeping Ulster under British rule. Such a regrettable division, he argued, of the Irish nation could hardly be considered “more extravagant than civil war.”

When the outbreak of World War I in August 1914 threw Britain into its greatest struggle since the Napoleonic period, however, the threat to the British Empire compelled Conan Doyle to take a harder line against Irish nationalism. In 1913, in an article entitled “Great Britain and the Next War,” Conan Doyle had warned of the danger of future German aggression and ended his argument was a caution for his fellow Irishman: “I would venture to say one word here to my Irish fellow-countrymen of all political persuasions. If they imagine that they can stand politically or economically while Britain falls, they are woefully mistaken. The British Fleet is their one shield. If it be broken, Ireland will go down. They may well throw themselves heartily into the common defence, for no sword can transfix England without the point reaching Ireland behind her.”

According to Conan Doyle, who identified as an Irishman, although Ireland might still suffer from unequal treatment under British rule, she would suffer from far worse treatment under any other master, specifically, Germany. Britain provided her with political freedoms, a national defense, and an economic market for her goods. Therefore, to undermine Britain and side with Germany, Conan Doyle believed, would not only be to Britain’s detriment, but to Ireland’s as well. In August 1914, Conan Doyle again expressed this sentiment in a letter to *The Freeman’s Journal* in Dublin: “The Empire is in no sense an English thing. Scotch and Irish have combined in the building of it, and have an equal pride and interest in its immense future. There is no possible reason why a man should not be a loyal Irishman and a loyal Imperialist also….If Ireland were alone in the Atlantic she would be at the absolute mercy of any European Power which chose to blockade her. No bravery upon the part of Irishmen could prevent her from being the victim of the Fleet of any one of the Great Powers. Her larger neighbour stands between her and such a disaster, and at her back she has the whole force of the Empire to preserve her from such a menace.”

Thus, Doyle, concluded, it was only in Ireland’s interest to remain loyal to Britain in any future world conflict.

In light of this opinion, it not surprising that Conan Doyle reacted harshly to the news of the Easter Rising and expressed little sympathy for the executed rebels. In a letter to *The Daily Chronicle* on May 9, 1916, in the midst of the Dublin executions, Conan Doyle cited the Battle of Mount Street Bridge, in which the Sherwood Foresters were mowed down by a determined band of Irish rebels, as well as other killings perpetrated

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by the insurgents, to express his contention that those condemned to death justly deserved their sentence: “Many will agree with you in your wise remarks as to the danger of creating political martyrs in Ireland. On the other hand you must admit that there have been many cold-blooded murders, and that unless these are sternly punished justice would become a farce. What about the poor old veterans who were shot down without warning before they had ever heard of a revolt? What of the unarmed officers shot in the streets of Dublin?...No pains can be too great to ensure the punishment of the men who did such deeds, but they should be tried not for rebellion, which might put a halo round their memories, but for most cowardly murder.”¹⁷ As a fervent proponent of the British Empire, Conan Doyle considered the acts of the Easter rebels, committed when Britain was embroiled in a worldwide war, to be the foulest treachery. However, recognizing that to try the rebels for rebellion would only canonize them in the eyes of the Irish people, he shrewdly recommended that they be tried for murder instead, a crime which was universally abhorrent to all peoples, regardless of political persuasion.

If Conan Doyle had no mercy for the men who participated in the Easter Rebellion, he did have quite a lot of sympathy for Sir Roger Casement, his old friend from the Congo Reform Association, who had been captured while trying to deliver German arms to the Irish rebels. As early as 1914, when it was first reported that Casement was in Berlin, treating with the German government in the cause of Irish independence, Conan Doyle wrote in to The Daily Chronicle to defend him, positing that Casement was mentally unstable after having endured many years in the tropics. Announcing that Casement was “a man of fine character,” Conan Doyle contended that it

was “inconceivable” that he would “act as a traitor to his country” if he was “in full possession of his senses….” Indeed, Conan Doyle had “never heard him say a word which was disloyal to Great Britain….” Thus, Conan Doyle concluded, Casement’s behavior could only be explained by his being “a sick man…worn by tropical hardships” encountered during his distinguished career as a British civil servant. No “sane man,” Conan Doyle added, “would…accept an assurance about Ireland which had obviously been already broken about Belgium….” 18

Convinced of Casement’s insanity, Conan Doyle could reconcile forgiving his friend’s traitorous actions with his own impassioned support for British Imperialism. Consequently, once Casement had been convicted of treason and sentenced to death, Conan Doyle organized a petition on his behalf to Herbert Asquith, the British Prime Minister. Restating the insanity argument as well as warning that Casement’s execution “would be helpful to Germany policy,” 19 Conan Doyle managed to collect the signatures of such luminous authors as G.K. Chesterton, Sir James Frazer and Arnold Bennett, although George Bernard Shaw, as noted earlier, refused to sign. In addition to notable literary figures, several prominent editors, including of the Daily News, the Manchester Guardian, and the Sphere, as well as the president of the Royal College of Physicians, the president of the National Free Church Council, and the president of the Baptist Union all affixed their signatures to the document. 20 Thus, the petition was quite formidable by the time of its presentation to the Prime Minister. Not content to end his efforts there, Conan Doyle also paid £700 toward Casement’s legal defense, almost half the total amount.

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19 Conan Doyle Casement petition, quoted in Booth, The Doctor, the Detective and Arthur Conan Doyle, 306.
20 Inglis, Roger Casement, 353.
Even the revelation of Casement’s homosexual activities did not dissuade Conan Doyle, as he declared that such personal actions had no bearing on the charge of treason.\textsuperscript{21} Nevertheless, despite Conan Doyle’s valiant attempts to win clemency for his friend, Casement was executed in Pentonville Prison on August 3, 1916.

Conan Doyle’s contrasting responses to the executions of the Easter rebels and Sir Roger Casement illustrate that his foremost concern was not for Ireland, but for the greater British Empire. The Dublin rebels, inasmuch as they clearly desired to sever Ireland’s link with Britain, were condemned by Conan Doyle as treacherous murderers who more than deserved the ultimate penalty. Casement, on the other hand, Conan Doyle regarded sympathetically. However, such sympathy did not emanate from any legitimacy which Conan Doyle gave to the project of Irish political autonomy. Rather, Conan Doyle could only express sympathy for Casement’s plight insofar as he believed Casement to be mentally deranged and not himself. If Conan Doyle had believed that Casement went to Germany to seek assistance for Irish independence with the full use of his intellectual faculties, it is certain that his reaction to Casement’s pending execution would have been much different. Indeed, despite his conversion to Home Rule under Casement’s influence in 1911, Conan Doyle remained an avid Imperialist, desiring Home Rule not for Ireland’s sake as such but only if it would strengthen the Empire as a whole. In this way, Conan Doyle remained a Unionist at heart, inasmuch as his primary aim was maintain the fabric of the British Empire, no matter what the cost.

\textsuperscript{21} Booth, \textit{The Doctor, the Detective and Arthur Conan Doyle}, 307.
Conclusion: “John Bull’s Other Island” and British Identity: Enduring Ambiguity

All three Anglo-Irish authors, William Butler Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, and Arthur Conan Doyle, were prominent literary figures of their time whose political opinions were widely disseminated throughout British society through their plays, novels, poetry and letters to major newspapers. Indeed, while Yeats’ poetry became synonymous with the Irish Literary Revival and Shaw’s John Bull’s Other Island caused King Edward VII to laugh so hard that he broke his chair,\(^1\) Conan Doyle’s decision to kill off Sherlock Holmes provoked members of the public to wear black arms bands in mourning.\(^2\) Writing into newspapers such as The Daily Chronicle, which enjoyed a circulation of 400,000 compared to The Times 150,000 shortly before World War I,\(^3\) they were public intellectuals whose political views carried weight within the larger society. Moreover, the authors, being of Anglo-Irish ancestry, provide an ethnic manifestation of the tension existing in the Anglo-Irish relationship. Does one’s loyalty lie with Ireland or Britain? Is Ireland fundamentally a colonial inferior within the British Empire or an integral equal, entitled to the same freedoms and privileges as England? The executions of the Dublin rebels and Sir Roger Casement challenged all three authors to examine these questions, insofar as they brought Ireland’s relationship with Britain into the forefront of the British political scene. As men possessing both Irish and English affinities, Yeats, Shaw, and Conan Doyle were acutely aware of the tensions between Ireland as a nation and British rule. Ultimately, all three authors acknowledged the colonial exploitation which England

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\(^1\) Pierce, ed., Irish Writing in the Twentieth Century: A Reader, 126.
\(^2\) Booth, The Doctor, the Detective and Arthur Conan Doyle: A Biography of Arthur Conan Doyle, 190.
had imposed upon Ireland for many centuries. Even Doyle, the most conservative of the three, acknowledged that Britain had only done its best for Ireland “for at least one long generation of mankind…,” namely, during the time of Gladstone. However, their varying responses to the executions of the Easter rebels and Sir Roger Casement illustrated that not only men of pure Irish roots but also those possessing a familial link with England, even to the point of considering themselves British, could subscribe to any of the three historic answers to the “Irish Question,” namely, complete independence, Home Rule, or Unionism. Although many historians have observed the presence of these three political strains within the native Irish population, the concept of British identity through the lens of the “Irish Question” has often been reduced to the imperialistic jingoism of Rudyard Kipling, whose Irish characters were generally limited to loyal soldiers carrying out “the white man’s burden” in far-flung parts of the British Empire. Thus, this thesis makes an attempt to broaden the definition of British identity in the era of imperialism from the jingoistic simplicity of Kipling to the complexity exhibited by Yeats, Shaw, and Conan Doyle’s varying opinions as to how Ireland related to the British Empire. Yeats, as the full-fledged Nationalist, was ultimately persuaded that Ireland was outside the purview of British identity. Shaw, taking the moderate position of Home Rule, considered British identity to encompass Ireland only insofar as Britain earned her right to govern Ireland through economic, political, and social parity. Doyle, however, representing the traditional wing of British identity, considered Ireland to be an inviolable part of the Empire, regardless of political, economic, or social treatment. Thus, he was

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5 Nagai, Empire of Analogies: Kipling, India, and Ireland, 133.
willing to grant Home Rule only if it was completely necessary to preserve the integrity of the Imperial project.

As a fourth figure, Sir Roger Casement, the British civil servant turned Irish patriot, also looms over this thesis, highlighting through his passion for colonized peoples, whether in Ireland, the Congo, or Peru, the challenge which national self-determination and ethnic diversity can potentially present to a cohesive national identity. Indeed, the ambiguity of British identity demonstrated by the diversity of Yeats, Shaw, Conan Doyle, and even Casement’s perceptions remains an extremely important issue today, inasmuch as the modern British state continues to struggle in finding a consensus on principles, institutions, and ideas that define “Britishness.” In an age of multiculturalism, British politicians have felt an increasing urgency to define national values and the qualities that typify “Britishness.”

The disturbing increase in homegrown terrorism, in which British citizens plot terrorist attacks against their own country, has only given this debate a more sinister importance. Inasmuch as these domestic terrorists often come from immigrant communities not fully integrated into British society, they seem to be a modern manifestation of a “colonial” problem which Britain historically has had to confront. In an effort to combat the growing threat posed by domestic terrorism and foster a healthy patriotism, the British government has proposed drafting a document which “will work with the public to develop a British statement of values that will set out the ideals and principles that bind us together as a nation.”

The publicity surrounding this proposal might lead one to surmise that the crisis in British identity is a new phenomenon, brought

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on by an age of increasing diversity and globalization. And yet, the views of Yeats, Shaw
and Conan Doyle suggest the uncertainty surrounding British identity is not a new
problem and even plagued Britain at its political height when it could claim to be “the
Empire upon which the sun never sets.”
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