A Brief Genealogy of Roger Casement: *Protestant* Irish Nationalists (1779-1916)[1]
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INTRODUCTION

The project of this paper is to situate Roger Casement as part of a historical phenomenon in Ireland whereby some portion of the British settler classes have been interpellated (Althusser, 1971) to the Irish nation. It is designed to better understand a particular set of identity politics which Casement embodies—the identity politics of those who have been ethno-racially privileged by the colonial regime in Ireland, but who threw their lot in with the colonized. Specifically I compare and contrast Casement's actions and words with preceding exemplars of protestant Irish nationalism who were important influences on him, particularly the Society of United Irishmen, Young Irelander John Mitchel, and his contemporary and close friend Alice Stopford Green.

I

While the United Irish movement was most certainly the greatest mobilization of protestants against British rule, and the primary touchstone for many protestant Irish nationalists since, my research indicates that Casement did not significantly engage their ideas. The United Irish were, however, widely discussed around the centenary commemorations at the turn of the century, and were important figures for those protestant Irish nationalists who were more influential in Casement's politics. Even if he did not seem to reference them often, Casement himself was interpreted by many people, during his lifetime, as a reincarnation of Tone (Dudgeon, 2002, p. 424) or Emmet. I would be remise, therefore, not to note a number of echoes between the United Irish and Casement.

There were, of course, striking resemblances between the late 18th century and the late 19th and early 20th century progressions from Home Rule to insurrection. Casement's Irish Volunteers were clearly conceptualized with reference to Grattan's, although as a counterforce to the UVF they might be seen as more closely resembling the Defenders. Casement's troubled arrival on a German submarine is unmistakably reminiscent of Bantry Bay in form if not content, such that Stopford Green viewed his actions as "an insane desire to imitate Wolfe Tone" (Ó Bróin, 1985, p. 133). His jail suicide attempt further conjures Tone, and his 'Speech from the Dock' was modeled, in part, after Robert Emmet's (Dudgeon, 2002, p. 509).

Like some of the more established protestant United Irish, his protestantness, and the standing and respectability that this social position enabled, made him a popular speaker (Dudgeon, 2002, p. 414 & 431; Gwynn, 1931, p. 188), representative, and patron of nationalist organizations (Ó Bróin, 1985, p. 36), but he too at times expressed a distrust of Irish Catholics. Casement had many relationships with catholics, but his closest circle of Irish friends and conspirators, like Stopford Green, Bulmer Hobson, the Asgard and Kelpie gun-runners, and later Robert Monteith, were overwhelmingly protestant. Like many Ulster protestant United Irishmen, Casement's public political activities were in large part directed toward converting the protestants of Ulster to the nationalist cause. This was perhaps most clearly on display at the

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October 24, 1913 at a Ballymoney Town Hall meeting, hosted by Homeruler Rev. James Brown Armour and billed as a protestant challenge to Carsonism. The Antrim town was known for its resistance to landlords and its liberal to left politics. Protestant nationalists Casement, Captain Jack White of the Irish Citizen Army and Alice Stopford Green shared the stage with speakers from the Liberal Party. Liberal M.P. Robert Graham Glendinning was given top billing over Casement, followed by Jack White, Stopford Green, Liberal Justices of the Peace Alexander Wilson and John Dinsmore, and barrister and liberal party member William Macafee. Catholics were strategically not invited to participate, and Casement's suggestion of Francis Joseph Bigger as a speaker was rejected by White because Bigger was seen as too much of a 'papist' (see Dudgeon, 2002, pp. 404-406). It seems clear that Casement, White and Green participated in the exclusively protestant meeting with the hopes of articulating this liberal Antrim pocket who opposed Carsonism to the Home Rule movement. In a move reminiscent of the United Irish oath, White asked participants to sign an 'Alternative Ulster Covenant' which invoked familiar United Irish concepts of "civil and religious freedom" and "a spirit of citizenship" (O'Brien & Keegan, 2012).

It is also interesting to consider the similarities between Casement's last minute attempt to avert the Easter Rising and United Irishmen who Jemmy Hope called "Foreign-aid men." Prior to the United Irish rising—particularly in Ulster—there was a division among the forces on the issue of waiting for foreign aid, and Hope blames 'Foreign-aid men,' many of whom held key leadership positions, for stalling when the signal was given to proceed without the French on May 23rd. The informer Leonard McNally characterized them as "wealthy" men who "will never dare to act decisively till they are aided by the French" because, he said, they are "too conscious of life and property" (quoted in Curtin, 1998 [1994], p. 88). That these 'foreign-aid men' were also "men of property," as Tone might call them, makes it difficult to discern if their actions had more to do with class than their ethnic privilege. Hope argued that, having been recruited to the movement for their social position and patronage, they had "unthinkingly staked more than was really in them," and functioned like "paper money, current for the time, keeping business afloat[, but] without any intrinsic value" (quoted in Curtin, 1998 [1994], p. 113). We see some resonances here with Casement. He was certainly recruited in large part due to his respectability, and his aversion to violence when the Rising came seems to indicate that he had perhaps 'staked' too much.

Curtin argues that some hesitation on the part of the Northern United Irish leadership was related to their marginalization from the United Irish decision-making process. Again this resonates with the marginal position of protestants Casement and Bulmer Hobson and catholic Eoin O'Neill at the time of the Easter rising. But while Curtin argues that northern United Irish hesitancy was in part due to a somewhat sectarian distrust of the Southern branch as well as fear of losing status and property, Casement was certainly not worried about his own life in opposing the rising, but rather the lives of the volunteers, rightly or wrongly. Lobbied by the rank-and-file, those Ulster protestant United Irish leaders who opposed the 'foreign-aid men', particularly Henry Joy McCracken, would eventually rise in June (Curtin, 1998 [1994], p. 267). Divided and late their efforts, like the forces which rose in 1916, they had little chance of success.

In light of the similarities between Casement's last minute opposition to the rising and that of the 'foreign-aid men' of the Ulster United Irish, it seems important to consider that, with the exceptions of Padraig and William Pearse [whose father was protestant but who were practicing Catholics] and Francis Sheehy-Skeffington [who I will come back to in a moment], he was the only protestant nationalist leader executed for involvement in the rising.

None of the other prominent protestant Volunteers participated in the rising. Ernest Blythe was in jail. Bulmer Hobson opposed the rising. Maud Gonne MacBride was in French exile. Sam Macguire did not participate in order to keep his strategic civil service position. Erskine Childers and Conor O'Brian were both serving with the Royal Navy. Darrell Figgis was out of the loop in the West and though willing to participate, he did not ultimately do anything. Monteith, who met Casement in Germany and accompanied him on the submarine, focused on evading capture after making contact with Austin Stack. In terms of the prominent protestants of the Irish Citizen Army, Captain Jack White was part of an ambulance crew in France. Sean O'Casey was opposed to the ICA alliance with the volunteers and opposed to the rising. The protestant women of the ICA, however, had a better showing. Countess Markievicz fought at St. Stephen's Green, was court-martialed and released in 1917. Kathleen Lynn served as Chief Medical Officer and was imprisoned with Markeivicz and other ICA women. Young Nora Connelly whose mother Lillie was protestant, served as a courier. Pacifist Francis Sheehy-Skeffington opposed the Rising but was none-the-less arrested and summarily executed.

Canon Ring reports that on the hangman's platform, Casement had "raised himself to full height, saying 'For God and Kathleen ni Houlihane'" (quoted in Dudgeon, 2002, p. 9), perhaps referring to the character in Yeat's play of the same name. While Casement was the only protestant leader who, when the moment came, 'give his all' to Cathleen (Yeats, 1905, p. 51) as part of the Easter blood sacrifice, it is interesting to consider the reaction of protestant Home Ruler Stephen Gwynn, who, after having seen the Yeats production, "wondered if such plays should be produced at all unless one was prepared to go out to shoot and be shot" (Ó Bróin, 1985, p. 41). Like McCracken and other United Irishmen, Casement's courage in the face of almost certain death, even if it was to prevent the rising, has certainly garnered him the deep respect of subsequent generations of Irish nationalists.

II

Intellectually, the two greatest influences on Casement seem to be Young Irelander John Mitchel, an Ulster protestant, and his close friend, Gaelic Leaguer Alice Stopford Green, a Leinster protestant. As Dudgeon (2002) notes, Casement would often cite Mitchel, and he was active in promoting Stopford Green's 1911 book *Irish Nationality* (pp. 168 & 279). In contrast to the United Irish, both Mitchel and Stopford Green were explicit in addressing their settler ancestry, and focused on reviving histories of native Irish resistance dating back to the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1170 (Roche, 1970).

Within two centuries of that invasion, the Crown was distressed about the extent to which English settlers in Ireland were assimilating to native Irish culture. This is evidenced by the 1367 Statues of Killkeny which condemned the "many English" who "live and govern themselves according to the manners, fashion, and language of the Irish enemies; and also have made divers [sic] marriages and alliances between themselves and the Irish enemies" (Hardiman, 2011 [1367]). The statues outlawed intermarriage, patronage, fostering, and sex with native Irish people, sales of weapons, use of the Irish language, laws and style. The statues also indicate, but condemn, a popular attitude among the English-English at the time that those English in Ireland were less than human, "calling them English hobbe[2], or Irish dog" (Ibid., p. 19).

In its medieval epoch, the acculturation of English settlers by the Irish was enabled by a definition of Irishness that was, as Marc Caball argues, "predicated more often on loyalty to a

[2] As in hob-goblin, a trouble-making humanoid creature similar to the Leprechaun image.

Gaelic cultural vision than criteria of a strictly racial character" (Caball, 1998, p. 125). An Anglo-Norman settler could therefore become Irish by assimilating to the cultural institutions of the colonized, that is, by doing all of those things that the Statues tried to prohibit. The English monarchy defended the colonial project against rampant settler assimilation by 'planting' Ireland with 'new' *british* colonists and by the 17th century this dynamic cultural definition of Irishness—which increasingly included adherence to the Catholic Church—allowed the native Irish and Anglo-Irish to articulate an inclusive, hybrid and pan-insular "political response to conquest and colonisation along the lines of a national [and anti-colonial] paradigm" (Ibid., 117) in order to resist the new, and increasingly protestant, waves of settlers. The defeat of the Jacobin forces in 1691 and the subsequent era of the Penal Laws consolidated Irish identity as ethno-racially "catholic" (McVeigh & Rolston, 2009, pp. 21-22), and "protestant" and "catholic" became the marks of, as Mitchel said, colonial and native (Mitchel, 1869, p. 28), or as Stopford Green said, "ejector and ejected… conflicting classes…divided into two creeds" (Green, 1911, p. 237).

For both Mitchel and Stopford Green, the United Irish who sacrificed their lives for Irish freedom constituted a blood sacrifice made by Irish protestants which ensured the possibility that they could become part of the Irish nation. But their later projects clearly saw a significant deficiencies in the United Irish failure to address the colonial past and engage native Irish culture. To the United Irish project of uniting "Protestant, Catholic, and Dissenter," Mitchel and Éire Óg added "Milesian and Cromwellian," reflecting their explicit engagement of the pre-18th century colonial history of Ireland. It also stated their intention to articulate, as Mitchel termed himself in 1846, "the Saxon Irishmen of the North" (quoted in Dudgeon, 2002, p. 183) with the 'old Irish' in much the same way that the Anglo-Norman settlers had been. Whereas the United Irish sought to unite 'Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter' by a militant civic republicanism, Young Ireland sought to unite 'Milesian and Cromwellian' through militant cultural nationalism.

Stopford Green would likewise draw parallels between protestant participation in the Gaelic League and those English academics who studied the Irish language in the 17th century, including Sir James Ware, Archbishop James Ussher, Baron Francis Aungier, and Bishop William Bedell. At the dawn of 'new' protestant English settlement in Ireland, she says, there was "a moment" and a "meeting-point between the new race and the old" where "a people compounded of many nations, some Irish by birth and descent, others by descent only, others neither by descent nor by birth but by inhabitation of one soil but all parts of one body politic" (Green, 1911, p. 156) facilitated by the Irish language. The Gaelic League, she idealistically argued, revived this moment and "united Catholic and Protestant, landlord and peasant" (Green, 1911, p. 248) through Irish cultural revival. Casement was enthusiastic about the efforts of the Gaelic league, happily contributed his talents to the first Glens Feis in 1904, and supported Irish language projects with fundraising until his death.

III

Mitchel was a well-known Anglophobe as well as a white supremacist who sided with the confederacy during the U.S. Civil War in a strange sort of Democratic Party brokered Milesian and Cromwellian alliance. His Irish cultural nationalism was not so much suggesting a mixing of two different 'races' as that Irish protestants were no longer significantly racially distinct from the native Irish. Many Irish protestants, he argued, were actually native Irish by descent but had converted to Protestantism for "the benefit of the English law in their dealings with the people of

the Pale" (Mitchel, 1869, p. 178). This line of argument was later taken to the extreme by Fenian Edward O'Meagher Condon who argued that the 'Angle' in Anglo-Saxon is actually '*an gael*' [the gael], in order to stress a common racial origin of the English and Irish and promote their unity in the United States (Condon, 1976 [1887], p. 10). Stopford Green would also echo Mitchel in this respect, adding an appeal to the Irish protestants' ego, when she argued that these native Irish converts to Protestantism had maintained their patriotism and were "braver in their outlook than the small and disheartened Catholic aristocracy" (Green, 1911, p. 199). Additionally, Mitchel would argue that, regardless of racial origins, "The Anglo-Irish and Scottish Ulstermen have now far too old a title to be questioned: they are a hardy race and fought stoutly for the pleasant valleys they dwell in" (quoted in Dudgeon, 2002, p. 183). Casement was thankfully nowhere near as white supremacist as many of his political predecessors, although his frequent comparative use of the term 'savages' is revealing and his description of Connemarans as "white Indians" (1910 White Diary quoted in Harris, 2006) is reminiscent of the 'white slavery' discourse employed by Democratic party apologists of slavery in the U.S., including Mitchel.

Despite ostensibly subscribing to Mitchel's racial and historical legitimization of Irish protestants, Casement's recognition of the confessional patinas which roughly marked colonizers and colonized, having lost his parents, and identifying with Ireland from a young age, led him to do genealogical research, particularly looking for evidence that he was descended from Irish catholics through his mother. He was pleased with his father's "Gaelic [Isle of] Mann" (Dudgeon, 2002, p. 54) heritage but had difficulty confirming his mother's lineage. If she was not raised a Catholic she seems to have converted and Casement was secretly re-baptized in Wales just before his 5th birthday. While he was raised a protestant, and traded politically on this Protestantism, he did not attend church and felt that the Church of Ireland was an intolerant institution (Dudgeon, 2002, p. 214). His feelings of ethnic ambiguity led to strange turns of phrase like "with every drop of fenian blood in my soul" (quoted in Dudgeon, 2002, p. 404), and his ultimate conversion, seems to be as much a part of becoming Irish as it was a matter of personal faith (Dudgeon, 2002, pp. see also 56-58). He was certainly not alone in this decision among his generation of protestant Irish nationalists. Other converts who were not satisfied with simply being "Protestants in their religion and Catholics in their politics" (Ó Bróin, 1985, p. 38) include Lillie Connolly, Grace Gifford Plunkett and her sister Muriel Gifford MacDonagh, Maud Gonne McBride, Countess Markievicz, and Charlotte Despard.

The racial and historical legitimacy of Irish protestant put forward by cultural nationalists Mitchel and Stopford Green was for Casement, contingent on embracing nationalist politics. He argued, for example [referring to Carsonists], that "These men who say that the cutting up of Ireland into two parts—Protestant and Catholic—is the solution of the difficulty are no Irishmen, and so far as I know no Irishman could put that proposal forward as a solution" (quoted in Mitchell, 2003, p. 87). Irishness was as much a function of choices as it was of genetics, and protestants had to make sacrifices in order to become fully Irish. The United Irish 'brotherhood of affection' was not enough. Irishness was more, as Léon Ó Bróin put it, "a brotherhood of adoption as well as blood" (Ó Bróin, 1985, p. 226).

IV

But while Mitchel, Stopford Green, and Casement diverged from the protestant United Irish tradition by engaging with their colonial positionality and seeking to articulate themselves and others with Irish catholics through cultural nationalism, each of these protestant nationalist

projects seems to have shared an overly optimistic attitude about the possibilities for recruiting protestants. This optimism stemmed from a shared conceptualization that protestant anti-Catholicism was rooted in elite manipulation and, in Casement's words, the "misapprehension" (quoted in Dudgeon, 2002, p. 410) of "simple [protestant] Irishmen" (*Speech From The Dock*). As a result of this conceptualization, Casement characterized protestants as "misguided" dupes of the unionist media and politicians who had no necessary "ill will" toward catholics, pawns in "the old game of [the] plunderer" (quoted in Dudgeon, 2002, p. 414). As he argued in his *Speech from the Dock*, "If external influences of disintegration would but leave us alone, we were sure that Nature itself must bring us together." The idea of 'Brits out' as a panacea for Irish protestant anti-Catholic sentiment dangerously disregards the fact that the Penal Law framework in Ireland was a result of Irish protestant resistance as much as it was Crown policy, and it totally disregards the lessons of 1798 which demonstrated that while marginalized dissenters and working-class protestants might have been disadvantaged in the social order, they still benefitted from it, both materially (Keogh, 1997, pp. 46-47; Ó Muiri, 1997, p. 126) and psychologically. As Leky said, "the most worthless Protestant…if he had nothing else to boast of, at least…found it pleasing to think that he was a member of a dominant race" (Leky quoted in Ignatiev, 1995, p. 35).

Loyalism was not simply a ploy of the landlords to divide the Irish masses, but perhaps equally a ploy by protestant workers and tenants to maintain a system which provided real benefits at the expense of catholics. The interest-based arguments that nationalists like Casement and Stopford Green geared toward protestants were, therefore, necessarily speculative promises of greater prosperity and freedom in an imagined Irish nation, which included undemocratic guarantees to preserve protestant social exceptionalism as well as their property, and appeals to protestant chauvinism. Such appeals were woefully pitted against the very real and immediate material and psychological advantages to the maintenance of a protestant supremacist state. Stopford Green's contention that protestants had made a "bad bargain" (Green, 1911, p. 174) which traded freedom and self-determination for material gains, would inevitably ring hollow, and in the final analysis, was at root a moral appeal which asked protestants to sacrifice a privileged social position for the good of the Irish people as a "whole" (Ibid., 170).

By 1914 it became clear to Casement that Carsonism had won the hearts, minds, and pockets of Irish protestants, and at this point he seems to have become much less invested in trying to persuade Ulster protestants to join the nationalist cause. His own personal actions were thereafter increasingly taken on a purely moral basis in stark contrast to the interests-based actions of the majority of Irish protestants. As he would later note in his *Speech from the Dock*, "the Unionist champions chose a path which they felt would lead to the woolsack; while I went down the road I knew must lead to the dock, and the event proved we were both right." While his actions were certainly valorous, they were now far too personal, individual, and costly to serve as any kind of model for large numbers of protestants to emulate. His disenchantment with recruiting other protestants to the nationalist cause must have also contributed in the end, to his Catholic conversion, the ultimate symbolic repudiation of the Irish protestant interest.

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NOTES