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Source: *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 41, No. 3, New Directions in Political History (Jul., 2002), pp. 329-353

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3070721>

Accessed: 02/06/2010 04:00

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# Bones of Contention: The Repatriation of the Remains of Roger Casement

*Kevin Grant*

This is a history of life after death—not the life of a disembodied soul, but of the body left behind in a prison yard, buried in quicklime. It is a history composed of family members, friends, politicians, and bureaucrats drawn into cooperation and conflict by the politics of rebellion, partition, and sexuality in Ireland and Great Britain. The deceased in dispute, Roger Casement, had been a controversial figure during the later years of his life, knighted by the British Crown in 1911 for his advocacy of humanitarian causes in Africa and South America and then hanged by the British government on 3 August 1916 for conspiring with Germany to mobilize and arm Irish separatists. Casement had requested that his body be buried at Murlough Bay, near his family's home in County Antrim in the province of Ulster. Instead, Casement's body was buried at Pentonville Prison in London, and for almost fifty years the British government rejected the appeals of Casement's family and supporters for the repatriation of his body to Ireland. In 1965, the body was finally exhumed and reinterred at Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin, following a state funeral.

Why did the British government take over fifty years to disinter Casement's body from Pentonville, and why was his request to be buried at Murlough Bay not honored? In exploring the answers to these questions, I focus on negotiations between the British and Irish governments, and the terms of their final agreement over the present location of Casement's remains. Above all, the location of Casement's remains was determined by the politics of the partition of Ireland and related developments in the sovereign and economic relations of Ireland and Great Britain.

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*Journal of British Studies* 41 (July 2002): 329–353  
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Both the political significance and the location of Casement's remains were, moreover, consistently influenced by controversy over his alleged homosexuality. In articulating the relationship between the politics of partition and Casement's sexual orientation, I emphasize the ambivalence with which Irish officials, and especially Eamon de Valera, viewed and represented Casement as a national symbol. The Irish government was troubled not only by the problematic issue of Casement's sexuality but also by Casement's personal allegiances across Ireland's politico-sectarian divide. Ultimately, the burial of Casement's remains in the Republic of Ireland in 1965 marked the Irish government's symbolic submission to the partition. It is, in other words, an ironic grave site, standing as an Irish nationalist monument to national disunification.<sup>1</sup>

Casement continues to be a subject of fascination and heated debate among academics and in the Irish media.<sup>2</sup> Most attention focuses on his sexuality and the disputed authenticity of the infamous "Black Diaries."<sup>3</sup> These diaries, apparently written in Casement's hand, were obtained by police investigators in London in April 1916, after the Royal Irish Constabulary arrested Casement on his return to Ireland from Germany in anticipation of the Easter Rising. The diaries chronicle Casement's sexual relations with numerous men and include descriptions of the physiques and penis sizes of some of Casement's sexual partners and various other men whom he admired. British officials surreptitiously displayed the diaries to influential journalists and public figures in order to defame Casement during and after his treason trial. From 1916 until the present, suspi-

<sup>1</sup> For related studies of the repatriation of Casement's remains, see Deirdre McMahon, "Roger Casement: An Account from the Archives of His Reinterment in Ireland," *Irish Archives* 3 (Spring 1996): 3–12. McMahon depends mainly on files from the Taoiseach's Department in the National Archives of Ireland and on oral interviews to reconstruct a basic account of official exchanges between the Irish and British governments. By contrast, I draw primarily on files of the Commonwealth Relations Office, located at the Public Record Office, Kew, England, as well as the Casement Papers at the National Library of Ireland. Moving beyond McMahon's useful study, my objective is to situate the controversies over Casement's body in the broader contexts of Anglo-Irish policy making. My work can furthermore be read as a critique of Lucy McDiarmid, "The Posthumous Life of Roger Casement," in *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*, ed. Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis (Amherst, Mass., 1997), pp. 127–58. McDiarmid dwells on issues of popular memory and sexuality, making use primarily, though not exclusively, of published literary sources and newspapers. Although McDiarmid refers to "state" and "official" ideologies, she does not directly examine these subjects, which is noteworthy given that the controversies over Casement's body focused on prompting the British state to take action.

<sup>2</sup> Regarding debates over Casement after 1965, see McDiarmid, "The Posthumous Life."

<sup>3</sup> For recent contributions to the debate over the authenticity of the diaries, see Angus Mitchell, ed., *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement* (Dublin, 1997); Roger Sawyer, ed., *Roger Casement's Diaries—1910: The Black and the White* (London, 1998).

cions of forgery and a British government conspiracy have surrounded the diaries, prompting the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, to call for a renewed investigation by scholars and ministers of the British government in April 1999.<sup>4</sup>

This essay examines the role of the dispute over the Black Diaries in the repatriation of Casement's body, but it does not engage in the extensive debate over the diaries' authenticity. What matters here is that the controversy over the diaries continued for most of the twentieth century, as it displayed the power of sexual orientation in defining political legitimacy in Ireland and Britain. While the Irish and British governments disputed the location of Casement's remains, they shared in the condemnation of his alleged homosexuality as immoral deviance. As I demonstrate below, Irish officials were so wary of authenticating Casement's homosexuality that they chose to repatriate his remains while leaving the Black Diaries in England in the control of the British government.

While sexual politics influenced disputes over Casement's remains, the course and pace of official negotiations were primarily determined by changes in the sovereign and economic relations between Ireland and Britain between 1916 and 1965. Like a touchstone, the issue of Casement's remains was revisited at the highest levels of government during periods of important transition in Anglo-Irish relations. Officials discussed the repatriation of Casement's remains as de Valera began to increase the Irish Free State's autonomy from Britain through legislation in the 1930s. Casement again resurfaced in the 1950s in the context of disputes over the terms of the independence of the Republic of Ireland, established in 1949. Subsequently, the Irish and British governments used Casement's remains to mark a new era of economic cooperation in opposition to the European Economic Community (E.E.C.) in the 1960s. Throughout these decades, Casement was an uncertain symbol of the Irish nation, and his reburial in Dublin, rather than at Murlough Bay, effectively misrepresented his vision of an independent and united Ireland.

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The enduring mystique of Casement lies in his dual existence as a politico-sectarian "everyman" and an outsider.<sup>5</sup> He was born at Sandycove, near Dublin, in 1864, to a Protestant father and a Catholic mother. Following the deaths of both his parents when he was a boy, Casement

<sup>4</sup>Toward this end, Ahern commissioned the Royal Irish Academy to convene an international symposium on Casement in Dublin in May 2000.

<sup>5</sup>The standard biographies of Casement are Brian Inglis, *Roger Casement* (London, 1973); B. L. Reid, *The Lives of Roger Casement* (New Haven, Conn., 1976).

moved north to live with his father's family in Ballycastle, County Antrim, where he grew up as a Protestant in a predominantly Protestant community. The young Casement became fascinated by stories of Africa, and in 1883 he traveled to the Congo as an employee of the shipping firm, Elder Dempster. He spent most of the next twenty years in West and central Africa, working as a jack-of-all-trades and, finally, as a British consular official. He became interested in the humanitarian politics of empire in the mid-1890s and later wrote a widely publicized report about labor exploitation and atrocities in the Congo Free State, which was published as a parliamentary white paper in February 1904.<sup>6</sup> After a brief leave from the Foreign Office, Casement took up consular posts in South America, rising to the position of Consul-General at Rio de Janeiro in 1908. In this capacity, he wrote another widely publicized and controversial report about labor exploitation and atrocities in the Putumayo River basin.<sup>7</sup> Following this second report, he was knighted in 1911, and he then retired from the consular service on a pension in August 1913.

In the course of Casement's distinguished service to Great Britain, he had developed misgivings about the British Empire and, specifically, Britain's exploitation of Ireland. One might attribute this alienation to Casement's growing interest in Irish cultural nationalism, and especially the language movement, in which he dabbled and to which he made considerable donations after 1904.<sup>8</sup> It also appears that Casement's involvement in advocating the property rights of Africans against imperi-

<sup>6</sup> For Casement's early involvement in humanitarian politics, see the following letter to the secretary of the Aborigines' Protection Society: Roger Casement, from Old Calabar, West Africa, to H. R. Fox Bourne, 7 February 1894, British Library, London, Add. MS 46912. For his subsequent report on the Congo Free State, see Roger Casement, "Correspondence and Report from his Majesty's Consul at Boma Respecting the Administration of the Independent State of the Congo," *Accounts and Papers of the British Parliament*, 1904, vol. 62, Cd. 1933. For broader discussions of Casement's participation in the Congo reform campaign, and especially the work of the Congo Reform Association (1904–13), see Kevin Patrick Grant, "'A Civilised Savagery': British Humanitarian Politics and European Imperialism in Africa, 1884–1926" (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1997); William Roger Louis, "Roger Casement and the Congo," *Journal of African History* 5, no. 1 (1964): 99–120.

<sup>7</sup> Seamas O Siochain, "Roger Casement, Ethnography, and the Putumayo," *Eire-Ireland* 29, no. 2 (1995): 29–41; Michael Taussig, "Culture of Terror—Space of Death: Roger Casement's Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26 (July 1984): 467–97.

<sup>8</sup> See Casement's correspondence with Douglas Hyde (1904–13), National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Casement Papers (hereafter Casement), MS 13,073. Although Casement's colleagues at the Foreign Office were unaware of his growing interest in the Gaelic language movement, this was no mystery to his personal friends, such as Alice Stopford Green. See Alice S. Green to E. D. Morel, 12 February 1906, British Library of Political and Economic Science, London School of Economics, E. D. Morel Collection, F8, File 72.

alist regimes informed his views on the experience of the Irish peasantry under British colonization. Casement wrote to his humanitarian ally in the Congo reform campaign, Alfred Emmott, M.P., in November 1906: "I . . . hope Ireland is really going to have some big change in administration carried thro'. That is the most vital problem, I am convinced, before the British Empire. If that Empire cannot permit one small fragment, representing the 100th part only of its potential strength, to arrange its own island affairs after the minds of its own people, then that Empire is a sham—and is foredoomed to entire dissolution."<sup>9</sup>

Casement's nationalism took a militant turn during the Great War in 1914, when he traveled to Germany and attempted to enlist Irish prisoners of war in an Irish brigade to return to Ireland and fight the British. He also took part in negotiating with Germany to provide soldiers and arms for a rebellion in Ireland on Easter 1916.<sup>10</sup> Casement was apprehended by the Royal Irish Constabulary after he disembarked from a German U-boat at Banna Strand in County Kerry on 20 April 1916, just days before the Easter Rising commenced and quickly collapsed under superior British force.

A controversial trial ensued in which Casement was convicted of high treason. Although Herbert Asquith's Liberal government was certain of Casement's guilt, it hesitated to execute him and sought a legal means to commute his sentence. In order to understand the British government's reluctance to execute Casement and its motives for subsequently defaming Casement, one must consider his trial in the broader context of the Great War. Casement had been convicted of treason on 29 June, just two days before British and Irish infantry at the Somme climbed out of their trenches and marched forward into no-man's-land, suffering nearly sixty thousand casualties on that single day under German machine-gun fire. In the summer of 1916, the Asquith government was confronting crises of logistics and national morale, and the Easter Rising had raised the specter of rebellion in Ireland even as the British began to consider imposing conscription on the Irish populace. Under these circumstances, the British government wished to avoid making Casement into a political martyr, particularly in view of Irish nationalists' resentment over the recent executions of fifteen participants in the Easter Rising. Moreover, the government was attempting to draw the United States into the war, and officials were concerned that Casement's death would alienate the influential Irish-American community.

<sup>9</sup> Casement to Alfred Emmott, 12 November 1906, Nuffield College Library, Oxford, Alfred Emmott Papers, sec. 2, MSS Emmott 3.

<sup>10</sup> Reinhard Doerries, *Sir Roger Casement in Imperial Germany, 1914–1916* (Dublin, 1998).

The government possessed information about Casement's sexuality with which it hoped to defame Casement and possibly extort him to disclaim the politics of his rebellion. Police investigators had obtained a set of diaries from Casement's last known address in London, diaries that provided a graphic chronicle of Casement's sexual relations with numerous men.<sup>11</sup> These diaries were placed under the control of the Home Office, which used them to undermine Casement's status as a political martyr by portraying him as immoral and insane.

The decades preceding Casement's trial had witnessed remarkable public debates over sexual orientation. The term "homosexual" gained currency in Britain after the early 1890s, and homosexuals had been commonly labeled in both law and medicine as "deviant" and mentally deranged.<sup>12</sup> Popular condemnation of homosexuality in Ireland was driven by the Catholic Church, while Britain's hostility toward homosexuals had taken a secular turn in the form of parliamentary legislation. The Labouchère Amendment to the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 had outlawed virtually all forms of sexual relations between men, expanding on the previous law against sodomy, or "buggery." This amendment was the product of vociferous debates over prostitution, and its provisions were later augmented by the Vagrancy Act of 1898, with its strictures against solicitation. The vilification of "buggery" had then been placed firmly in the public eye in 1895 by the trials of Oscar Wilde, whose downfall was an ominous precursor of Casement's experience twenty years later.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, both Wilde and Casement faced examination in court by Edward Carson, a distinguished barrister who, by 1916, had become a leader of militant unionists in Ulster.

The Home Office secretary, Herbert Samuel, was ultimately responsible for the policy of defaming Casement on the basis of the Black Diaries.<sup>14</sup> The Home Office did not release the diaries to the general public, for reasons discussed below, but instead displayed them privately to journalists and other leaders of public opinion and, especially, to Casement's supporters. Through this selective display of the diaries, the Home

<sup>11</sup> The precise manner in which the diaries were obtained has been disputed. See Mitchell, *The Amazon Journal*, pp. 15–40. This issue might be resolved by Special Branch files that are currently under review for release to the Public Records Office (PRO).

<sup>12</sup> Ed Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side* (New York, 1993), p. 9; Jeffrey Weeks, *Coming Out: Homosexual Politics in Britain from the Nineteenth Century to the Present* (London, 1990), pp. 2–6.

<sup>13</sup> See Cohen, *Talk on the Wilde Side*.

<sup>14</sup> Regarding the home secretary, Herbert Samuel, it is noteworthy that he was an early parliamentary supporter of the Congo reform campaign. He took an interest in this cause after reading Casement's report in 1904 (House of Lords Record Office, London, Herbert Samuel Papers, A/22, 1904 Diary).

Office thus established Casement's homosexuality as an open secret. Henry Nevinson, a well-known journalist and an ally of Casement's, protested in the *Manchester Guardian* of 25 July 1916: "It is common knowledge that insinuations against Casement's private character have been passing from mouth to mouth. These insinuations have no bearing on the charge of which he is convicted."<sup>15</sup> As Nevinson was aware, these insinuations did have direct bearing on Casement's potential status as a political martyr, which was the government's primary concern.

There are two reasons why the government did not release the Black Diaries to the public. First, the Home Office wanted to avoid a debate over the diaries' authenticity.<sup>16</sup> British officials could more easily limit controversy over the authenticity of the Black Diaries by restricting firsthand knowledge of the diaries' very existence and relying on the insidious power of rumor. Second, as observed above, Casement's sexuality had no legal bearing on his trial or his sentencing, so the government could not raise this issue in public without risking conflict with its own rule of law.

Having initiated public rumors about Casement's moral deviance and mental instability through the selective, private display of the Black Diaries, the British government informed Casement's counsel that it might commute Casement's sentence to life imprisonment if he declared himself to be insane. This declaration would have enabled the government to avoid Casement's martyrdom on the ground that his rebellion was not political, but psychotic. As Casement was aware, the Home Office had already used the diaries to persuade a number of his supporters that he was deranged.<sup>17</sup> Regardless, Casement's counsel refused the in-

<sup>15</sup> Henry Nevinson, *Last Changes, Last Chances* (London, 1928), p. 115. Nevinson recalled that the Home Office circulated copies of the diaries among members of the London press and among leaders of society (p. 114). He further believed that the allegation of homosexuality was decisive in sealing Casement's death sentence (pp. 114–16).

<sup>16</sup> "The Casement Case," PRO, CAB 37/151/35, p. 5. Anglo-Irish politics had already been thrown into turmoil over a case of forgery, when in 1887 *The Times* published a facsimile of a letter signed by Charles Stewart Parnell, purportedly conveying Parnell's support for the Phoenix Park murders of 1882. A government committee confirmed that the letter was a forgery in 1890. See F. S. L. Lyons, *Charles Stewart Parnell* (London, 1977).

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., the observations of the Reverend John Harris, a close ally of Casement in the Congo reform campaign and the current secretary of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society. Following Casement's conviction for high treason, Harris took a leading role in organizing petitions to commute Casement's death sentence, and he adamantly rejected the rumors of Casement's sexual deviance. He wrote to William Cadbury, another of Casement's supporters: "The difficulty is that this revolting rumour has gained such wide credence and is declared to be based on such conclusive evidence that most of our friends are afraid to touch the question." See John Harris to William Cadbury, 14 July 1916, Archive of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society, Rhodes House, Oxford (hereafter Anti-Slavery), D3/14.



sanity plea, and, after a series of failed appeals, Casement was hanged at Pentonville Prison on 3 August 1916.

In the days preceding his execution, Casement had converted to Catholicism. As he attended to the salvation of his soul, he also considered the disposal of his body and asked his family to bury his remains in Ireland. "Don't let me lie here in this dreadful place," he implored his cousin, Gertrude Bannister, at their last meeting. "Take my body back with you and let it lie in the old churchyard in Murlough Bay."<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, Casement's solicitor, George Gavan Duffy, applied to the Home Office to retrieve the body for burial by the family in Antrim.

The government never seriously considered the family's request to bury Casement's remains. The government's opposition was provoked by Casement's request to be buried in Ulster, where unionists had formed the Ulster Volunteer Force in 1913 to defend their political ties to Britain against Irish "Home Rule" and the militant republicanism that Casement had advocated. The government intended to bury Casement's body in England to avoid a violent unionist backlash against a nationalist spectacle of mourning and protest in their midst. In attempting to legitimize this expedient policy, the government invoked a specious reading of the letter of the law.

Duffy's request was denied by Sir Ernley Blackwell, legal assistant under-secretary at the Home Office, on behalf of the home secretary, Herbert Samuel.<sup>19</sup> Blackwell wrote, "I am directed by the Secretary to refer you to section 6 of the Capital Punishment Amendment Act 1868 which provides that the body of every offender executed shall be buried within the walls of the prison within which judgment of death is executed on him."<sup>20</sup> Duffy's reply warrants extensive quotation, as his counterargument would later lie at the crux of debates over Casement's remains. "I most respectfully dissent from this view inasmuch as that Act has

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Sir Ernley Blackwell subsequently called Harris into the Home Office to view the diaries as an emissary of the archbishop of Canterbury, who had submitted an appeal on Casement's behalf to the home secretary. Harris was convinced of the diaries' authenticity and persuaded the archbishop to withdraw his support for Casement. Harris commented to another of Casement's supporters, Lord Cromer, "I am strongly of the opinion that the evidence shows very serious mental disorder, probably not unconnected with tropical disease." (See Harris to Lord Cromer, 26 July 1916, Anti-Slavery, D3/13.)

<sup>18</sup> Inglis, *Roger Casement*, p. 385.

<sup>19</sup> McDiarmid, "The Posthumous Life," incorrectly identifies Blackwell as "legal advisor to the Foreign Office" (p. 127). This error is significant because the Foreign Office did not play a part in Casement's trial or in the burial of his remains. The prime minister and cabinet relied on the Home Office for guidance throughout this controversy, though the Commonwealth Relations Office would play a secondary role in offering legal advice after 1953.

<sup>20</sup> E. Blackwell to G. Gavan Duffy, 3 August 1916, Casement, MS 13,088.

always been considered to apply to cases of murder and none other, and the principal section of the Act (Section 2) as to carrying out of judgement of death is expressly confined to murder. . . . The relatives of Roger Casement consider that a grievous wrong has been done to them, since it is apparent that the question of burial within the prison walls has never been considered by the Home Secretary otherwise than in connection with a Statute which they are advised has no application.”<sup>21</sup> As Duffy drafted this response, Casement’s remains already lay buried in the Pentonville prison yard.

There were some persons who supported Casement to the proverbial end and thereafter, though there is no clear evidence that any of his leading advocates believed the allegations of his homosexuality. As in the cases of most small pressure groups, with their unstable memberships, ephemeral literature, and poorly preserved records, it is difficult to reconstruct the activities of the private citizens who devoted themselves to securing the return of Casement’s body to Ireland. Gertrude Bannister, Casement’s cousin, renewed her appeals for the body in 1931 after she heard rumors that Pentonville Prison was to be demolished. She directed her appeals to various British officials, and although she found the prime minister, James Ramsay MacDonald, to be receptive, she was disappointed by the summary rejection of her request by the home secretary, J. R. Clynes.<sup>22</sup>

The “Roger Casement Remains Repatriation Committee” (hereafter the Casement Repatriation Committee) was founded in 1934 in London by Gertrude Parry (who had since married and given up the name Bannister) and Sorcha MacDermott, a relative of Sean MacDermott, one of the leaders and martyrs of the Easter Rising.<sup>23</sup> The committee asserted a strong connection between Casement’s remains and the unresolved

<sup>21</sup> Gavan Duffy to Under-Secretary of State, 4 August 1916, Casement, MS 13,088.

<sup>22</sup> Anonymous, undated memorandum of Casement Repatriation Committee, Casement, MS 24,123. The style of this document is consistent with the correspondence of Sorcha MacDermott, the honorary secretary of the Roger Casement Remains Repatriation Committee. References to events within the document suggest that it was written in 1936. Prime Minister MacDonald might have been receptive to Bannister because of his role as chairman of the Parliamentary Congo Committee, which was established in the wake of the 1906 general election. In this capacity, MacDonald certainly became familiar with Casement’s work on the Congo and his role in the Congo reform campaign.

<sup>23</sup> The original officers of the Casement Repatriation Committee were Fintain Murphy, president; Padraig O’Boyle, vice-chairman; Miss K. O’Kelly and Miss R. Killen, honorary treasurers; Miss Sorcha MacDermott, honorary secretary; Mrs. Parry, Mrs. J. Dowling, Miss C. Sheehan, Rev. C. O’Callaghan, Garry Allingham, Frank Dunne, and Cliff Murphy, committee members. Sorcha MacDermott had become a member of the Roger Casement Sinn Fein Club in 1916, which had subsequently been transformed into a branch of Cumann na mBan, of which MacDermott was the honorary secretary. See the *Sunday Press*, “Casement’s Last Days Described” (3 August 1958).

claims of the Easter rebels to Irish independence.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the committee represented Casement as the embodiment of Irish cultural nationalism, recalling his support for the Gaelic League and overlooking his inability to speak or read Gaelic and his upbringing as a Protestant. The committee held weekly gatherings among themselves, published pamphlets, and sponsored public meetings, the largest of which took place in Hyde Park on Easter Sunday 1936, in cooperation with the Gaelic League and the Gaelic Athletic Association.<sup>25</sup>

The committee focused its rhetoric on defining Casement as a political actor rather than as a common criminal. According to the resolution of the meeting in Hyde Park, "Casement was not a criminal, neither being charged nor tried as a criminal but a political offender." Invoking Casement's commitment to Irish sovereignty, the resolution observed that the "British Government recognised the righteousness and justice of that work in which he was engaged by partially granting Ireland's claim to national freedom [under the aegis of the Irish Free State, established in 1922]." The government's "persistence in treating the remains of Roger Casement in the same way as those of common murderers can only be construed as bitter vindictiveness both against the memory of the martyred patriot and against his fellow-countrymen."<sup>26</sup>

To the dismay of the Casement Repatriation Committee, the Fianna Fáil government of the Irish Free State proved reluctant to join in their aggressive rhetoric, which connected Casement's repatriation to Ireland's sovereignty. While the committee identified Casement with the politics of the Easter Rising of 1916, the current Free State government had to cope with a new political environment, defined largely by the partition of Ireland. The British government had introduced the partition in principle under the Government of Ireland Act of 1920. At the conclusion of the Anglo-Irish War (1919–21), representatives of the Irish provisional government had accepted partition under the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of December 1921, which further laid the groundwork for the creation of the Irish Free State. The Boundary Commission had then fixed the current border in 1925, partitioning county Antrim and the other five northern counties of Ulster from the remaining twenty-six counties of Ireland.

Eamon de Valera, the leader of Fianna Fáil and the president of the

<sup>24</sup> The first president of the committee, Fintain Murphy, was a veteran of the Easter Rising.

<sup>25</sup> MacDermott was the honorary secretary of the Amusements Committee of the London Gaelic League. See the *Sunday Press*, "Casement's Last Days Described" (3 August 1958).

<sup>26</sup> Roger Casement Committee, Copy of Resolution of Easter Sunday, 1936, Casement, MS 13,089 (14).

Executive Council of the Irish Free State since 1932, was the only surviving leader of the Easter Rising and a man who had met and admired Casement.<sup>27</sup> Deirdre McMahon demonstrates that de Valera responded to a request by the executors of Casement's estate to investigate and possibly block an early proposal for a Hollywood movie about Casement's life.<sup>28</sup> Yet when the Casement Repatriation Committee lobbied for the return of Casement's body to Murlough Bay in March 1935, de Valera and Fianna Fáil delayed in replying for nine months. The party secretary finally explained in cryptic terms: "investigations were made as to the feasibility of carrying out the intentions of your Committee. Owing to certain vital circumstances it was found impossible to effect any re-interment."<sup>29</sup>

In January 1936, however, de Valera appealed privately to Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin for the return of Casement's remains to his family in Antrim. It is likely that he was prompted to make this appeal by debates over Casement in the press, which were sparked by the impending anniversary of Casement's death and an erroneous report that the British had agreed to turn over his body. Baldwin refused de Valera's request on the grounds that "the repatriation of Casement's remains, and above all, the publicity which would inevitably ensue, would be bound to lead to a recrudescence of controversy." Also, Baldwin noted that this action would "be a departure from our invariable practice," referring to the enforcement of the 1868 statute.<sup>30</sup>

De Valera let the matter drop, perhaps convinced that any further requests would be fruitless. It is more probable, however, that he perceived the repatriation of Casement's body as an issue that was incompatible with his political objectives at that time. After de Valera assumed

<sup>27</sup> De Valera had first encountered Casement in 1912, when Casement attended an Irish language summer school of which de Valera was the director. In the months after the Easter Rising, de Valera named his newborn son, Ruari (the Gaelic form of Roger), after Casement. In the following year, as a prisoner at Pentonville, de Valera had prayed over Casement's grave. See *Speeches and Statements by Eamon de Valera, 1917-73*, ed. Maurice Moynihan (Dublin, 1980), p. 603; Tim Pat Coogan, *Eamon de Valera* (New York, 1993), pp. 63, 683; the Earl of Longford and Thomas P. O'Neill, *Eamon de Valera* (Boston, 1971), p. 457.

<sup>28</sup> McMahon, "Roger Casement," p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Anonymous, undated memorandum of Casement Repatriation Committee, Casement, MS 24,123; Sorcha MacDermott, 9 December 1935, Casement, MS 24,122. In March 1935, Parry approached the Irish Free State commissioner in London, J. W. Dulanty, regarding the repatriation of Casement's remains. The commissioner asked Parry not to take further action while he made private inquiries. As nothing came of this, the committee sent a resolution to de Valera in May but received no reply and so sent a letter to the secretary of Fianna Fáil in September. In December they inquired again and received the above response.

<sup>30</sup> McMahon, "Roger Casement," p. 5; de Valera's appeal is also referred to in Seán Lemass, P.M., to Harold Macmillan, P.M., 18 April 1961, PRO, DO161/168.

the leadership of the Free State in 1932, he attempted to put off the issue of partition, seeing it as a threat to his efforts to establish greater autonomy—or “external association,” as he called it—for the southern twenty-six counties of Ireland.<sup>31</sup> The British government also wished to set aside the issue of partition in these years of economic depression. Consequently, one must consider the possibility that de Valera’s request to Baldwin was a formality that had been calculated to fail. In effectively postponing the discussion of Casement’s burial at Murlough Bay, de Valera signaled implicitly that he would postpone discussion of the partition. With Casement and the partition out of the way in early 1936, de Valera opened bilateral talks with the dominions secretary, Malcolm MacDonald, in the spring.<sup>32</sup>

Over the next two years, the Fianna Fáil government abolished the oath of allegiance to the British crown, stopped the payment of land annuities to Britain, gained control of the Free State’s naval bases, and restructured its legal and economic relations with Britain through the constitution of 1937 and the Anglo-Irish Trade Agreement of 1938. Meanwhile, de Valera made no move to challenge British sovereignty in Northern Ireland and even assuaged British fears of aggression by outlawing the Irish Republican Army at the outset of negotiations in June 1936. Given this gradualist approach to Ireland’s unification, de Valera was content to leave Casement’s body at Pentonville, rather than incite intractable conflicts in Ulster.

Casement’s disputed sexual orientation was, by contrast, an issue over which de Valera had far less control. Public debates in Ireland over the authenticity of Casement’s Black Diaries revived in 1936–37 in the light of the twentieth anniversary of Casement’s death. The prospect of a homosexual as a national martyr presented a dilemma to the Irish government, particularly given its strong identification with Catholicism. Since its creation in 1926, the Fianna Fáil party had been committed to social legislation that reflected Catholic values, and it recognized the “special position” of the Catholic Church in Ireland under Article 44 of the 1937 constitution. According to J. H. Whyte, “The years 1923–37 reveal, so far as religious values are concerned, a remarkable consensus in Irish society. There was overwhelming agreement that traditional Catholic values should be maintained.”<sup>33</sup> These values were more widely

<sup>31</sup> John Bowman, *De Valera and the Ulster Question, 1917–1973* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 112–18, 135–36.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 139–40.

<sup>33</sup> J. H. Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland, 1923–1979* (Dublin, 1980), p. 60. McDiarmid, “The Posthumous Life,” notes the most famous examples of the conservative social legislation of this period (p. 135).

contested than Whyte implies, and Lucy McDiarmid is surely correct in asserting that “the Casement controversy had become a site for Irish thinking about sexual behavior and . . . social legislation.”<sup>34</sup> Yet the controversies that McDiarmid illuminates did not threaten to change the views of the Irish Free State government toward Casement’s alleged homosexuality.

It is noteworthy that the Catholic Church itself had no grounds for opposing the reburial of Casement’s body in Ireland. Casement had been formally received into the church, following a confession and absolution, prior to his death. He had been buried at Pentonville Prison in the presence of a Catholic priest who had administered the requisite rites and ceremonies. Consequently, the allegations of Casement’s homosexuality were moot under the terms of church doctrine, though this fact does not mitigate the popular aversion to Casement’s deviance, an aversion promoted by Catholic values.

Aside from these religious issues, de Valera had reason to believe that the British would use the Black Diaries to embarrass him and undermine his political legitimacy as a statesman. British officials circulated copies of the Black Diaries to de Valera’s critics, and to the Irish ambassador in London, Con Cremin, after 1932.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, as de Valera was acutely aware of his role as a leading representative of Irish nationalism, he might have perceived that the deviance of a national martyr could be used to undermine the moral integrity of the nation’s identity and its political claims. Under these circumstances, de Valera and Fianna Fáil were forced to walk a fine line. On the one hand, the party’s paper, the *Irish Press*, published works that refuted the authenticity of the Black Diaries and hailed Casement as a national hero.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, de Valera declined to insist that the British return either Casement’s body or his diaries, as both posed irresolvable distractions from his immediate political goals.

In the year after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Trade Agreement in April 1938, the partition and Casement were overshadowed by the onset of the Second World War. De Valera pledged Ireland to neutrality, and yet the British government and the unionists in Northern Ireland

<sup>34</sup> McDiarmid, “The Posthumous Life,” p. 143.

<sup>35</sup> For example, Frank Macdermot had copies of the diaries in his possession in 1957. See Sir Gilbert Laithwaite, Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO), to Arthur W. Snelling, CRO, 14 October 1957, PRO, DO35/8029. Regarding Macdermot’s criticism of de Valera in the 1930s, see Bowman, *De Valera*, pp. 128–29.

<sup>36</sup> For example, William Maloney published “The Forged Casement Diaries” in serial form in the *Irish Press* in 1936–37, prompting Yeats’s poem, “Roger Casement,” in the *Irish Press* on 2 February 1937. See McDiarmid, “The Posthumous Life,” on the ensuing controversy.

worried about an Irish-German alliance and, especially, the possibility that Germany might gain access to the Free State's naval ports. Robert Fisk comments: "In Britain . . . the idea of German U-boats nestling beside the Irish coastline had been popularly held ever since Roger Casement stepped on Banna Strand, County Kerry, after being shipped to Ireland in a submarine."<sup>37</sup> Because of British concerns about national defense, and the readiness of unionists to play defense as their trump card in support of the partition, it was inconceivable that the memory of Casement would be negotiated at this time or in the several years of difficult postwar recovery.

The election of 1948 produced Ireland's first interparty government, which established the Republic of Ireland on Easter Monday 1949. Two years later, de Valera regained control of the government, now as Taoiseach, and resumed his gradualist approach to the partition. De Valera viewed the partition as an intractable problem, and, as John Bowman asserts, he had resigned himself to "a policy of patience and opportunism."<sup>38</sup> De Valera and Fianna Fáil were now prepared to make only "ritual gestures" toward the partition, and they accordingly used Casement as a ritual symbol.<sup>39</sup>

The controversy over Casement's remains did not abate with the independence of the southern twenty-six counties of Ireland in 1949—in fact, the remains subsequently embodied the shortcomings of Irish independence. Anglo-Irish relations remained locked in a colonial framework, manifested in the institutional structure of the British government's interactions with the Republic of Ireland. British external affairs were supposed to be administered by the Foreign Office, the Colonial Office, and the Commonwealth Relations Office (formerly known as the Dominions Office).<sup>40</sup> The Republic of Ireland should logically have been handled by the Foreign Office, but, according to F. M. G. Willson, "the British Government decided not to treat the new Republic as a foreign State, and left the Commonwealth Relations Office to conduct relations with it."<sup>41</sup> In negotiations over the specific issue of Casement's remains, the British Home Office continued to determine official policy. After

<sup>37</sup> Robert Fisk, *In Time of War: Ireland, Ulster and the Price of Neutrality, 1939–1945* (London, 1985), pp. 128–29.

<sup>38</sup> Bowman, *De Valera*, pp. 282–83.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 280–81; Also see R. Ryle Dwyer, "Eamon de Valera and the Partition Question," in *De Valera and His Times*, ed. John P. O'Carroll and John A. Murphy (Cork, 1983), pp. 88–89.

<sup>40</sup> The Dominions Office was renamed the Commonwealth Relations Office in July 1947.

<sup>41</sup> F. M. G. Willson, *The Organization of the British Central Government, 1914–1956* (London, 1957), p. 192.

1953, the Home Office began to seek legal opinions on Casement's remains from the legal branch of the Commonwealth Relations Office, known as the Constitutional Department. Thus, the British government treated Casement's remains, like the Republic of Ireland, as a colonial or—in view of the Home Office's role—a domestic issue.

Casement embodied, in part, the humiliation of the partition for Irish nationalists, and yet they lacked the power to repatriate Casement's body to Antrim, just as they were unable to seize the northern six counties of Ulster. De Valera did not intend to force the British government to settle the issue of Casement's remains, but he voiced his support for the repatriation of the remains in principle, thus conveying his support for the future reunification of Ireland. During de Valera's last years as Taoiseach (1951–54 and 1957–59), he was subjected to increasing pressure and public agitation from northern nationalists to act on the issue of partition. The Irish Republican Army renewed its campaigns against the government of Northern Ireland, and nationalists in the north requested representation in the Dáil, an idea that neither Fianna Fáil nor the British government supported.<sup>42</sup> It was in this atmosphere that Casement again resurfaced in official discussions.

On 10 June 1953, the British Embassy in Dublin informed the Commonwealth Relations Office, "You might like to be aware that there has been some revival of interest in the case of Roger Casement's bones."<sup>43</sup> The embassy submitted press clippings that reported a renewed campaign by the Roger Casement Remains Repatriation Committee, which had come under the energetic leadership of Herbert Mackey since the death of Gertrude Parry in 1950. The committee was planning to initiate legal action before the Queen's Bench in London in order to challenge the application of the criminal statute of 1868 to Casement's remains. For reasons that are not clear, this action was blocked in November 1953 by Colum Gavan Duffy, who had become an executor of Casement's estate on the death of his father, George Gavan Duffy, in 1951.<sup>44</sup> Mackey explained in a letter to the *Sunday Press* on 11 December 1960 that the committee was unable to take legal action without Duffy's permission. By this time, the committee had dwindled to a handful of members, and one must be careful not to exaggerate its influence in Britain. When, for example, Mackey had sent a telegram to Winston Churchill on his eighti-

<sup>42</sup> Bowman, *De Valera*, pp. 282–85.

<sup>43</sup> Letter from British Embassy to R. Walker, CRO, 10 June 1953, PRO, DO35/8069.

<sup>44</sup> According to McMahon, "Roger Casement," Duffy expressed concerns in 1959 that unauthorized individuals might attempt to exploit Casement's diaries for profit (p. 9). It is possible that Duffy similarly viewed the Casement Repatriation Committee as self-serving opportunists.



eth birthday in 1954, appealing for the return of Casement's body, the Home Office and the Commonwealth Relations Office decided not to dignify the appeal with a reply.<sup>45</sup>

Yet British officials in Dublin and London sensed throughout the 1950s that Casement's remains might soon become a stumbling block in Anglo-Irish relations. Officials in the British Embassy, the Commonwealth Relations Office, and the Home Office attempted to keep track of the many popular commemorations of Casement in these years. Just four days after the warning by the Dublin Embassy on 10 June 1953, Sir Roger Casement Park was opened in the Catholic neighborhood of West Belfast. Over the next several years, this and other locations became sites for annual celebrations of Casement and protests for the return of his remains.

The British Embassy reported in 1958: "The customary ceremonies were held here on 3rd August to celebrate the 42nd Anniversary of Sir Roger Casement's death." The ceremonies took place at several sites across Ireland, enacting the unification of the country through Casement's memorialization. There was a special mass in Dublin Castle, the Gaelic League laid a wreath at Banna Strand where Casement had disembarked from the U-Boat, another wreath was laid by family members and supporters at Casement's birthplace at Sandycove, and there were Gaelic athletics and dancing at Casement Park in Belfast. The largest commemoration ceremony took place at Murlough Bay in Antrim, where hundreds of people marched behind the tricolor and laid a wreath on behalf of the Casement Repatriation Committee. Meanwhile, in England, some two hundred members of Sinn Féin laid a wreath outside Pentonville Prison and called for the release of Casement's body.<sup>46</sup>

De Valera joined in these commemorations to a limited extent, but he resigned himself to ritual gestures rather than calls for immediate action. On 11 August 1953, the British Embassy reported press coverage of a ceremony on 2 August in Antrim, which de Valera had attended. The event was the unveiling of a plaque marking the site for Casement's grave at Murlough Bay. De Valera declared to a crowd of several thousand nationalists, "I am thrilled to stand on a spot so dear to Roger Casement. I hope his ashes will one day rest here."<sup>47</sup> De Valera then spoke in Irish, calling for wider use of the language, but he also emphasized that all inhabitants of the island were, first and foremost, Irishmen.

<sup>45</sup> Herbert Mackey to Winston Churchill, 27 November 1954, PRO, DO35/8029.

<sup>46</sup> G. D. Anderson, British Embassy, Dublin, to T. D. O'Leary, CRO, 6 August 1958, PRO, DO35/8029.

<sup>47</sup> Irish Republican Government Summary, British Embassy, Dublin, 11 August 1953, PRO, DO35/8029.

De Valera represented Casement as a unifying cultural icon rather than as a provocative symbol around which to rally support for the immediate political unification of Ireland.<sup>48</sup> De Valera found in Casement an exemplary case of national assimilation. Casement was, after all, a Protestant and a servant of the British crown who ultimately abandoned these callings for the Catholic Church and a Gaelic heritage. In propping up Casement as a cultural icon, de Valera was subtly deploying an assimilationist rhetoric that many unionists found just as threatening as the prospect of military invasion by the Republic of Ireland.

De Valera was careful to observe a distant horizon line for Ireland's unification, maintaining a diplomatic tone that contrasted sharply with the direct language of his fellow speaker at Murlough Bay, Sean MacBride. As a longtime supporter of the Irish Republican Army and an influential politician, MacBride had become increasingly frustrated by de Valera's reluctance to challenge Britain on the issue of the partition.<sup>49</sup> According to the *Irish Press*, "Mr. MacBride said it was fitting that the ultimate resting place for Casement's remains should be in Antrim, not only because it was in the glens that he grew up, but because it is in that portion of Ireland which is still not free. . . . The site of the grave will serve as a constant reminder of the task which has yet to be achieved."<sup>50</sup>

A local group calling itself the Casement Commemoration Committee proposed a resolution requesting the release of Casement's remains from Pentonville, and the crowd assented with a loud cheer. De Valera, MacBride, and others then walked to Drumnakill Old Cemetery, where, in the oratory of St. Mologe, Mackey of the Casement Repatriation Committee placed a plaque that read: "On this 2nd day of August, 1953, in the presence of a great hosting of Gaels, this spot was chosen to be the grave of the patriot, Roger Casement, executed by the British on the 3rd August, 1916."<sup>51</sup>

De Valera's use of ritual gestures toward the partition and Casement's remains was demonstrated again several weeks later, at a luncheon with Prime Minister Churchill on 16 September 1953. De Valera took this opportunity to raise the issue of the partition, which Churchill promptly dismissed. With this volatile subject foreclosed, de Valera then appealed on behalf of Casement's relatives in Northern Ireland for the

<sup>48</sup> Regarding de Valera's commitment to Gaelic over immediate unification, see Bowman, *De Valera*, pp. 294–95; Dwyer, "Eamon de Valera," p. 84.

<sup>49</sup> Bowman, *De Valera*, p. 282. MacBride had been the I.R.A. chief of staff in 1936–37. He established *Clann na Poblachta* in 1946 and had served as foreign minister in 1948–51.

<sup>50</sup> "Casement Hosting," *Irish Press* (3 August 1953).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

return of Casement's body. One might interpret this act as evidence of de Valera's persistence in challenging Churchill over the partition. It is more likely, however, that de Valera strategically settled the subject of the partition and only then used Casement's remains to register his ritual support for Irish unification in principle.

Churchill assured de Valera that he would look into the matter of Casement's remains, and he consulted with the home secretary, Sir David Maxwell Fyfe, on the same afternoon. Fyfe, one of the government's most vocal and aggressive critics of homosexuality, reminded Churchill of the evidence of Casement's homosexuality in the Black Diaries. At the same time, Home Office officials drafted a memorandum that argued, "The whole thing was inspired as a propaganda move on the part of the nationalist minority in Northern Ireland, and any return of the remains would be bound to lead to demonstrations."<sup>52</sup> Churchill was successfully dissuaded by both of these factors, but he now required a formal justification for refusing de Valera's request.

Records of the Commonwealth Relations Office indicate that British officials questioned seriously whether the government's initial, legal position under the 1868 statute would stand up to public scrutiny. In a memorandum to Churchill on 23 September 1953, Fyfe advised him to reject de Valera's request on the grounds that "the matter is essentially one for a uniform rule."<sup>53</sup> Churchill was to avoid the specific legal discourse through which Britain had criminalized Casement's political action, as this would incite debate and animosity over the sovereignty of the Republic of Ireland. Fyfe urged Churchill to gloss over the specific terms of the 1868 statute and simply to explain that no bodies had been released under this statute—which was true—and that an exception would raise complications. Second, Fyfe commented, "The removal of the body and the subsequent funeral would be the occasion of a public demonstration of a very undesirable character. . . . It would be likely to provoke criticism, and possibly active opposition, in some quarters in the United Kingdom. In Ireland it might lead to exploitation of Casement's memory as a hero and a martyr, which would hardly be welcome to the Government of Northern Ireland, where Casement's relatives live."<sup>54</sup>

In responding to de Valera, Churchill took the unusual step of writing a private letter that was hand delivered by an embassy official to

<sup>52</sup> "Secret" memo from J. J. S. Garneru to A. F. Morley (head of the Constitutional Department, CRO), 17 September 1953, PRO, DO35/8029.

<sup>53</sup> Maxwell Fyfe to Churchill, 23 September 1953, PRO, DO35/8029. Also see the minutes exchanged between Home Office officials in September and October 1953, PRO, DO35/8029.

<sup>54</sup> Fyfe to Churchill, 23 September 1953, PRO, DO35/8029.

de Valera's home. Churchill overlooked the Home Office strategy and stated, "I am sorry to tell you that we cannot comply with your request as the law on the subject is specific and binding. . . . Apart from these legal considerations I am sure that we should avoid the risk of reviving old controversies and reawakening the bitter memories of old differences."<sup>55</sup> De Valera responded, as the home secretary had anticipated, by refuting Churchill's implication that Casement's remains were covered by the terms of the 1868 statute for murderers. "With regard to the non-legal considerations you mention," de Valera continued, "I would argue in a contrary sense. . . . So long as Roger Casement's body remains within British prison walls . . . , so long will there be public resentment here at what must appear to be, at least, the unseemly obduracy of the British Government."<sup>56</sup>

The Irish government subsequently overlooked the issue of Casement's remains after de Valera fell from power in 1954, making way for John Costello's Second Inter-Party Government, which eventually ceded power back to de Valera in 1957. Several months into de Valera's final term as Taoiseach, on 9 October, the Irish ambassador in London, Con Cremin, approached the permanent under-secretary of state at the Commonwealth Relations Office, Sir Gilbert Laithwaite, regarding the return of Casement's remains. This was the first that Laithwaite had heard of the subject since assuming his post in early 1955. On making inquiries, he was surprised to encounter surreptitious claims about Casement's sexuality. The Irish journalist and politician, Frank MacDermot, a critic of de Valera, offered to show Laithwaite a copy of the diaries, but Laithwaite refused this opportunity. He commented to a colleague at the Commonwealth Relations Office, "Mr. Cremin said he, too, had seen the alleged diaries, but they were circulating only as a copy."<sup>57</sup>

Apart from the issue of Casement's sexuality, Laithwaite found that his legal advisors in the Commonwealth Relations Office and the Home Office wanted to substantiate their case on more conventional grounds. In response to Laithwaite's meeting with Cremin, the Commonwealth Relations Office generated a memorandum that summarized the debate over Casement's remains and outlined policy options. The memorandum, written by M. P. Preston, acknowledged that "the legal case might be open to challenge" and endorsed the proposal of the home secretary in 1953 to depart from legal arguments and emphasize "uniform rule." Moreover, Preston commented that the removal of the body from Penton-

<sup>55</sup> Churchill to Eamon de Valera, 14 October 1953, PRO, DO35/8029.

<sup>56</sup> De Valera to Churchill, 23 October 1953, PRO, DO35/8029.

<sup>57</sup> Laithwaite to Snelling, 14 October 1957, PRO, DO35/8029.

ville Prison and the funeral would be “the occasion of undesirable public demonstration. (This is almost certainly true in the Casement case, particularly if the relatives reinterred the remains in the ‘empty grave’ in County Antrim (Northern Ireland) [*sic*]).” Significantly, at least within these depths of the government bureaucracy, Preston concluded by noting that if British officials were to seek further legal advice on this matter, they should ask, “If Section 6 does *not* mean that the body must remain buried for all time, is there any other Act of Parliament which precludes the removal of the remains from the burial ground in the prison?” Also, Preston asked, “Does it lie within the power of the Home Secretary to authorise the removal of the remains of a body buried within the walls of a prison in accordance with Section 6 of the Capital Punishment Amendment Act 1868?”<sup>58</sup>

British officials debated briefly whether to exploit, rather than avoid, the issue of partition. Arthur Snelling, the superintending under-secretary of the Political Division at the Commonwealth Relations Office, sent a confidential memorandum to J. J. Nunn, a legal advisor at the Home Office, on 17 October 1957, suggesting a creative legal strategy should the Irish government opt to push the issue into the courts. Snelling explained: “It occurs to me that Laithwaite might also possibly hint that one of the preliminary questions a court of law would no doubt consider is what the *locus standi* of the applicants may be. It is difficult to see what *locus standi* the Irish Republican Government can have in this matter. If it is the case that Casement’s relatives live in Northern Ireland and that the family grave is in Northern Ireland presumably the only Government that could have any *locus standi* would be the Government of Northern Ireland.”<sup>59</sup>

Yet in the opinion of more influential policy makers, rumors of Casement’s sexual deviance were more effective than any other discursive weapons in neutralizing nationalist protest. Laithwaite remarked in a memorandum to the Commonwealth Relations Office that the issue of Casement’s sexuality had apparently rendered the Irish government ambivalent about actually retrieving the body.<sup>60</sup> In a minute of 26 August 1959, Laithwaite observed:

The Ambassador said that he had been rather surprised not to have had any instructions from his Government about the removal of Sir Roger Case-

<sup>58</sup> Memorandum from M. P. Preston, CRO, to Snelling, 11 October 1957, PRO, DO35/8029.

<sup>59</sup> Copy of confidential memorandum from Snelling to J. J. Nunn, Home Office, 17 October 1957, PRO, DO35/8029.

<sup>60</sup> Laithwaite memorandum of meeting with the Irish Ambassador, Con Cremin, 2 December 1957, PRO, DO35/8029.

ment's body to Ireland. In fact, he had heard nothing from them. I said that . . . if the general conclusion was going to be that the diaries were authentic and that Sir Roger Casement's moral character had to that extent been open to severe reproach, I could quite well imagine that people such as the Archbishop of Dublin and others would feel substantially less enthusiasm about the return of Sir Roger Casement's remains to Ireland. . . . The Ambassador said he was inclined to think that there might be something in this.<sup>61</sup>

As British officials discussed how to reframe their case against the reinterment of Casement's remains in Northern Ireland, advocates of his reinterment began reframing the politics of Casement's remains and his memorialization. The *Irish Times* of 8 August 1960 reported that, on the preceding Saturday, the Casement Repatriation Committee had held a ceremony to bless a plot for Casement's body in Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin. In 1916, Casement's sister, Mrs. Nina Newman, had reserved a plot for Casement at Glasnevin, but in 1959 it had been discovered that this plot had been filled by accident.<sup>62</sup> The new plot was marked by a marble stone, inscribed, "For Roger Casement, martyred in the cause of Irish freedom, 3rd August 1916." The committee explained that it still hoped that Casement would eventually be buried at Murlough Bay in Antrim, but it was now presenting Glasnevin as an alternative.<sup>63</sup> Glasnevin Cemetery was already sacred ground for Irish nationalists. It held the remains of numerous nationalist leaders, including the fifteen rebels of the Easter Rising who were executed before Casement in 1916. Casement was already popularly identified with the Easter martyrs, as one sees in William Butler Yeats's poem, "Sixteen Dead Men." Indeed, this new burial site would prove to be a decisive factor in enabling the Irish and British governments to shift Casement's memorialization away from the partition and into the broader tradition of the Easter Rising.

On the day after the blessing of Casement's new burial site, a commemoration mass was held for Casement in Dublin Castle, followed by a pilgrimage to Glasnevin Cemetery by a group including the Lord

<sup>61</sup> See "Extract" from Laithwaite's minute of 26 August 1959, no recipient specified, PRO, DO35/8029.

<sup>62</sup> Proinsias O Duinn, honorary secretary of the Casement Repatriation Committee, letter to *Irish Press* (3 April 1961).

<sup>63</sup> The ceremony was attended by Capt. Seamus MaCall, a cousin of Casement's, as well as representatives of the Repatriation Committee, the National Graves Association, the Benevolent Society of Irish Republican Adherents, New York, and the Easter Week Commemoration Committee of the Association of Irish Societies in New York. See "Franciscan's Tribute to Casement," *Irish Times* (8 August 1960); "At Blessing of Casement Plot," *Irish Press* (8 August 1960).

Mayor of Dublin, Mackey, and other representatives of the Casement Repatriation Committee. Simultaneously, according to the *Irish Press*, “Hundreds of people from all over Ireland gathered around an empty grave on the rocky shore of Murlough Bay, Co. Antrim . . . to honour Roger Casement. Beneath the Tricolor the crowd recited a decade of the Rosary. Wreaths were laid by Mr. James McCaughan, for the Ballycastle Commemoration Committee, and by Mr. Sean Stinson, secretary of the Antrim County Board, for the G.A.A. [Gaelic Athletic Association]. Afterwards, a harpist and two Uilleann pipers played the National Anthem and a Lament.”<sup>64</sup> As in years past, Ireland was once more united in commemorating Casement.

Significantly, this memorialized Casement was heterosexual, as Mackey later argued in his book, *Roger Casement: The Forged Diaries*.<sup>65</sup> The debate over Casement’s sexuality had revived in 1959, with the long-anticipated publication of *The Black Diaries: An Account of Casement’s Life and Times with a Collection of His Diaries and Writings* by Peter Singleton-Gates and Maurice Girodias.<sup>66</sup> Singleton-Gates had been working as a journalist in London when he acquired copies of the diaries from a British official in 1922. Now, with the publication of the diaries finally in the offing, a dialogue opened between the Irish and British governments over whether to give the diaries to the Republic of Ireland. In the end, the Fianna Fáil government of Seán Lemass chose to forgo responsibility for the disposal and authentication of the diaries. As a compromise, it was announced in July 1959 that the diaries would be deposited at the Public Record Office in England, where they would be made available to reputable scholars at the discretion of the archivists.<sup>67</sup>

In this final act of negotiation over Casement’s diaries, the Irish and British governments displayed their common assumptions regarding the proper sexual orientation of a national symbol. The British had used the diaries not only to defame Casement but also to undermine the legitimacy of Ireland’s political representatives. Regardless, the Lemass government chose to leave the diaries in British hands rather than assume responsibility for authenticating the homosexuality of a national martyr. In choosing to leave the diaries abroad, the Irish government might have hoped to disassociate the diaries from Casement’s body on its eventual return to Ireland. Yet Britain still controlled the disputed evidence of Casement’s homosexuality, and this evidence remained threatening because both

<sup>64</sup> “Casement Honoured at Murlough Bay,” *Irish Press* (8 August 1960).

<sup>65</sup> Herbert O. Mackey, *Roger Casement: The Forged Diaries* (Dublin, 1966).

<sup>66</sup> Peter Singleton-Gates and Maurice Girodias, *The Black Diaries: An Account of Casement’s Life and Times with a Collection of His Diaries and Writings* (Paris, 1959).

<sup>67</sup> McMahan, “Roger Casement,” p. 9.

governments agreed that it chronicled a moral degeneracy that any sovereign nation should discourage and conceal.

Although the location of Casement's diaries was settled in 1959, the Conservative government of Harold Macmillan continued to reject Lemass's requests for Casement's body.<sup>68</sup> Lemass was not, however, dissuaded from resolving this long-standing dispute in Anglo-Irish relations. As in the case of his predecessor, de Valera, Lemass's approach to Casement's remains must be seen in relation to his political circumstances and his larger goals. In the early 1960s, Lemass wanted to improve the economic relations between Ireland and Britain, which required undoing de Valera's work of thirty years earlier. In 1963, both countries faced the prospect of economic isolation. Charles de Gaulle had vetoed Britain's membership in the European Economic Community (E.E.C.), while Lemass had suspended the Republic of Ireland's move toward the E.E.C. In March 1964, Lemass called for the strengthening of economic ties between Ireland and Great Britain, and two months later he gave assurances to the Macmillan government that he would support the repatriation of Casement's body to the Republic of Ireland.<sup>69</sup>

On taking power in October 1964, the Labour government of Harold Wilson was also intent on improving Anglo-Irish relations. Wilson recalls in his memoirs, "The refusal to return [Casement's] body had soured Anglo-Irish relations for almost half a century and I felt the time had come for us to set it right."<sup>70</sup> More specifically, Casement's repatriation was a gesture of good will, which was calculated to set the stage for economic negotiations. Furthermore, this gesture reflected Wilson's progressive views on sexual orientation; views that would prompt him to decriminalize homosexuality in Britain under the Sexual Offences Act of 1967. In response to an appeal by Lemass in November 1964, Wilson stated that he and his cabinet were considering whether to hand over Casement's remains to the Irish government.<sup>71</sup>

At the cabinet meeting of 14 January 1965, the home secretary, Sir Frank Soskice, noted that he did not see any legal objections to this course of action. "On the other hand it was known that Sir Roger Casement had expressed a wish to be buried in Northern Ireland. This would be wholly unacceptable to the Government of Northern Ireland." After further discussion, the cabinet agreed that Casement's remains should be given to the Republic of Ireland with the understanding that they would

<sup>68</sup> For a summary of these requests, see *ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

<sup>69</sup> Paul Bew and Henry Patterson, *Seán Lemass and the Making of Modern Ireland, 1945–1966* (Dublin, 1982), p. 174.

<sup>70</sup> Harold Wilson, *A Personal Record* (Boston, 1971), p. 75.

<sup>71</sup> McMahon, "Roger Casement," p. 10.



be reinterred in its territory.<sup>72</sup> Wilson indicated to the Irish government on the same day that he was open to the idea of repatriating Casement's body, and the details were settled with the Irish minister for external affairs, Frank Aiken, on the Sunday morning following the state funeral of Churchill.

On 23 February 1965, Prime Minister Wilson and Taoiseach Lemass announced in the House of Commons and the Dáil, respectively, that Britain would turn over Casement's remains to the Republic of Ireland, noting that the Irish government would inter the remains at Glasnevin Cemetery.<sup>73</sup> The remains were flown on the same day to Dublin, where they lay in state for four days at the Garrison Church of the Sacred Heart, Arbour Hill. Sixty-five thousand people viewed the coffin, and crowds lined the streets as the body was moved to the Pro-Cathedral, where the funeral was to be held. To the music of Handel's "Dead March," the coffin was borne on a gun carriage, draped in the tricolor, and towed by a Land Rover that was preceded by six vehicles carrying wreaths and flowers. An army escort of 450 followed with arms reversed. Accompanying the procession were cars bearing President de Valera, Taoiseach Lemass, and the only family members in attendance: two of Casement's nieces flown in by the Irish government from Australia.<sup>74</sup> The procession was met at the cathedral by one thousand members of the old Irish Republican Army and Cumann na mBan. After the funeral, in showers of snow and sleet, the cortege passed slowly through the streets of Dublin to Glasnevin Cemetery. De Valera gave a graveside oration, declaring with reference to Ulster: "And as we stand here, each one of us will resolve that we shall do everything to work so that the people of that province and ourselves may be united in co-operation, that we will be all vieing with each other in loving this land for which so many sacrifices have been made throughout the centuries." Among the many tributes and wreaths laid at the grave was a sod of turf from the high headland over Murlough Bay.<sup>75</sup>

In the month after Casement's burial, the Irish and British governments began negotiations for a new trade agreement, which was signed in December 1965. Reflecting on Casement's repatriation to Ireland, Wilson observes in his memoirs: "There was no doubt that this action, followed

<sup>72</sup> Minutes of cabinet meeting, 14 January 1965, PRO, CAB128/39, pt. 1.

<sup>73</sup> *Parliamentary Debates*, 5th ser., 1964–65, vol. 707, 23 February 1965, pp. 231–32.

<sup>74</sup> These women were the daughters of Casement's older brother, Charles (Reid, *The Lives of Roger Casement*, p. 450).

<sup>75</sup> For accounts of the funeral and burial, see the *Irish Times* of 1 and 2 March 1965. Also see *The Times*, "Crowds Pay Homage to Roger Casement" (1 March 1965), "A Stirring Moment at Casement Funeral" (2 March 1965).

by the much closer trade relations—including the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Area Agreement—developed later in the year, did a great deal to improve friendship between the two countries. Indeed almost throughout our period of office they remained at the best level known since the Government of Ireland Act nearly half a century earlier.”<sup>76</sup>

The significance of the repatriation of Casement’s remains cannot, however, be reduced to that of an economic bargaining chip. Casement’s body was returned to Ireland in the year between the one hundredth anniversary of his birth and the fiftieth anniversary of his death. It appears to have gone unnoticed that the body was repatriated in the year of the fortieth anniversary of the final determination of the boundary of Ireland’s partition. This is fitting, as the stalemate over the location of Casement’s body had its origin in Anglo-Irish colonial conflict and Ireland’s politico-sectarian divide. The decision of the Lemass government to bury Casement in the Republic of Ireland was a clear, symbolic submission to the partition and British postcolonial domination.

Both the Irish and British governments had an interest in stabilizing the memorialization of Casement, as neither intended to revisit the issue of the partition in the 1960s. The Irish government attempted to subsume Casement within the heroic tradition of the Easter Rising by burying him with military honors among the rebel martyrs at Glasnevin Cemetery. This identification with the Easter Rising suited British interests, as it promised to remove Casement’s body from the politics of the partition and fix his memory within a legend even larger than his own. And yet Casement continues to be a memory in motion. His historical persona has been arguably rendered unstable by the tension between his homosexuality and the heterosexual prejudices of Irish nationalism. There is also, perhaps, a sense that the many sides of Casement offer shifting perspectives on Ireland’s future, as his body moves slowly toward Murlough Bay.

<sup>76</sup> Wilson, *A Personal Record*, p. 75.