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QUEER TREASONS: HOMOSEXUALITY AND IRISH NATIONAL IDENTITY

Abstract

Queer Treasons suggests how and why homosexuality has been placed outside the limited discourse of what constitutes 'Irishness.' I argue that, since the early part of the twentieth century, homosexuality has been represented as 'foreign' to nationalisms in Ireland, particularly when the borders of the nation are perceived to be under threat. I further suggest that the threat of homosexuals, as represented in Irish political discourse, points more generally toward an instability in the discourses of nation itself.

Keywords

homosexuality; queer; nation; Irish identity; borders; representation; political discourse

Independence is not a word which can be used as an exorcism.

(Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*: 251)

Introduction

SEXUALITY AND, IN particular, homosexuality has occupied an uncomfortable place in the country which counts among its citizens Oscar Wilde, Roger Casement, Eva Gore-Booth and Kate O'Brien. 'Place' is a metaphor that I use

consciously, for homosexuality has troubled the notion of nationalism and 'Irishness', concepts which themselves are constructed with particular attention to space and place as well as history and narrative. Like gender, sexuality does not confine itself within the borders. Any identity category potentially troubles the national border, but homosexuality in particular threatens the stability of the narrative of Nation: the very instability and specific historical contingency of the definition of homosexuality makes the category more fluid than most, and thus brings into question the fixity and coherence of all identity categories. Both the discourses of European colonialism, which according to Ashis Nandy (1983) encourages a response of 'hypermasculinity' on the part of the colonized, and of orthodox Catholicism, which historically has demonized homosexuality, distance themselves from the homosexual as a particularly troubling figure. And homosexuality does not fit neatly within the discourse of bourgeois nationalism, since it threatens the reproduction of the heterosexual familist narrative of the Nation/State. As David Lloyd (1993) has argued, 'what is at issue here is effectively a matter of *verisimilitude*: which narrative of "Irishness" comes to seem self-evident, normative, truthful. Control of narratives is a crucial function of the state apparatus since its political and legal frameworks can only gain consent if the tale they tell monopolizes the field of probabilities' (1993: 6). The work both of the colonial and the new Irish State has been, until very recently, to exclude homosexuality from that field. The 1937 Irish Constitution is the outcome of that exclusion, an unparalleled legal entrenchment of heterosexist patriarchy and the State's right to enforce it.

This essay affirms Lloyd's argument that the 'recovery and interpretation of . . . occluded practices' is the only way to expand 'the field of possibility for radical democracy' (1993: 7). I begin this essay with an analysis of Kieran Rose's pamphlet, *Diverse Communities: The Evolution of Lesbian and Gay Politics in Ireland* (1994). Rose's history and analysis of the gay rights movement in Ireland attempts to reclaim nationalism as liberatory without explicitly acknowledging the history of nationalist homophobia. Using Rose as a starting point, I discuss two cases of twentieth century Irish nationalist homophobia: the treason trial and concurrent circulation of the personal diaries of Roger Casement, and the continuing controversy over the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization's repeated requests to march in the New York City St Patrick's Day parade. What emerges is a picture of the homosexual as a free-floating agent who personifies the breakdown of national borders, particularly when those within the borders believe themselves to be under siege. With this in mind, I conclude with a look at the future of queer¹ politics in both the Republic and the North.

Competing traditions

In the last 20 years, the political support of gays and lesbians in Ireland has increased at an impressive rate. The final step in the decriminalization of homosexuality in

June 1993 was, according to Kieran Rose, ‘enthusiastically welcomed in both Houses of the Oireachtas’ (1994). Rose notes further that ‘the Government . . . chose the more radical option, which, in the words of the leaked memo, “would in effect equate, for the purposes of the law, homosexual and heterosexual behaviour”’ (1994: 2). This Bill was the result of over 20 years of gay rights advocacy, advocacy which, in part, linked itself to the feminist movement for support and modeling (1994: 11).

Rose’s pamphlet argues that the radical changes in Irish official policy towards gays and lesbians are founded in ‘positive traditional Irish values arising from the anti-colonial struggle reinvigorated and amplified by the new social, cultural and economic influences of the 1960s onwards’ (1994: 3). Rose surprisingly invokes Irish traditionalism as the basis for social change, surprising especially given the frequency with which ‘traditional Irish values’ have been the measure against which Irish conservative nationalists have held contemporary Irish culture and found it wanting. He continues:

The perception of the Irish people as irredemiably [*sic*] ‘backward’ on sexual and social issues was an idea that GLEN [Gay and Lesbian Equality Network] refused to accept. While there are obvious contradictions in Irish attitudes, GLEN knew that there was a tradition of tolerance, which was benign, and based on a belief in fairness and justice. GLEN knew that there were real and positive traditional Irish values, arising from the struggle against colonialism and for civil, religious and economic rights, which could be activated, and the demand for equality was attuned to this heritage.

(Rose, 1994: 4)

The equation of ‘tolerance’, ‘fairness’ and ‘justice’ with traditional Irish ‘values’ and ‘heritage’ superimposes often-conflicting self-descriptive narratives of Irish nationalism. Rose’s rhetorical strategy effectively harnesses those narratives together by embracing a common link: a *telos* of liberation. Rose notes but smooths over references to Irish nationalist homophobia, returning consistently to the claim that nationalist homophobia is a legacy of British colonialism. This claim is a compelling one, potentially echoing Ashis Nandy’s claims that nationalist movements respond to colonialism within the discursive limits set by the colonizer. Rose’s references to the repeated, if not wholly consistent, homophobia or at least heterosexism of nationalist as well as labour organizations suggests that, at its worst, Irish nationalism shares a patriarchal, repressive logic with the colonizers it ostensibly opposes.

Rose never overtly concedes this, however, nor does he hold nationalism accountable for perpetuating an oppressive system. Rose does state that ‘the late-nineteenth century also saw a deepening hostility towards homosexuality from what Lynne Segal (1990) has described as “the late-Victorian storm-troopers of a new aggressive masculinity”’ (1994: 6). He then notes Jeffrey Weeks’ explanation

of the homosexual purges of the 1880s and the 1885 legislation criminalizing sexual practices between men as part of the general British concern with 'imperialism and national decline' (1994: 6), and follows this comment directly with mention of a disturbing period in Irish nationalist history:

The Irish nationalist press pursued 'homosexual scandals' from the opposite direction, as a means of undermining certain highly-placed officials in the colonial administration in Dublin, one of whom was said to bear 'the odium of contaminating the running stream of Irish moral purity by stirring up the stink of pollution planted by foreign hands' (Breen 1990). It is significant that Irish nationalist ideology developed during such a homophobic period in European history.

(1994: 6)

Rose situates the nationalist response as part of the more general *zeitgeist* of homophobia without closely examining the interrelationship of homophobia, colonialism and nationalism. The juxtaposition of the similar English and Irish responses to homosexuality suggest that both share an ethos of 'aggressive masculinity'. Of course, Alan Sinfield (1994) has argued that the late nineteenth century saw the association of 'effeminacy' with homosexuality and the demonization of both in the course of the Wilde trials. Keeping in mind that the conflation of heterosexual maleness and 'aggressive masculinity' as ideals were forming in this period, it is important to note that both the British colonial powers and the Irish nationalists were using the same language of 'masculinity' and that both wrote homosexuality as a kind of foreign 'pollution'. This characterization would be repeated in the early years of the AIDS crisis, when the general populace denied the presence of AIDS in Ireland and, concurrently, right-wing groups such as Family Solidarity castigated homosexuals as carriers.² The concept of the homosexual as the foreign at home, the free-floating moral contaminant, reveals a profound anxiety both about national borders and about sexual identities. Two very different moments in history can serve as focal points for analysis of this anxiety: the response to Roger Casement's diaries in the earlier part of this century, and the New York Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) responses to the repeated requests of the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization (ILGO) to march in the St Patrick's Day Parade.

Perverted justice

Sir Roger Casement, British diplomat and humanitarian, is best known in Irish history for his attempt to supply the Irish nationalist forces with arms from Germany for their Easter Rising in 1916. The boat carrying the arms was intercepted and scuttled; Casement landed in Kerry to call off the Rising but was

captured before the message could be sent. He was then taken to London and tried on charges of treason. His lawyer, Serjeant Sullivan – the last Queen’s Serjeant in Ireland – was a conservative and a Unionist, which ensured a less-than-friendly relationship between him and Casement. His ineffective defence was mounted based on a point of grammar in fourteenth-century statute; its success rested on whether or not there was a comma in that document.

Casement’s defence already compromised by such an odd and precarious legal strategy, he was then attacked by the press when his diaries, detailing his homosexual encounters, were discovered and circulated among politicians and potential supporters of his reprieve both in the UK and the USA. When Sullivan questioned him about the diaries, it is claimed that Casement admitted and defended his homosexuality.³ Ultimately, Casement’s defence did not succeed,⁴ and he was hung for treason in August 1916.

Casement’s defence lawyer suggests a connection between treason and homosexuality when asserting that ‘Casement was not completely normal and one of the abnormalities of his type is addiction to lamentable practices. He had the further affliction of the craving to record erotica and this horrible document was in the hands of the crown’.⁵ What are being included under the rubric of ‘lamentable practices’ in this instance is not clear, but the structure of the sentence suggests that they could include the tendency towards Irish nationalism as likely as it could the tendency toward homosexual acts; if the ‘lamentable practices’ were homosexual acts only, the normal rhetorical construction would be that Casement had the ‘further affliction of the craving to record *them*.’ That Sullivan specifies the diaries as a ‘further affliction’ suggests that the ‘lamentable practices’ encompass the whole lot: Casement’s ‘type’, then, is the ‘abnormal’ Irish rebel/homosexual. Casement’s acceptance of physical-force nationalism and his secret collaboration with the Germans on behalf of the Irish correspond, in the eyes of the British, with his secret homosexual life. Their decision to circulate the diaries – to give them ‘private publicity’, as critic Lucy McDiarmid (1997) has put it – set the terms for the Irish nationalist response.

Were the diaries forged? With the 1997 publication of the so-called ‘Black Diaries’, the critical debate about authenticity was given new fuel. But the answer to that question is not one of the concerns of this essay; either way, the debates around the authenticity of diaries suggest the extent to which Casement, as Kieran Kennedy (1998: 27) has put it, ‘became a spectacular embodiment of post-Edwardian England’s and Ireland’s anxieties about masculinity and male sexuality’ – and, I would add, national identity.

The response of his friends and supporters to the diaries was general disbelief and active campaigning to ‘clear his name’, both of the charges of treason and of the ‘accusations’ of homosexuality. But Casement would not, as friends suggested to him, lie and claim that he had been on his way to stop the Rising rather than participate in it; nor is it wholly clear whether or not he denounced the diaries. Nonetheless, many of his supporters persistently clung to the claim

of forgery, especially in the years before the diaries were available for study. For Irish nationalists to accept that Casement was an 'Irish patriot' – and particularly, to claim him as a martyr – required that his homosexuality be pushed back into the closet or denied. Both the British and the Irish made his sexuality foreign, either by denying it and accepting his patriotism (the Irish nationalist response), or by accepting both his Irish nationalism and his sexuality as evidence of the same problem.

William Butler Yeats, among others, enthusiastically accepted the claim that the diaries were forged. In a letter to Ethel Mannin written in November of 1936, Yeats writes:

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

(Yeats, 1954: 867)

This is the first mention of Casement in Yeats's writing. It is worth noting what Yeats points out here: that the diaries prevented agitation for a reprieve. Though this is not strictly true – his close friends kept up the fight until days before his death – it is true that the diaries prevented a more general outcry against his execution, despite their ostensible lack of relevance to the case at hand. But I will return to the issue of the diaries' relevance to Casement's treason. First, it is worth looking at the verses *The Forged Casement Diaries* inspired Yeats to write.

Yeats wrote two poems for Casement: 'Roger Casement' and 'The Ghost of Roger Casement', arranged respectively in *Last Poems* (1957: 581–4). *Last Poems* gives a strong sense of Yeats's growing disillusionment with politics, both British and Irish; both Casement poems show his anger at the British government's abuse of power. The first poem is addressed toward those who used the diaries to 'blacken his good name': the 'perjurer', 'forger', 'Spring Rice' (Sir Cecil Arthur Spring-Rice, British Ambassador to America) and 'all the troop/That cried it far and wide' (1957: 582).⁶ The poem, written for publication in one of the major Irish newspapers, is an appeal to the British to 'make amends'. A letter to Dorothy Wellesley suggests Yeats's tendency to combine the crime of treason with the evidence of homosexuality: 'But the Casement evidence was not true as we know – it was one of a number of acts of forgery committed at that time. I can only repeat words spoken to me by the old head of the Fenians years ago. "There are things a man must not do even to save a nation"' (1957:

870). Presumably, the 'nation' of which Yeats speaks is Great Britain, and the 'things' are forgery and perjury: in this reading, Yeats accuses the British of trying to save their nation with 'evidence' of Casement's homosexuality, even though the diaries were not 'evidence' in any legal sense. But if the 'nation' to which Yeats refers is Ireland, the statement presents an odd conflation of the sexual and political acts of which Casement was accused, a reading supported by the fact that the 'nation' to which the Fenian (presumably John O'Leary) refers is Ireland. In either interpretation, Yeats conflates the two 'guilts' – not at all surprising, given the extent to which the 'crimes' of homosexuality and treason themselves were linked both rhetorically in Maloney's book and actually in the circumstances surrounding Casement's trial.

It is interesting that Yeats also supported Charles Stewart Parnell,⁷ given that both Casement's and Parnell's situations involved forgeries and evidence of sexual 'misconduct'. Yeats's anger in the Parnell case was directed both at the British government over the forgeries and the attempts to split the Party, and at the Irish clergy and other members of the Party for militating for Parnell to step down from his leadership position. Yeats's tendency in the poems and letters to see the Casement 'forgeries' similarly as political 'evidence' against him suggests a blurring of the lines between two cases that involved accusations of sexual and political 'sins'. Yeats's recent reading of *Parnell Vindicated* (Harrison, 1931), which helped inspire his Parnell ballad, would have further supported his tendency to see the two cases as similar. The Parnell letters forged by Pigott, however, were evidence against him in the legal case linking him to the Invincibles murders. The proof of forgery meant a reprieve; the adultery case was relieved by no such forgeries. Yeats seems to suggest the Casement case is a repetition of the same problem: a patriot brought down by British conspiracy, forgery and popular opinion.⁸ But the poem inspired by Parnell's case, 'Come Gather Round Me Parnellites', celebrates Parnell's affair. The similarity in syntactic construction of the last two lines of that ballad, 'And Parnell loved his country/And Parnell loved his lass' (1957: 586, 11. 31–32), suggests a parallel, even a connection, between the two forms of loving. The literal and symbolic registers are collapsed, as the loving of woman becomes an understandably masculine, virile corollary of loving a nation (Mother Ireland, Cathleen). That Parnell loved an Englishwoman is, of course, not part of the poetic formula. In the Casement poems, however, Yeats does not suggest that love for a man is coequal with love of country; rather, the accusation of the former seems to preclude the latter. The poems instead focus on accusation and anger at the British government. It is, perhaps, significant that all three poems are written in ballad form, but the last of them – 'The Ghost of Roger Casement' – is the least 'singable'. Though it follows traditional ballad meter the most closely, the repetition of the refrain – 'The ghost of Roger Casement/Is beating on the door' – disturbs the rhyme scheme every time it appears after the first stanza. The ghost meant to haunt the British actually haunts the poem; the meter and refrain, separately intended to make the poem like a

popular ballad, do not work together. Ironically, then, the repetition of the refrain prevents the poem from being repeated as a ballad.

The poem serves, perhaps, as a metaphor for Casement himself – a figure not easily resolvable, one that resists narrative closure because he does not fit neatly into the heterosexual narrative of nation. B. L. Reid's biography, *The Lives of Roger Casement* (1976), even in its title, suggests a fragmentation of narratives and selves; in his preface, he writes that '[Casement] was fragmented, and he was elusive: he was defined not by coherency but by complex tensions barely contained' (p. xv). Reid himself treats Casement's sexuality with an odd mixture of tolerance, clinical distance, judgemental criticism and personal sympathy. In the Appendices in which he treats the issue of authenticity, for example, Reid refers to the question of Casement's sexual orientation as one which concerns his 'purity'; he also refers to the evidence of Casement's homosexuality as 'negative' evidence (1976: 466, 468). He goes on, however, to write acceptingly that 'I find nothing innately filthy-minded in any of this' (p. 481). Reid quotes Ernley Blackwell's memorandum to the Cabinet, which states that Casement 'seems to have completed the full cycle of sexual degeneracy and from a pervert has become an invert – a woman, or pathic, who derives his satisfaction from attracting men and inducing them to use him. . .' (p. 465). He then responds in agreement that 'Blackwell's statement is clinically if cruelly accurate', goes on to detail Casement's sexual habits, and notes that 'more often than not he functioned primarily as he receiving or female partner' (p. 465). While agreeing with Blackwell's diagnosis, however, Reid takes issue with its tone, 'its purse-lipped supercilious condemnatory delivery' that he argues 'comes from the same Victorian habit of mind, puritanical, self-righteous, and wholly unimaginative, that leads a presumably more enlightened man of the generation of René MacColl still to call Casement a "degenerate", a "clandestine pervert", a "self-confessed pervert"' (p. 465).

In a tone of acceptance, Reid continues: 'Casement was not a pervert: he was an invert; and he was not a degenerate: he was a homosexual. He was a citizen of an alternative sexual world' (p. 465). The language of citizenship in this context is strange, since one does not usually speak of 'citizenship' in 'sexual worlds'. Reid's statement could be read generously as a sympathetic description of a radical position outside of national familism; but it is also an implicit denial that Casement had either allegiance to, nor rights in, any other 'world' beyond that of homosexuality. The end of Reid's last chapter represents the difficulty Casement has presented for those who wish to characterize him:

Casement's nature was divided to a depth just short of real pathology, of disastrous incoherence. Was he an Irishman or an Englishman; an Irish patriot or an English public servant; a countryman or a cityman; a man of the people or a gentleman; an Irish peasant or an Irish senator; an intellectual or an artist; an intellectual or a man of action; an idealist or a

pragmatist; a sensualist or an anchorite; an African or a European; a Protestant or a Catholic; a man or a woman; a man or a boy? He did not know: he was all of them.

(Reid, 1976: 454)⁹

Casement – his ‘citizenship’, nationality, class, sexuality, ‘gender’ – did not fit neatly into the usual binaries. Reid suggests that Casement is unusual, ‘just short of real pathology’, but one of Reid’s final comments is particularly insightful: ‘. . . his dividedness represented a whole culture, a whole era; strange as he was, he represented us all . . .’ (p. 454). Reid, in the final moments of the last narrative chapter of Casement’s life, begins to recognize that the fluidity and ‘inconsistency’ of Casement’s identity is the fluidity and inconsistency of *identity*. Though Reid goes on in his final lines to invoke Hamlet, ‘greatness’ and ‘tragedy’, this last insight is perhaps the most appropriate; he realizes, however briefly, that Casement embodies the tensions of a narrative tradition based on binaries, fear and exclusion.

Irish eyes

The treatment of Casement by biographers, critics, poets and friends over the last eight-and-a-half decades is only one example of the anxiety over the relationship between national and sexual boundaries.¹⁰ To take a very recent example, this anxiety has also particularly been in evidence, as Rose notes, in the St Patrick’s Day parades in New York City. That this parade takes place in the USA and not Ireland makes it particularly relevant to a discussion about the anxieties about national borders and the narratives that create them.

The Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), the organizer of the New York parades, have responded aggressively since 1990 to keep the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization (ILGO) from marching in the parade – a response which, Rose reflects, is part of a ‘disheartingly [*sic*] negative tradition’ (1994: 32). As Helena Mulherns, writing for *Hot Press* magazine, noted in 1995,

It is interesting that New York’s first official St Patrick’s Day parade in 1762 was organised by Irish Protestants and Catholics as a protest to fight just such ‘ancient hatreds’ – the ethnic and religious discrimination that was rampant against Irish people living there. ILGO’s statement on February 21st [1995] pointed out that ‘Lesbians and gay men of all races and ethnicities now insist on that same simple right: participation in the life of our ethnic communities on equal terms with everyone else. It’s ironic that in the 1990s the parade organisers discriminate against Irish people on the basis of sexual orientation’.

(Mulherns, 1995)

Rose observes that 'what was at issue was who would define what it is to be Irish' (1994: 32). The support for the ILGO from many sources in Ireland stands as a stark contrast to the AOH reaction in the USA. 'For the Irish at home the extreme reaction of the AOH seemed strange and served to highlight and encourage the growing confidence of Irish society to accommodate difference' (Rose, 1994: 33). The phenomenon becomes less strange, however, when examined more closely: the AOH response to ILGO is an attempt to legitimize a certain narrative of Irish identity, one based on a history of Irish Catholicism, patriarchy and, of course, heterosexuality. The conservatism of Irish-American Irish nationalists is closely tied to this investment in a simplified narrative of Irish history, in the absence of a simple spatial claim to identity: i.e. if one does not reside within the spatial boundaries of Ireland, one needs an airtight narrative of descent that serves to protect the boundaries of group identity. Self-policing the borders of the Irish-American community is deemed essential to control the public perceptions of a group that has historically been both demonized as non-white and, more recently, celebrated as Ur-white. Expanding the possibilities of who can be Irish blurs the distinction between (Irish) self and other; to include a category of people so consistently alienated as homosexuals is risky and destabilizing indeed. ILGO poses such a threat, particularly because sexuality is so often an un(re)markable category: to accept ILGO means accepting the possibility that members of ILGO already exist within the sanctioned confines of the parade and of 'Irishness'. To deny ILGO access is implicitly to assert that gay men do not exist in the AOH; that no women who came to work in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia in the nineteenth century were lesbians; that no Irish-American priests or nuns are gay or lesbian; that the whole history of Irish emigration to the USA is not already inextricably bound up with gay and lesbian history. ILGO is an 'otherable' group, conveniently enough, and by excluding it physically from the parade, the AOH hopes to exclude the people it represents from the narrative of Irish and Irish-American identity.

Anne Maguire, New York activist and co-founder of ILGO, notes that the legitimization of Gay Pride Day can be seen as a strategy that facilitates alienation and marginalization: 'Mayor Giuliani has basically told us "you have your day in June", referring to the Gay Pride Parade, which is all about containment. He doesn't seem to understand that we are lesbians and gay men of all ethnic and racial identities, not for one designated day in June, but for the other 364 days of the year as well' (Mulkerns, 1995). As the 'Frequently Asked Questions' portion of the official ILGO website states, 'as Irish lesbians and gay men, our cultural heritage and sexual identity are inseparably linked – we are Irish and gay'.¹¹

In the USA, then, Irish identity is hotly contested. Perhaps not surprisingly, one of the ways in which the decisions of the AOH have been justified is through the claim that, since ILGO has over the years been supported by queer activist

groups from a range of nations and cultures, they are not specifically Irish. Casement's story echoes here: Irish is 'home', whereas queer is 'foreign'; they are mutually exclusive categories. The generous response of 'the Irish at home' to which Rose refers, on the other hand, comes from the comfort of the implied contained, domesticized space: the home of Ireland. Along with the containment seemingly provided by national borders comes a distance facilitated by the divergent narratives of Irish and Irish-American history. ILGO can be treated with tolerance in Ireland even by Irish conservatives, since the narrative of Irish-American identity does not perceptibly threaten the narrative of Irish identity. National borders and temporal separation provide necessary distance. This is not to belittle the positive response of the Irish in Ireland to the ILGO crisis; rather, I mean to refocus attention on strategies of containment versus strategies of inclusion. Irish feminist Nell McCafferty's encouraging and positive response walks the line between inclusion and containment; in a letter of support to ILGO, she wrote: 'Beloved sisters and brothers, sex in all its variety adds to the gaiety of nations. Today you add a sparkle to smiling Irish eyes' (Rose, 1994: 33). McCafferty's response, though both welcome and well-intended, rhetorically posits a separation between ILGO and the Irish eyes that watch; it also diffuses the struggle over recognition of sexual identity into 'sex in all its variety' and the very particular debate over Irish identity into a gaiety that affects 'all nations'. Though the latter move is an important and necessary attempt to universalize the issue, it also serves to move the debate away from the particular struggle at hand over 'Irishness'.

Conclusion

The ILGO crisis and the Casement case point out the political crisis of representation that erupts when the borders between competing and overlapping identities and narratives are unstable. The concept of the homosexual as the uncontainable and foreign threat reveals a profound anxiety about the stability of the Irish 'nation' at times and places of crisis. I would argue that the positive changes in gay rights in the Republic of Ireland at the end of the twentieth century have come less because of the 'traditional Irish values' embodied by nationalism than because the Irish state has opened its doors to both the European Community's laws and its economic opportunities and thus has begun to enjoy an economic boom that perhaps counterbalances concerns about a less-secure Irish national identity. The improvement in the political situation of queers in Ireland should last as long as the opening of borders is seen as a boon, not a threat – particularly, I might add cynically, if queer politics is overshadowed by the 'pink pound'.¹²

The plight of queer activists in Northern Ireland, however, remains similar to that of early activists in the Republic: their lives are literally embattled and

their space in the political sphere is limited by the same perception of threat suggested above – best illustrated, perhaps, by the Rev. Ian Paisley’s notorious late-1970s ‘Save Ulster from Sodomy’ campaign. The political displacement of Northern queers is due to the continued contestation over national identity and the relative economic insecurity of those in the North. Northern Irish queers have made community in spite of this, however, creating, to appropriate the words of Reid, ‘an alternative sexual world’ in which queers have place.¹³ While the existence of this world is precarious, it seems a promising alternative to a sectarian politics of identity that has defined the lives of those in the North for so long. Until the North establishes an inclusive government, however, that ‘alternative world’ remains the only place in which Northern queers can find anything like full citizenship.

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Notes

- 1 I use ‘queer’ interchangeably with ‘gay’ and ‘gay and lesbian’ throughout this chapter. Though the term is contested in activist and academic circles both because of its originally pejorative usage and because it does not focus exclusively on gays and lesbians, it conveniently umbrellas a number of communities that fall outside of the realm of supposedly normative heterosexuality. By using the terms interchangeably, I hope to suggest the largest possible community.
- 2 See Rose, pp. 22–5, for a brief discussion of the gay community’s response to the AIDS crisis.
- 3 See Reid (1976), especially the appendices, for a discussion of Serjeant’s public statements and, more generally, for a discussion of the authenticity debate.
- 4 Sullivan reacted to Casement’s admissions with anything but acceptance. Perhaps unrelated to these admissions, but worthy of comment: Sullivan actually blacked out and collapsed during the final speech from the defence.
- 5 Sullivan (1952).
- 6 The original poem, published in the *Irish Press* on 2 February 1937, specifically accused Sir Alfred Noyes: ‘Come Alfred Noyes, come all the troop. . .’. When

Noyes responded to Yeats's accusation, he republished the poem in the paper with 'Come Tom and Dick, come all the troop. . .'. For a discussion of Yeats's letters on the subject of Casement and his poems, see Michael Steinman (1984: 152–63).

- 7 Charles Stewart Parnell (1846–1891): Irish MP, known first for his leadership of the Home-Rule-oriented parliamentary obstructionists in the 1870s and then for his leadership of the politically powerful Irish Parliamentary Party in the 1880s. The most celebrated trials associated with Parnell concern his alleged complicity with a political murder and his adulterous relationship with Katherine (Kitty) O'Shea. On 6 May 1882, The Chief Secretary to Ireland, Lord Frederick Cavendish, and his Undersecretary, T. H. Burke, in Phoenix Park were murdered by the assassination group the Invincibles. Parnell was jailed in 1887 as a result of the 'discovery' of letters linking him with the crime. Parnell demanded that a committee of the House of Commons investigate the case; the British government appointed a commission of three judges. In February 1889, Richard Pigott was exposed as the forger of the letters, and Parnell was released. Within the year, however, Parnell was struck with another blow: he was named as co-respondent in a divorce case brought by Captain W. H. O'Shea, a former member of Parnell's home rule Party. Parnell's adulterous relationship with Katherine O'Shea led to a split in the party and the fall of Parnell from political power. Parnell died within a year of the divorce proceedings, on 6 October 1891.
- 8 See especially 'Parnell's Funeral' for Yeats' view of the 'popular rage, / *Hysterica passio*' that brought about the fall of Parnell.
- 9 Compare Roger Sawyer (1984: 145):

The 'disease' [Casement himself uses this term to describe his homosexuality] is more helpful to analysis of the man and his achievements than one might like to admit; it explains a large part of the generally accepted contradictions in his life. He has long been known in terms of these contradictions: the imperial official who embraced the rebel cause, the Protestant of Catholic persuasion, the Northerner of Southern temperament, and, of course, the prude who practiced perversions – the list can be prolonged indefinitely.

Sawyer goes on to analyse in particular the workings of the 'frustrated mother-love' that led to Casement's many social, psychological, political and sexual 'contradictions'.

- 10 For further discussion of Casement in the public eye, see McDiarmid (1997).
- 11 Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization, 'Let ILGO March!', available online: <http://www.geocities.com/Broadway/5421/ilgospdfaq.html>
- 12 Thanks to Marie Honan and Anne Maguire for making me aware of this term. The 'pink pound' refers to the potential contributions to the economy by the lesbian and gay community – in short, gay consumers' money.
- 13 I discuss the relationship between sexuality, gender, and politics in contemporary Northern Ireland more fully in Conrad (1999).

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