

# The New Women of the Glens

Writers and Revolutionaries



*Tina O'Toole*

Transnational kinship networks have become clearly visible across the Irish diaspora over the past 40 years in particular. This chapter demonstrates that such networks pre-date the contemporary period and, moreover, argues that the development of a radical politics in early twentieth-century Ireland depended upon them. From the Great Famine on, Irish culture had been characterised by an intense consciousness in public and private life about the boundaries of belonging to family, community, and nation. Each of these social institutions was gendered in a very specific way, with public and private domains demarcated along gendered lines; these gendered divisions persisted throughout the twentieth century in Ireland. Those who found themselves outside the structures and definitions of their family of origin circumvented this fixed heteronormative and patriarchal structure by creating lateral support networks of their own, alternatives to more hierarchical family structures. Focusing on the women writers and activists who influenced and supported Roger Casement's radical nationalist politics, this work considers the ways in which their chosen kinship group – centred on the Glens of Antrim but operating transnationally across Ireland, Britain, and the wider colonial world – unsettled fixities of family and national affinity in Irish culture.

This research extends recent paradigm shifts opening up late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland to scrutiny, particularly in relation to the active participation of women as agents and the existence of queer communities and codes.<sup>1</sup> When embarking on a reading of Casement's community, the reader might expect a chapter about the intimate lives of the men in his circle. However, his close affinities to women friends in the same period are equally compelling, not just in relation to Casement's identity and politics, but in the new insights they provide into a vibrant community of interest at work on a range of activist projects in the early twentieth century. In particular, the efforts of several key women in Casement's life at the time of

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his trials and in the campaign for clemency stand out: Alice Stopford Green, Gertrude Bannister, Ada McNeill, Alice Milligan, and Eva Gore-Booth (the latter came to support him in court although she hadn't known him before the trial), all of whom might be described in the terms of the period as 'New Women' as will be explained. One especially memorable moment in that campaign was the petition made by these stalwart women for a royal pardon, which they insisted on presenting in person to George V at Buckingham Palace.<sup>2</sup> Long before that moment, these women and others like them had been an important influence in the shaping of Casement's Irish nationalist sensibilities. By attending to Casement as a member of a community, a wider kinship group, this chapter questions the tendency to see Irish revolutionaries as exceptional men, existing in isolation from a wider community. Exploring Casement's writing in tandem with that of Alice Stopford Green and other 'New Women' writers, reveals their influence on his Irish nationalist education and politics, and provides new insights into the gendering of national identities in the period.

While Casement's trials strengthened the ties between his women friends, their central importance in his life and identity formation are evident from his early adulthood onwards. Having lost his parents at an early age, Casement's family of origin dispersed; his connection to paternal relations in Magherintemple left in *loco parentis* following his father's death was distant (for instance, he spent subsequent holiday periods in his school or with the families of schoolfriends). Casement's diary entries in the early years of his African travels detail leave periods, often Christmases, spent miserably in Magherintemple and Ballymena; doubtless the sense of restriction and enclosure he experienced 'at home' with members of his father's family contributed to his decision to migrate. This echoes Anne Marie Fortier's description of 'home as not-home' in the narratives of 'lesbian/gay people' who experience 'estrangement in the original home', and whose migration is thus 'a movement away from being estranged' (Fortier 129, 118). Casement went to work for a shipping company at the age of 16, then he followed in his maternal uncle Edward Bannister's footsteps and went to Africa three years later. Thus began a long career in the colonial service culminating in his important humanitarian interventions in the Congo and the Putumayo. Perhaps as a result of his early loss of both a fixed family and rooted home experience, Casement developed and carefully maintained a kinship network of his own, and because of his peripatetic existence, that network was a transnational one.

Having cast off from the Casements of Magherintemple, Casement did not cut himself off entirely from his homeland and its concerns however. Through his sister, Nina, in Portrush, and his close friends in London, Robert Lynd and Sylvia Dryhurst, he became intimate with a network of

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Figure 5.1: Agnes O'Farrelly (Úna Ní Fhaircheallaigh) (1874–1951), professor of Irish at UCD, during a 1945 conferral ceremony at Maynooth University. (Courtesy of UCD Archives)

radical writers and nationalist activists in Ireland and Britain at the turn of the century. While this coterie included a significant number of male friends, Francis Joseph Bigger and Bulmer Hobson to name but two, he relied upon several close women friends and family members throughout his life. Chief among Casement's chosen kinship group were his Bannister cousins Gertrude and Elizabeth in Liverpool; he was especially fond of 'Gee' (his pet name for Gertrude) who became a teacher in a girls' school. Two prominent Irish intellectuals also featured in Casement's coterie, Alice Stopford Green, described by Margaret O'Callaghan as 'historian to the revolutionary generation of 1916 in Ireland' (O'Callaghan, 'Alice Stopford Green')<sup>3</sup>; and Irish language scholar Agnes O'Farrelly (Úna Ní Fhaircheallaigh) who later became professor of Irish at UCD, and was a well-known campaigner for women's educational rights and founding member of Cumann na mBan. Moreover, while Casement's associations with Magherintemple were unhappy, his abiding connection to that hinterland was lifelong, and in fact his dying wish was to be buried at Murlough Bay in the Glens of Antrim. His 'New Woman' circle in the Glens included Rose and Charlotte Young, Ada McNeill, Margaret

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Dobbs, and Margaret Hutton. Exchanges between these individuals created, among other initiatives, the first Feis na nGleann (Festival of the Glens) held at Waterfoot (Glenariff, Co. Antrim) in 1904. McNeill, Dobbs, and Rose Young, along with Casement and Bigger, were central figures in the original Feis, which became a focal point in the Irish cultural revival.

Casement and his circle, like other young people all over Ireland in those years, began to interrogate traditional political and cultural formations, evaluating traditional structures against new ideas and values then emerging in European culture and politics. Many of Casement's cohort in north Antrim came from Conservative unionist families; the Youngs, for instance, contributed funding to establish the Ulster Volunteer Force. During the political upheavals of the early twentieth century, many of these families were split

Figure 5.2: Portrait of Ada McNeill (1860–1959).  
(Courtesy of Feis na nGleann)



*Ada McNeill, Cushendun, Founder Member*



Figure 5.3: Portrait of Margaret Dobbs (1871–1962).  
(Courtesy of Feis na nGleann)

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ideologically on gender lines, the men continuing to support the union with Great Britain, the women joining the Gaelic League, and sometimes openly espousing ‘separatist’ (i.e. Irish nationalist) tendencies. Such women were no different to their peers whose names are more familiar to us in the narrative of the Irish struggle for independence, like Constance Markievicz and Albinia Broderick for instance, in having Protestant ascendancy backgrounds. In terms of Irish women’s nationalist activism, we might trace a line of political influence down to them from the period of the Ladies’ Land League, which also had a cross-community membership. Middle-class Protestant families produced their fair share of Irish rebels too, of course, such as Belfast-born Mabel McConnell (later Fitzgerald), who encountered Irish nationalist politics for the first time at Queen’s University; she later commented ‘I seem to base all my friendships in nationalism; other things are as important, but not nearly as much so’ (qtd Foster 16).<sup>4</sup> However, despite diversity in the confessional backgrounds of members of the revolutionary generation, the subsequent partition of the island and sectarian aspect of Free State discourses made northern Protestant contributions to Irish nationalism more difficult to perceive and commemorate. Perhaps the most poignant example of this was the destruction of a large Celtic cross, the memorial stone marking Bigger’s grave, by a loyalist bomb in 1980.

The family of Ada McNeill provides a concise example of such divided political loyalties. A member of the McNeill family of Cushendun, she was a first cousin of Ronald McNeill (Lord Cushendun), a unionist and Conservative MP who had close ties to Edward Carson and James Craig. Yet Ada was an early member of the Gaelic League, became a fluent Irish speaker, and was an enthusiastic member and secretary of the first Feis na nGleann committee and the committee of Coláiste Uladh, the Irish language school, as well as an ardent republican in later life. In reminiscences of Casement, she wrote: ‘I was in a Unionist milieu, and Roger was too, on the Ballycastle side of the mountain. It was not surprising we made friends’ (Phoenix et al. 47). Margaret Dobbs, similarly, broke with family tradition in her investment in Gaelic culture; Dobbs’s father was the high sheriff of Carrickfergus and Co. Louth, and her brother James was a unionist who took part in the Larne gun-running. By contrast, she became an executive member of Cumann na mBan in 1914 (Dudgeon 219). Such decisive rejections of unionist family traditions in favour of an investment in Gaelic culture, are consistent with contemporary feminist challenges to the family and stultifying bourgeois culture. These could all be described as ‘New Women’; they were part of that generation of newly empowered, educated, active and radical women in Ireland – scholars, educators, artists, and writers – who openly professed first-wave feminist ambitions and were engaged in public discourse and social activism of one kind or another.

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In the 1890s the 'New Woman' had become a common phenomenon in popular culture, and an exemplar for several generations of young women.<sup>5</sup> Sarah Grand (Frances Bellenden Clarke, 1854–1943), perhaps the best-known 'New Woman' writer, came from Donaghadee (a mere 60 miles from the Glens of Antrim). Grand's landmark essay, 'The new aspect of the woman question' (1894) brought the term 'New Woman' into being. Sally Ledger outlines some of the multiple manifestations of the New Woman figure thus: 'She was, variously, a feminist activist, a social reformer, a popular novelist, a suffragette playwright, a woman poet; she was also a fictional construct, a discursive response to the activities of the 1890s women's movement.'<sup>6</sup> Grand's popular novels were premised on a central female character who, having her consciousness raised by feminist ideas, gains confidence in her ability to voice her rights, and is ultimately willing to fight for them. Writers like Grand sought to revolutionise the prevailing gender order; they issued a challenge to contemporary vested interests in order to advance women's social autonomy, a challenge that was no less radical than that of their sisters in the campaign for women's suffrage. The creation of these fictional feminists made way for their readers – a generation of newly literate in the 1890s – to follow in the footsteps of their literary heroines, and so the imbrication of social activism and literary representation is part of this picture. Needless to say, the work of 'New Women' writers on the page and feminist activists on the streets coincided with a turbulent time of anti-imperial and class agitation in Ireland and internationally.

Today, those empowered young Irish women who played an active part in the struggle for Irish independence are just beginning to be mentioned in the 'official' national narrative. Yet, in light of women's earlier involvement in Land League agitation, and Gillian McIntosh's recent work on women mill-workers in Belfast in the same period,<sup>7</sup> it seems that these women radicals were just the visible sign of happenings beneath the dominant surfaces of Irish culture in the late nineteenth century, subversive energies producing new resistance movements among women of different classes (McIntosh 26). For a new generation of young Antrim women coming to consciousness at the turn of the century, in a context in which political radicalism gripped the island, the decision to throw in their lot with the national struggle is not so difficult to credit. Simultaneously, of course, a number of other Irish feminist activists and writers such as Isabella Tod, Margaret Byers, and Mary Bulmer Hobson, as well as Edith Somerville and Violet Martin (Somerville and Ross), were unionists; they saw no future for political radicalism in a Home Rule Ireland, and fought its advance as a threat to their feminist agenda.

The vehicle for bringing their nationalist sisters together in the Glens was another kind of cultural revolt in the form of the Gaelic League. As Margaret MacCurtain and others have observed, the Gaelic League was the

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first nationalist organisation in Ireland after the Land League to involve women, and offer them a level footing with men. In a 1907 letter to Ní Fhaircheallaigh, Casement makes specific reference to this: '[t]he Gaelic League is largely inspired and partially directed by women' (NLI MS 3172319 Dec. 1907). Crucially, from the perspective of these Glens women, the League was a cross-community organisation involving Catholics and Protestants and thus it became a meeting point for young people who might otherwise never have encountered one another socially. Diarmaid Ó Doibhlin emphasises the effectiveness of Cuideachta Ghaeilge Uladh (the Ulster Gaelic Society) in bringing people from different social classes together, as the educated middle classes went out to learn the language from rural working people (Ó Doibhlin 16). The Irish language was still thriving in the Glens of Antrim right up into the 1890s, as Ó Doibhlin tells us 'particularly in Glenarm and Cary and in Glenariff' (Ó Doibhlin 19); in other words, those women learning Irish in the Glens at the turn of the century encountered spoken Irish in their childhood, and had ready access to communities of native Irish speakers, particularly on Rathlin Island off the north Antrim coast. In tandem with this, the re-energising of the Irish language in what Richard Kirkland terms 'Belfast's red-brick Gaeltacht' continued apace, and the involvement of Casement's friends there has been well documented.

On account of this living tradition, the Glens provided a haven for Irish language enthusiasts such as Margaret Emmeline Dobbs (1871–1962), who moved to Glenariff with her mother in 1898. Along with her friend Ada McNeill, Dobbs became a central figure in the Glens group. Her lifelong study of the Irish language and culture is evident in her many publications, including *Side-Lights on the Táin Age and Other Studies* (1917), numerous editions of Irish language texts, a range of essays on historical and archaeological subjects in local and international philological journals, as well as seven plays.<sup>8</sup> Dobbs's commitment to both Gaelic culture and feminist principles is evident in the introduction to an edition of *The Ban-Shenchus* [sic] in Irish with her own English translations. She describes this as a 'history of women'. Dobbs's own origins were staunchly unionist, there was little Irish language culture or tradition in the family; her interest in the language is said to have originated with a servant (probably a nanny) in her family home in Dublin. Self-taught, she later attended the Irish college at Cloghaneely. Having moved to the Glens in 1898 after her father's death, she taught Irish in the summers on Rathlin Island and at Gortahork; she also funded scholarships to the Gaeltacht. The educative function of her publications is clear, she provides English-language translations and explanations throughout her edition of the *Bansheanchas* for instance, and she delivered lectures to historical societies in the region. Dobbs had the liberty and means to pursue a fairly single-minded commitment to the language movement,

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and her home in Portnagolan, Cushendall, was central to all cultural nationalist activities in north Antrim, becoming something of a Glens equivalent of Bigger's Antrim Road house, Ardrigh. She was a founding member of the Feis committee in 1904, and became a good friend to Casement; Ó Doibhlin suggests she was his closest friend (Ó Doibhlin 21).

Ada McNeill (1860–1959) attributed her investment in Irish culture to Casement. When they became acquainted in Antrim in their early twenties, he prompted an interest in Irish culture that was entirely new to her, '[w]e were a horrid cynical transplanted family. In the West Highland homes of the past we would have been among our own set and neighbours' (Phoenix et al. 47). During their many tramps through the Glens together she found herself plunged into an ideological battle. In 1929 she wrote about those conversations:

Roger had the history of Ireland at his finger ends . . . We often argued and fought out our battles of long ago. I criticised the Irish side – but he always made excuses for them . . . I remember rainy grey days in the dark old library [at Churchfield, Casement's cousins' home] . . . Roger refuting my gutsy excited arguments with quotations upon which he could always lay his fingers. I learned a lot like this – and to read for myself. (Phoenix et al. 47)

The crucial point here is the last one, all of these women were learning to 'read for themselves' in those years, to deconstruct the received cultural and social world they had inherited from their planter families. By the time McNeill reconnected with Casement in the early twentieth century (his migration to the Congo ended their close connection for a time) this re-education had borne fruit; Ada was by then an ardent member of the Gaelic League. She recalls that her first attempt at a letter 'in the Gaelic' was written to him from the Aran Islands (Phoenix et al. 49).

It is unfortunate that so few of these letters survive, as is the case with most of the correspondence from these women to Casement; while his letters to them have been preserved, scholars have to rely on a one-sided conversation in order to trace the interconnections. As such, Ada's published reminiscences are a valuable resource, not least because they provide a unique insight into the affective impact on this new generation as they embarked on a new cultural movement:

A spirit was awakening in Ireland. Even in the sleepy old Glens, people turned out to meetings . . . got enthusiastic about reviving old customs. We were no longer Ireland of the Gall – the stranger. We tried to revive dancing – Roger took his place in the four hand reels. Strode about the roads hatless, encouraging, working up the heedless. I was not long ago talking to Stephen Clarke and he drew a picture of



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Roger – so full of energy and prompt work. There was a Feis in Cushendall and all our negotiations had failed to get the field we wanted for a hurling match. Another field full of weeds and dockens and thistles had to suffice . . . Immediately Roger went for the scythe in hand and while we were talking and cursing, began to work hard cutting down the weeds and preparing the ground. (Phoenix et al. 49)

Rose Maud Young (1865–1947), another original member of the Feis group was also a lifelong friend of Casement's; on the eve of his execution, Casement sent 'Love to R. Y. and to Charlotte' from the Tower (Sawyer 43). The Youngs, unionist merchants from Ballymena, had been good to him from the time of his schooling, providing him with holiday respite from time to time (there was a distant family connection between them). John Young was the chief sheriff and deputy lieutenant in Antrim but Jeffrey Dudgeon suggests that his first wife, Grace (née Savage), was an Irish

Figure 5.4: Portrait of Rose Young (Róis Ní Ógáin) (1865–1947). (Courtesy of Chris Brooke)

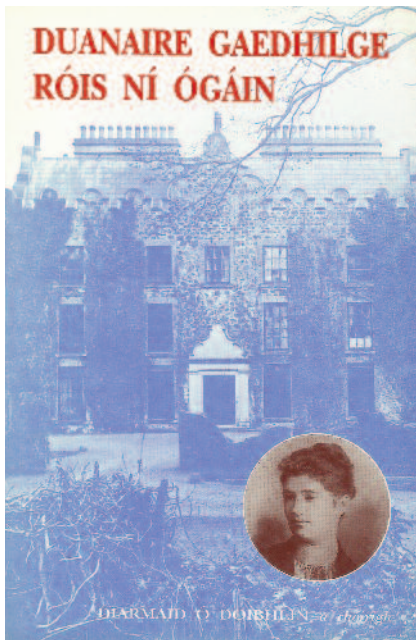


Figure 5.5: Cover of the 1996 reissue of Rose Young's ballad collection, *Duanaire Gaedhilge* (1921). (Courtesy of Diarmaid Ó Doibhlin)

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nationalist and that she may have influenced her daughter, Rose's, political outlook and that of the young Casement (Dudgeon 65). As such, Rose Young grew up in a unionist household at Galgorm Castle, but the plaque unveiled there to the memory of Róis Ní Ógáin in 1996 (by her grandniece Lady Brookeborough) describes her as 'scoláire Gaeilge' (Mac Reamoinn). Ní Ógáin's lifelong commitment to the revival of the Irish language is evident, in particular, in her collection of songs in the three-volume *Duanaire Gaedhilge* (1921).<sup>9</sup>

Ó Doibhlin suggests that her Irish language education began with Bishop William Reeves, rector of Ballymena, who discussed his Irish manuscripts collection with her. Having trained as a teacher in England, Ní Ógáin began taking Irish language classes in London while staying with her sister there; along with Ada McNeill, she continued these studies back in Antrim, taking classes in Belfast, and attending summer schools in Donegal. She was among the group present on 28 February 1904 at a public meeting in Cushendall when it was decided to organise the first Feis na nGleann; clearly, such a celebration of the culture was consistent with her individual efforts to document and revive the Irish language. Ó Doibhlin's pioneering work on her diaries (1883–1945) illustrates the diverse ideological interests at play, which is typical of that of many of these women. Ní Ógáin details visits to speak Irish with the old people in the Glens and attendance at the 1905 Oireachtas in Dublin with Douglas Hyde, while dining with leading unionist figures and celebrating Coronation Day 1911 at Galgorm Castle. Her brother George became a key figure in the Orange Order, county grand master of Antrim, and the Unionist MP for Bannside. Dudgeon observes that this 'crossover culture' was typical of the period, giving the example of the Belfast Naturalist Field Club, 'a key meeting ground where Protestants collided with modern attitudes and ancient Gaelic ideals' (Phoenix et al. 66).

The inaugural Feis na nGleann brought those 'modern attitudes' and 'ancient Gaelic ideals' into sharp focus, as well as providing an important meeting point for the principals in this coterie. Margaret Dobbs credits Bigger and his 'young friends' with the idea 'when spending a holiday in Cushendun' (Phoenix et al. 41). That intervention brought an audience of 2,000 people to Glenariff on 30 June 1904, comprising leading figures in the Gaelic League, the GAA, antiquarian societies, as well as writers, actors, musicians, and dancers. Crucially, it provided an encounter between revivalists and the traditional work practices, arts and crafts of the Irish-speaking population in the Glens (as well as the Rathlin islanders, Casement having chartered transport to bring the 'Rachary' people across). Photographs of the Feis depict the opening procession from Cushendall to Waterfoot, which featured banners representing local clans and the nine glens; spectators clearly visible in surviving photographs include Casement, Dobbs, McNeill, and

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Bigger. Competitions and displays of traditional dance, music, language and history, as well as a local industries section, were the centrepiece of the Feis (Phoenix et al. 3). A hurling match on the beach was won by Carey Faughs (which club still displays the Shield of Heroes commissioned by Bigger for the event); Casement was one of the umpires at the match.<sup>10</sup> At the end of the day, prizes were awarded and speeches made by Horace Plunkett, pioneer of the co-operative movement in agriculture, with Stephen Gwynn and Eoin MacNeill awarding literary and language prizes. While its place in the local history and that of cultural nationalism is assured, the Feis was also crucial in cementing relationships and thereby facilitating the further exchange of ideas and strategies between its main actors.

Exchanges between members of this coterie focus primarily on the de-Anglicisation of Ireland, to use Hyde's term. Their letters almost always open with a salutation in the Irish language, often written in uncial (Gaelic) rather than Roman hand, and using the *séimhiú* (signified by a superscript dot) rather than 'h' as was the custom in the early twentieth century. Writing to Úna Ní Fhaircheallaigh, Casement begins with 'A Díl Cara' written in this way; in one of the few available letters in Gee's hand she addresses her friend Ada McNeill in Irish, 'A Íde, A Chara'. The Gaelicisation of names is interesting here too, evident in the switch from 'Ada' to 'Íde'. Adopting the Irish-language version of their names or changing their names was consistent with their sense of being engaged in a project to reinvent their culture; Rose Young wrote under the name Róis Ní Ógáin, the Bannister sisters took the Irish names Una and Eilis, Margaret Dobbs became Maighréad, etc. Such name-changing was common, too, among 'New Woman' writers who frequently wrote under pseudonyms, though as a mark of their feminist commitment many chose distinctly female names like 'Sarah Grand', rather than obscuring their identities as with the 'Georges' of an earlier era. In both cases, there is a distinct sense of new identities being assumed and a community of interest being forged by the use of these new names.

Rejecting their given names and the ideological adherence of their families, these Glens women rejected patriarchal authority in other ways too, choosing not to marry and opting for public careers as scholars and writers. This contradicts received ideas of the period, in which Irish patriotism and masculinity are indivisible. As a counterpart to contemporary hypermasculinity during the revolutionary period, cultural nationalism configured a passive femininity, making strong, self-actualised representations of Irish women in public discourse difficult to achieve. Yet, arguably, the kind of community-building efforts and social networking that underpin the revolutionary struggle in that period tend to be much more often associated with women's ways of working. Alice Stopford Green underlines this point in *Women's Place in the World of Letters*: 'In modern thought and literature, in

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fact, the personal note dominates all others . . . there are many signs that the feminine as opposed to the masculine forces in the modern world are becoming more and more decisive in human affairs' (Stopford Green, *Women's Place* 29).

With the arrival of Alice Green (1847–1929) in Cushendall for the 1904 Feis, this revolutionary group came together in the Glens of Antrim for the first time.<sup>11</sup> A close friend of Casement's, and an influential figure in his radicalisation, Green was the most widely read Irish historian of the period (O'Callaghan, 'Alice Stopford Green' 2013). Her homes in London and on Stephen's Green in Dublin were well-known salons for political radicals; she was good friends with Beatrice Webb for a time, and maintained an extensive correspondence with a number of public intellectuals and social radicals,



Figure 5.6: Portrait of Alice Stopford Green (1847–1929). (Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland)

including John Francis Taylor (*Manchester Guardian* correspondent for Ireland in the late nineteenth century), as well as Douglas Hyde and Eoin MacNeill (O'Callaghan, 'Alice Stopford Green' 2013). This quote gives us a hint of her personality: 'The aim of conversation is to "shut up" your companion (alias for the time being opponent). If he is feeble, he deserves it, and if he is strong it is a duty we owe it to society to silence him for once' (McDowell 17). Casement was an avid reader, and Green's reputation and clear sense of a mission to correct received ideas about Ireland as an uncivilised place in the period before colonisation, cannot have failed to impress him, not to mention her rejection of Anglicisation:

The child who knew only Irish was given a teacher who knew nothing but English; his history book mentioned Ireland twice only – a place conquered by Henry II and made into an English province by the union . . . the Irish boy was taught to thank God for being 'a happy English child'. (Stopford Green, *Irish Nationality* 248)

In a much-quoted letter to his old headmaster, Casement used similar grounds to compare his schooling unfavourably to Pearse's St Enda's:

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Now from my own recollection of the old Diocesan School and from what I know of similar establishments in Ireland, their aim is not so much to fit a boy to live and thrive in his own country, as to equip him for export from it. I was taught nothing about Ireland at Ballymena School. I don't think the word was ever mentioned in a single class of the school . . . As an Irishman, I wish to see this state of things changed . . . Patriotism has been stigmatized and often treated as 'treason', as a 'crime' – or dismissed with superior scorn as 'local'. (qtd Singleton-Gates 42)

The 'local' adherence of his friends in the Glens, of course, was challenging to their unionist context; not to mention the fact that, ultimately, Casement's patriotism would lead to his being executed for treason.

Green and Casement first made contact through Edmund Morel and their mutual interest in the anti-slavery movement; we are told that Casement wrote a 15-page letter of introduction to her in 1904, 'without reflecting but straight from my heart' (McDowell 74). From then on, they became close friends, and Casement wrote many homesick letters to her from his various postings abroad. The two were intellectually and ideologically compatible in various ways; her influence on Casement's emerging Irish nationalist sensibilities is beyond doubt, while his humanitarian efforts and commitment to the anti-slavery movement chimed with Green's liberalism. In other circumstances, they might have made a striking couple, Casement's dark features and charisma were well matched by Green's natural vitality and 'mass of red hair'. Her biographer, R. B. McDowell, describes her as having 'a decided sense of fun. From stories she records in her diary, she must have read Punch with gusto and she was quick to perceive and enjoy the incongruities and absurdities of human behaviour' (McDowell 17). They also shared an acute understanding of the close connections between colonial occupation and the exploitation of indigenous labour. Margaret O'Callaghan observes that Casement 'bombarded his acquaintances with her [Green's] writings' (O'Callaghan, 'Casement'), and Dudgeon describes him as having 'taken on the role of a one-man publicity department and distributor' for her 1911 publication *Irish Nationality*. Between them, they ignited the revolutionary group in the Glens and beyond, providing a forceful intellectual foundation to support the Irish nationalist cause.

The range of counter-cultural projects involving this network was sustained by the letters traded between the Glens women and like-minded individuals in Dublin, London and, where Casement is concerned, the Putumayo. Booklists and poems are exchanged and books reviewed in subsequent letters; in one such, Casement praises Margaret Hutton's *The Táin* to Ní Fhaircheallaigh but criticises the Anglicisation of the names in the text (NLI MS 31723 22 Nov.1907). Many of the letters refer to the bilingual project they are invested in, discussing efforts to find teachers for

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Irish schools (many candidates had the language skills but no teaching qualifications), or the difficulties in finding financial support for local schools in Gaeltacht areas. While the focus of these exchanges is most often the project of language revival, there is an abiding interest in philanthropy too, in stimulating local industries (as evidenced by the Feis for instance), alongside an understanding of the material realities of life in remote regions.

Moving between the Glens, the west of Ireland, and the wider colonial world in that period enabled Casement to draw keen-eyed comparisons between typhus outbreaks in Connemara and the Putumayo, and between Irish poverty and the enslavement of indigenous peoples under colonialism; his comment about the 'white Indians' of Connemara, which he described as the 'Irish Putumayo' is a clear example of this, for instance (NLI 13073).<sup>12</sup> Just as he had earlier committed himself to the re-education of Ada McNeill, his prodigious letter-writing meant that his 'New Woman' network in the Glens had access to these ideas, and to his perception of social injustice in the wider world he moved through; moreover, Casement's achievements in highlighting human rights abuses in the Congo and the Putumayo encouraged them to believe that, where political will is available, social change is possible. The Glens women put this awareness to good use, bringing their own capacity to bear in their efforts to right local wrongs. For instance, in this (undated) letter Gertrude circulated after Casement's death to raise funds for the Aran Island schools, she mentions his earlier intervention in a place

where the children acquire their education under conditions of great hardship . . . When Roger Casement visited the islands in 1913 his heart . . . was moved with pity for the plight of these poor little ones. He gave a sum of money to be expended in providing food (a cup of hot cocoa or milk or bread and jam) for the children in the middle of the day so that they might face their school tasks with more energy than is possible when children are cold and hungry. (NLI MS 39,120/5)

Their willingness to carry on consciousness raising in his name to achieve social justice and foster the Irish language shows the extent to which social change was the central motivating principle of this group.

Inevitably, Casement's trial and execution brought this group of women closer together, and as their letters to one another show, their later efforts to commemorate him were the basis for several initiatives, not least their collective involvement in subsequent iterations of the Glens Feis. In 1928, Margaret Dobbs was a driving force in the re-establishment of the Feis, along with Ada McNeill and Gertrude Bannister (who had since moved to the Glens from England, following her marriage to Sydney Parry); Dobbs maintained an active involvement in the committee until her death in 1962.

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In later life, the extent to which these women constituted a self-reliant community is plainly evident; to give just two examples of this, Ada McNeill took Eilis in when the Bannister sisters became homeless in 1942 following the wiping out of their savings in a stock market crash, and Rose Young shared Margaret Dobbs's home in Cushendall until her death in 1947. Their sense of common cause in the period following Casement's death was doubtless enhanced when, following the foundation of two new states on the island of Ireland, their ideological affinities were radically at odds with the northern majority.

Partition of the island in 1922 meant that this nationalist community was left somewhat stranded in the Glens. Alice Green's earlier introduction to *Woman's Place in the World of Letters* might have been written in tribute to them:

Of all pilgrims and sojourners in the world, woman remains in fact the most perplexed and the most alien . . . With her dim consciousness of having come from beyond the Law, or at least from regions where there is the adumbration of a new Law, her eyes are turned only to the Future. There she imagines ceaselessly another Life to be revealed which shall utterly efface old codes and systems. In her need and desire she has allied herself with the poor, the slaves, the publicans and sinners, with all who, like herself, were seeking something different from that which they knew. (Stopford Green, *Woman's Place* 23)

Ultimately, this vision of a new law and a time when 'old codes and systems' would be overturned, has proved a considerably longer project than she envisioned. Meanwhile, the names of these women have largely been forgotten, even in connection with the well-known men in their circle, Roger Casement, Bulmer Hobson, F. J. Bigger. A poem by another Antrim writer, John Hewitt, captures the gendered nature of public memory which contributes to this forgetfulness. In 'Fame', the scene is set in a rural community, a group of men gather in a 'joiner's rock-floored shop' at the end of a day's hay-making; the speaker, an outsider to the group, tries to gain a foothold in the company by turning the conversation to something he knows something about, poetry. He mentions work by a local poet and his intervention is immediately rewarded by the enthusiasm of his fellows, who know the poet in question; to the chagrin of the speaker, however, their main interest is in the tales they tell about this man's escapades, and so poetry is quickly out-classed by their yarning. Undaunted, he tries again to turn the conversation to poetry but this time, the men begin comparing notes on local rhymers and *seanachies* such as Henry Pat, whose 'every hit was clear / still, all the parties he was tilting at were dead and gone this many's a year'. The speaker has

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one final parry, mentioning the name of a renowned Glens poet, Moira O'Neill.<sup>13</sup> This is the response of the Glens men:

Oh aye, ye mean the young Miss Higginson  
who lived with the M'Neills of Cushendun.  
She was a decent girl. I seen her when  
they had the first big feis here, in the Glen.  
They said that she writ poems now and then.

## Notes

1 Discussions of queer kinship emerged in scholarly and activist work chiefly as a means to explore alternatives to heteronormative family structures and claim legitimacy for LGBTQ families. See for instance: Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Heather Murray, *Not in This Family: Gays and the Meaning of Kinship in Postwar North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

2 Gertrude Bannister, Eva Gore-Booth, and Alice Stopford Green, along with Henry Nevinson and Philip Morel, had an audience with King George V on 2 August 1916, the day before Casement's hanging. The king refused a royal pardon on the basis that it was within the home secretary's jurisdiction; while George V did pass on the request to the home secretary, all appeals including this one were denied. See Sonja Tiernan, *Eva Gore-Booth: An Image of Such Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 193–4.

3 O'Callaghan is currently engaged in a full-length study of the historical writings of Alice Stopford Green and her circle.

4 Máire Mhac an tSaoi's anecdote about Mabel Fitzgerald in the post-Civil War period underscores her republican adherence: 'At that time Mrs Fitzgerald's espousal of the republican cause was so intense that she would not let her husband, Desmond, a minister in the Free State government, come home to his own house.' (Máire Mhac an tSaoi, *The Same Age as the State* (Dublin: O'Brien Press 2013), 74).

5 According to Riona Nic Congáil, Agnes O'Farrelly's first novel, *Grádh agus Crádh* (1901), was a 'New Woman' novel.

6 See also Tina O'Toole, *The Irish New Woman* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

7 Unpublished report for the Irish Temperance League (2012), 'Providing an alternative to the public house: the Irish Temperance League and the creation of the first coffee chain in Belfast in the 1870s.'

8 For further background on Dobbs's sustained commitment to local culture and language education, see interview with Mairead McMullan, local historian and archivist to Feis na nGleann (interviewer: Philip Campbell; from the 2009 BBCNI/TG4 series *Taisce na Tuaithe*). Available at: [youtube.com/watch?v=4nY9ZtPN3Uw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nY9ZtPN3Uw).

9 This was reissued by Cló Iar-Chonnacht in 2009, titled *Duanaire Gaedhilge Róis Ni Ógáin: A Collection of the Most Popular Songs of the Time*. Diarmaid Ó Doibhlin, ed.



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10 This is now seen as a key event in northern GAA history, according to the Boston College GAA Oral History Project (see [bc.edu/centers/irish/gaahistory.html](http://bc.edu/centers/irish/gaahistory.html)); the strong hurling tradition for which Antrim was famous throughout the twentieth century is partly attributed to the annual Feis (the main GAA stadium in Belfast is called Casement Park; the Cushendall GAA club, founded in 1906, is named ‘Ruairí Óg’s’, see [ruairiog.com/about-us/history](http://ruairiog.com/about-us/history)).

11 Gertrude Bannister’s involvement would come later, in the aftermath of the revolutionary period and Casement’s execution.

12 This is from a note made by Casement on a letter to him about the Putumayo from Charles Roberts, 6 June 1913.

13 Moira O’Neill (Agnes Higginson-Skrine) (1864–1955) was an Irish–Canadian poet who published *Songs of the Glens of Antrim* (1900) and *More Songs of the Glens of Antrim* (1921); she was the mother of writer Molly Keane (Nesta Skrine) (1904–96).

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