

Beneath the Hieroglyph: Recontextualising the Black Diaries of Roger Casement

By Angus Mitchell (1)

Abstract

The executed revolutionary Roger Casement continues to provoke one of the most enduring controversies in Irish and World history, principally because of the explicitly sexual Black Diaries which determine both his cultural meanings and his relevance to Anglo-Irish relations. His investigations of crimes against humanity in the Congo (1903) and in the Amazon (1910/11) altered the political economy of the tropical Atlantic and inaugurated the modern discourse of human rights. Despite efforts to isolate his achievements and bring closure to the debate over the Black Diaries' authenticity, Casement continues to haunt and barangue from beyond the grave. Ireland, it would seem, has failed Roger Casement. His presence remains officially embarrassing and publicly discomforting. Is it time for Latin American scholars and writers to start to decipher his meaning and to embrace both his history and his myth?

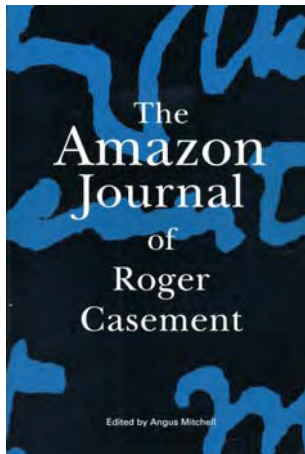
The Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset begins his meditation *Man and Crisis* with an essay on 'Galileo and his effect on History'. He invokes the image of the hieroglyph to illustrate the idea of how, in order to see the true meaning in the fact or the document and to reveal its deeper sense, we must look through and beyond the hieroglyph. The fact lies not within the fact itself, but in the indivisible unity of everything surrounding the fact. Facts help maintain and keep secrets, while presenting the illusion that they are some sort of Gnostic answer to the research inquiry. The idea has echoes in the postmodern challenge to truth claims and the objectivity of factual reconstruction. If the thought is extended to Roger Casement's Black Diaries, the researcher is confronted by a series of encrypted hieroglyphs. Each diary is firmly chiselled on the walls of the temple of the state's memory, five bound volumes, held in the National Archives (Kew, London), incontrovertible in their physical presence. (2) But what is revealed beneath their surface? Do they help expose the investigation of crimes against humanity in the Congo and Amazon that they map, or do they encrypt and repackage meanings, emotions, secrets and truths enabling the West to forget its trans-temporal and transnational violations of the global South? What internal and external dynamics are at play within the Black Diaries?

The entangled fetish of rumour and secrecy surrounding these documents has possessed

them with a hypnotic demeaning meaning. Their authenticity is still debated in terms of some rather banal lines of thinking. Yet their implication has now shifted into other contexts, where veracity can be scrutinised in new ways. To question their authenticity is neither a heresy nor synonymous with homophobia or anti-statism. They can no longer be innocently upheld as symbols of sexual emancipation, but must be interrogated for their own internal and external logics. Using tested critical tools to scope their deeper geographies, the documents themselves can be surveilled in multiple contextual locations, their contradictions tabulated and their dynamics read for political uses and abuses. Part of the reason they remain so frustratingly 'present' is because their interpretation and analysis has been encouraged within an uninformed and officially restricted environment. Thankfully, in the last decade, this has started to change and the dynamic of the documents and the facts they contain has shifted because of various cultural, political and academic actions.

Nevertheless, the Black Diaries endure as the most persistent controversy in Anglo-Irish history in spite of the fact that they belong within the research domains of sub-Saharan Africa and Latin American studies. Casement continues to haunt historical discourse like some archival phantasmagoria, spooking official narratives of world history, subverting certainties and challenging stereotypes. More

than a dozen monographs, biographies and edited volumes of his documents have been published in little over a decade, along with numerous journal articles, press reports and letters to the editor. The controversy over the Black Diaries blunders on like some half-forgotten history war waged on a wild frontier of the past. (3) Those who care, care passionately, but most people are oblivious to either the polemic or its implications.



The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement
(Angus Mitchell - Anaconda Editions - 2000)

The latest phase in the controversy extends from some recent political modifications in different areas of the law in England and Ireland, facilitating alteration in the cultural and intellectual circumstances that had constipated discussion about Casement and his contested Black Diaries since the 1960s. In Britain, the Open Government Initiative and a more transparent approach to questions of state secrecy has precipitated a vast declassification of Casement files, along with a different type of interrogation of the relationship between state secrecy and state documents. In Ireland, the Black Diaries debate was unfastened by the changes in the Sexual Offences Act, and the decriminalisation of homosexuality, which allowed for more open, public discussion on these matters. Equally important was the decision to include Sinn Féin within the democratic process. Dissembling the barriers preventing inter-community understanding has, however, exposed extraordinary contradictions in conflicting historical narratives: the root

cause of much civil conflict and disobedience in the first place.

Despite efforts to work through and reconcile the disagreements and paradoxes exposed in the multiple inscriptions of Casement and his representation, there survive two Roger Casements in the historiography of twentieth-century Anglo-Irish history. On one side, still swinging from the gallows, is the disgraced colonial servant, who was classified as a 'British traitor' and partially silenced as an imperial agent. On the other side, buried in the archive, is the Irish patriot, marginalised within the history of 1916 and yet still discomfortingly subversive, despite efforts to forget him. As there was a duality in Casement's consciousness as a rebel Irishman serving the British Empire, so there survives a divisive duality in his interpretation within conflicting historical traditions. Hardly surprising therefore that the war fought over his place in history reveals less about the man and more about the politics of the historical knowledge determining his reputation.

In a cultural and political deconstruction of the man and his facts, there are three interlinking contextual considerations requiring scrutiny. Context, of course, is essential to all historical representation and is susceptible to its own inclusions, omissions, constructions and epistemologies. The principal point of disharmony in Casement's interpretation is evident within the archive itself. There has been an imaginative failure to interrogate the Black Diaries in terms of their own archival dynamic. Why do some archives command greater power and control over others? How and why do specific archives privilege a narrative evident from specific documents? How does the control of information lead to particular distortions and imbalances in the construal of histories? Similarly, the sexual discourse arising from the diaries has been advantaged above all other narratives. No one can deny Casement's vitality in stimulating sexual discussion, but some straightforward questions about sexual and textual inconsistencies within the Black Diaries are ignored and obscured. Why? A further imperative context is revealed in the

diplomatic politics of Casement's inclusion as a historical protagonist. Casement cuts against the grain of agreed versions of the past, which may help explain why he has been removed and marginalised within narratives where he might rightly feature.

Archival Context

The Casement archive is both vast and fragmented. Considerable collections of letters, papers and correspondence are held in the National Archives (Kew, London), the National Library of Ireland (Dublin), New York Public Library (Special Collections) and the Politisches Archiv in Bonn. Supplementing these collections are dozens of other smaller holdings spread between diverse locations including the Niger Delta, Rio de Janeiro and the palace of Tervuren, on the outskirts of Brussels. They contain correspondence and traces that help to build a picture of a life lived across the Atlantic world at the height of imperial expansion in the thirty years before the outbreak of the First World War.



Roger Casement in the island of Guarujá
(Angus Mitchell - Anaconda Editions - 2000)

Casement was self-conscious of his place in history and the centrality of the written word in producing both visibility and meaning. He became a formidable constructor of history and produced documentation that has kept him close to the discussion on public records. How he challenged the relationship between his versions of truth and the State's version is discernible from the comment made by the

Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office, Bill Deedes, in 1953, when answering specific questions on the Black Diaries. He commented on how governments found it 'necessary to allow a passage of time before uncovering the whole truth about political events.' (4) In 1999 Casement files along with those of the infamous Mata Hari were the first secret intelligence files to be officially released into the British public domain. (5) But by that stage his place in history had been largely settled, or so most people thought. (6)

In Britain, the emphasis since the Black Diaries were released in 1959 has been to privilege the documents as the prism through which his life or 'treason' must be viewed and understood. An example of this was made clear in 2000 when an extensive list of Casement papers was circulated by the Public Record Office (now renamed the National Archives): *Roger Casement. Records at the Public Record Office*, which unequivocally defined the diaries as the archival key to unlocking Casement's meaning. (7) Page two of the document stated that in 1959 it was intended that they would remain closed for a hundred years, but 'privileged access' was allowed to 'historians' and 'other responsible persons'. It failed to mention that those who held views contrary to that of the British State had been excluded from seeing the documents as recently as 1990. While there is something luridly intriguing about the Black Diaries, they are vital to unlocking information about Casement's two principal investigations into colonial administration conducted in 1903 in the upper Congo and in 1910/11 in the north-west Amazon.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the power struggle between European empires was primarily dependent upon knowledge: knowledge transfigured into power and, as the scramble for territory continued, the boundaries of knowledge expanded: '[c]olonial knowledge both enabled colonial conquest and was produced by it'. (8) This resulted in a massive challenge of information control. In his study of the imperial archive, Thomas Richards has examined the value of knowledge in the organisation of imperial order and the role of

information in legitimating imperial action. (9) His theory builds on more familiar critiques of how knowledge and power were constituted through cultural hegemony; an argument advanced by Edward Said in terms of literature, Michel Foucault in terms of sexuality and Mary Louise Pratt in terms of travel writing. Richards builds on this analysis and demonstrates how archives became utopian representations of the state and instruments for territorial control.

Yet this knowledge empire produced its own reversals and reactions. Richards also looks at the 'enemy archive': how a counter-archive, challenging imperial matrices, extended from this early example of a knowledge economy. He cites the publication of the invasion novel, *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903) by Erskine Childers as a key juncture in the development of the enemy archive. It was Childers, of course, who conspired with Casement in 1914 to run guns into Howth in County Dublin, thereby arming the Irish Volunteers and igniting the history of the troubles. The Casement-Childers collaboration and their jointly hatched 'invasion plan' played into the deepest phobias on imperial defence and started to interfere with the borders separating fiction and fact.

This mirroring of fact by fiction is constantly at play within Casement's life and interpretation. He deliberately constructs his own journeys up river into the 'heart of darkness' – in both Africa and the Amazon – to investigate the dark heart of 'civilisation' and in the trajectory of his life there is something of both Marlow and Kurtz. The author, Arthur Conan Doyle, bases his imperial hero, Lord John Roxton, in his Professor Challenger novel *The Lost World*, on Casement's investigation of the Putumayo atrocities. The borders separating fact from fiction are crossed and re-crossed in the interpretation of Casement's life in a way that threatens to distort and destabilise his facts and the official archive both from within and without. Mario Vargas Llosa's observation (in his interview in this edition of IMSLA) that Casement has 'a character whose natural environment is a very great novel, and not the real world' partly explains why he remains more attractive as a character to those who work with

the imagination. Historians, in contrast, are generally cautious of the Casement story to the point of avoidance, a condition resulting from the unstable and contrary nature of the facts relevant to his story.

However, Casement's invasion plan to overthrow the empire ran far deeper than the plot to train and arm the Irish Volunteers. His lasting act of sabotage lies within the archive itself. His investigation of King Leopold's systemic violence in the Congo Free State and his exposé of the City of London's support for Amazon rubber atrocities and, finally, his condemnation of uncaring administration in the Connemara district of the West of Ireland, converge into a single atrocity across time and space. His archival legacy links up to expose colonial abuse on a worldwide scale and systemic failure at every turn. His archive produces a counter-knowledge or counter-history which destabilises the architecture of imperial knowledge through challenging the racial, sexual and cultural norms underpinning the knowledge legitimising imperial control.

What lies beneath the Black Diaries (the hieroglyph) is a single and vast trans-temporal and trans-historical atrocity committed in the name of 'empires' and 'civilisation'. This is a crime of unspeakable dimensions that, once identified, demands a re-periodisation of the official history of slavery and the nineteenth century anti-slavery movement. Casement was the chronicler of that crime at the moment of its initiation on the Congo and during a particularly destructive cycle of devastation defining the history of Amazon people and their environment. His evidence of that crime is contained in a paper trail of official reports, letters and diaries, which become the indivisible unity of his life leading him through the transformation from imperialist to rebel to revolutionary. The counter-insurgent response from the knowledge/power nexus is the deployment of the Black Diaries, which map the key moments of his investigations into Leopold's Congo and British financial complicity in the local apocalypse ignited by the Amazon rubber industry. The Black Diaries reverse the sense and begin the due process of

distortion, reduction and confusion by inverting Casement and turning him into the object to be investigated: the Edwardian sex tourist preying on the vulnerable. Thereby they break the coherency of his transformation and recondition the facts of his life by imposing an alternative counter-narrative to his counter-archive.

Sexuality Context

Mrinalini Sinha, in her work on *Colonial Masculinity – The ‘manly Englishmen’ and the ‘effeminate Bengali’* in the late nineteenth century, demonstrates how ‘gender was an important axis along which colonial power was constructed’ in Bengal of the 1880s and 1890s. (10) This same axis might be extended into Ireland up until 1916 and studied through a succession of events beginning with the trials of Charles Stewart Parnell and Oscar Wilde, peaking in the series of sexual scandals associated with British administration in Dublin Castle in the Edwardian age and ending with Casement’s trial. (11) As the propaganda war between the British Empire and its Irish critics deepened, so sexuality began to play a more prominent role in how the conflict was represented for public consumption. (12) The power of rumour was also used with great effect as the propaganda engagement became both more sophisticated and more ruthless. In the background to the political drama circulated theories on race, evolution, eugenics and degeneration. The works of Max Nordau, Sigmund Freud, Havelock Ellis and Richard von Krafft-Ebbing straddle the period and helped shape thinking on and around sexuality. George Bernard Shaw later remembered how Casement’s ‘trial happened at a time when the writings of Sigmund Freud had made psychopathy grotesquely fashionable. Everybody was expected to have a secret history.’ (13) Echoing in the background of his conviction is the humiliation and tragedy of Oscar Wilde. Recently, Wilde and Casement have been coupled as the sexual *enfants terribles* of the Victorian and Edwardian eras.

In the run of recent work analysing the interface between sexuality, empire, race and

gender, the Black Diaries have been treated with some level of caution and circumspection. Casement’s ‘gay’ status has been invoked more often as a symbol of Irish ‘modernity’, or as a means of humiliating intolerant attitudes amongst Irish nationalists, than as a blueprint for ‘gay’ lifestyles. Flimsy consideration has been given to the internal meanings of the diaries as documents and the interpretative shadow they cast over his investigations. Some of the reason may lie in the often tedious style of the daily descriptions, describing a life where mosquitoes are more visible than emotions. To argue, therefore, that the diaries are essentially homophobic may be unfashionable, but it is not unreasonable. They impose various homophobic stereotypes of the ‘diseased mind’ type and situate sexual difference in a marginal and alienated world bereft of either love or sympathy. Equally problematic is the treatment of the willing ‘native’ as silent and willing victim of the diarist’s predatory instincts.

Furthermore, the sense evident from the diaries is wildly contradictory to how Casement made use of sexual imagery in his own activism to build his case against colonial systems and to provoke reaction to the plight of the colonised. What the diaries obscure is the innovative strategy that he adopted to challenge the gender stereotypes of his own time and, most obviously, the hyper-masculinity so prevalent in his era. In 1906, his colleague in the Congo Reform Association, E. D. Morel, made a noteworthy reference to the use of sexual abuse by the coloniser in his exposé of the horrors wrought by the rubber industry. (14) The comment quite probably extends from Morel’s lengthy discussions with Casement: the source for much of his local knowledge on Africa. He wrote how the African had to endure:

violation of the sanctuaries of sex, against the rape of the newly married wife, against bestialities foul and nameless, exotics introduced by the white man’s “civilization” and copied by his servants in the general, purposeful satanic crushing of body, soul and spirit in a people. (15)

In the explicit and vivid language used here, the linguistic fingerprint of Casement is apparent. The general tone of the comment, linking

sexuality and colonial invasion, is later on mirrored in his 1912 report on the Putumayo atrocities describing horrendous abuses against Amazonian women and children where the 'white' coloniser is blamed for destroying healthy sexual lifestyles:

The very conditions of Indian life, open and above board, and every act of every day known to well nigh every neighbour, precluded, I should say, very widespread sexual immorality before the coming of the white man. (16)

Also integral to Casement's subtle subversion and proto-'queering' of imperial gender politics was his experimentation with new types of masculinity, which disrupted the colonial explorer stereotype. This was a masculinity achieved without dominance over the native and the use of the gun. Conrad captured it when he remembered Casement in the Congo 'start[ing] off into an unspeakable wilderness, swinging a crookhandled stick for all weapons, with two bull-dogs: Paddy (white) and Biddy (brindle) at his heels and a Loanda boy carrying a bundle for all company. (17) ' Casement's skills at resolving conflicts in highly sensitive situations without recourse to violence and using non-violent and peaceful methods is contrary to his image as 'gun-runner' in 1914. His recruiting speeches make persistent reference to 'manhood' and 'manliness', but idealise and encourage the defensive and the protective use of martial force as opposed to aggressive colonial violence.

Ireland has no blood to give to any land, to any cause but that of Ireland. Our duty as a Christian people is to abstain from bloodshed ...Let Irishmen and Irish boys stay in Ireland. Their duty is clear – before God and before man. We, as a people, have no quarrel with the German people. (18)

Intimately related to this recasting of Irishmen as passive and local, as opposed to active and global, was his progressive position on the place of women in Ireland's move towards independence. Women, more than men, were the enduring influence in his life. The historian and founder of the African Society, Alice Stopford Green, was his predominant

intellectual mentor, closely followed by the poet-activist, Alice Milligan, the public educator, Agnes O'Farrelly, and his cousin Gertrude Bannister. The inclusive Ireland envisaged by Casement was one that gave equal status to all women. In December 1907 he wrote to Agnes O'Farrelly during the debate over the teaching of Irish at the National University:

Why not also try to get some female representation? The Gaelic League is largely inspired and partially directed by women. Women played a great part in Old Ireland in training the youthful mind and chivalry of the Gael. (19)

When he co-drafted the *Manifesto of the Irish Volunteers*, the founding document for the movement, he deliberately inscribed women with a role. (20) During his trial, several newspapers commented on the large number of women in the public gallery. But this progressive and empathetic attitude is reconfigured and silenced within the sexualised narrative.

A further point of academic confusion is apparent from how his utilisation of different gender identities has been misinterpreted. (21) Writing in *Irish Freedom*, he adopts the pseudonym Shan van Vocht 'Poor Old Woman' and in some of his encoded correspondence with the Clan na Gael he signs himself 'Mary'. (22) When he dies, one priest recorded how he went to the gallows with the 'faith & piety of an Irish peasant woman.' (23) Descriptions of Casement often refer to his 'beauty' and his fine features using a language to portray him as if he were a woman. (24) In how he disrupts the colonial stereotypes of gender, there is something of the 'womanly man' about Casement. Richard Kirkland, in a comparison of Casement, Fanon and Gandhi, acknowledged his 'sacrifice' as 'part of a coherent resistance to colonialism' necessary in order to recreate himself as a 'new man.' (25) However, his experimentation with his own gender left him vulnerable to interpretative control. On 17 July 1916, the day of Casement's appeal, the memoranda read to the Coalition War Cabinet, which indelibly placed the diaries on the official record, stated:

of late years he 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. (26)

Few official statements better codify the confusion over sexuality that permeated the Coalition War Cabinet in 1916. Casement's treason is constructed not merely as a betrayal of his country and his class but, above all, his gender. If there is a single word which stands out from the transcript of his trial it is the word 'seduce'. Casement's efforts to recruit Irishmen to join his brigade in Germany, or enlist with the Irish volunteers, are not considered as recruitment but condemned as 'seduction'. He is denied the status of 'recruiter' and instead damned as a 'seducer' – a seducer of men from their loyalty to king and empire. Obviously, the word has explicit sexual connotations.

The Cabinet memo of 17 July can be identified as the first queered reading of Casement in a genealogy of queer readings, which reveal different shifts in sexual practice and politics in both Britain and Ireland since 1916. (27) Nevertheless, this first queered reading has required constant renovation, restoration and sexual replastering. In his aptly named *Queer People*, Basil Thomson, the historian-policeman who discovered the diaries, spins forgery, espionage and sexual deviancy into the world where Casement survives as an arch protagonist. (28) The first published edition of the Black Diaries (1959) splices the diaries into the overarching chronicle of the Irish independence movement between 1904 and 1922. (29) The encrypted message implies that Casement's investigation of colonial savagery was a key to achieving Irish independence, and helps explain the presence of a photograph of Casement's prosecutor, the Lord Chancellor, F. E. Smith, as the frontispiece to the volume. More recently, Jeff Dudgeon uses the Black Diaries to update the queer geographies of Ulster and to re-imagine Northern Protestant nationalism as some high camp drama driven by a cabal of queer crusaders. (30) But in each of these re-queerings, the dismissal of the internal politics of the diaries and how they

represent the African, Amerindian, Irish nationalist, Jew or Jamaican as willing victims of the diarist's desire, ignores the supremacist politics implicit in the Black Diaries.

Casement's interrogation of imperial systems helped articulate unspeakable aspects of power and inaugurated the postcolonial negotiation of the relationship between fact and fiction, slave and master, 'civilization' and the 'primitive'. (31) He also exposed systemic deceptions and lies controlling the dominance of the periphery by the metropolitan centre. His archive upturns the embedded racial and gender prejudices inherent within colonial authority and assembles an alternative version of events that radically transforms in the wake of his revolutionary evolution. The defence of Casement's narrative remains integral to postcolonial resistance. Conversely, the repackaging of the Black Diaries is vital to maintaining the integrity of the archive and the historical structures it both produces and protects.

Historian Lynn Hunt has analysed the relationship of eroticism to the body politic during the French revolution and shows how the 'sexualized body of Marie Antoinette can be read for what it reveals about power and the connections between public and private, revolutionary and counter-revolutionary'. (32) If a similar approach is taken to Casement's archival body, then his sexuality serves as an exceptional insight into colonial sexuality. Beyond and beneath the hieroglyph is revealed a new man hell-bent on overthrowing the system on multiple levels. The response to this systemic attack is a rewriting of his narrative in a manner designed to restore sexual normativity and preserve imperial hierarchies while superimposing a counter-narrative of seduction, deviancy, anti-humanism, isolation and tropical disease to thwart accusations of systemic violence, colonial corruption and establishment vice. What the Black Diaries achieved through innuendo in 1916 has been re-asserted through the authority of 'fact' since 1959, revealing a narrative that has succeeded in saving both Ireland and the global South from the revolutionary deviant.

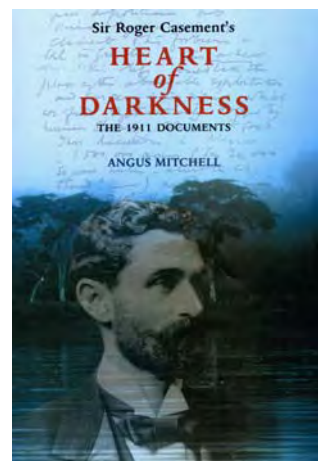
Political Context

In order to understand the 'presence' of the Black Diaries it is important to remember that discussion of foreign policy was always deemed to lie beyond the control of any potentially devolved Irish parliament. Even if Ireland had been granted Home Rule in either 1886 or 1893, foreign affairs would have remained within British parliamentary jurisdiction. Nevertheless, this did not prevent the Irish Parliamentary Party from developing a coherent critical policy towards empire from the 1870s, which had considerable influence on altering the wider discussion on empire and in shaping other nationalist discourses. Irish parliamentarians such as F. H. O'Donnell and Michael Davitt were advocates of an international dimension to the Home Rule discussion. What makes Casement different, however, was his acceptance by and work for the imperial system. He was considered part of the inner circle of the establishment and was recognised for his services in 1911 with a knighthood. Both of his investigations into crimes against humanity contributed enormously to the philanthropic image of the British Empire and to the belief in its self-regulating capabilities.

The complex political nature of those investigations reveals both public and secret aspects of how imperial government operated. The Congo inquiry gave Britain significant diplomatic leverage with Belgium and also helped divert attention away from deepening concerns about British imperial administration in South Africa after the Boer War. In the Amazon, the strategic publication of his reports in July 1912 persuaded investment away from the extractive rubber economy in the Atlantic region to the plantation rubber economy in South-East Asia. The relevance of Casement's 1912 *Blue Book* commands greater interest in South America for how it altered the political economy of the region than for its validity as a document exposing the abuses carried out against Amazonian communities. Recent global events have disclosed once more how humanitarian intention is often the publicly stated reason for motivating intervention, but it

often cloaks wider economic interests. The historian Eric Hobsbawm has identified how 'the abolition of the slave trade was used to justify British naval power, as human rights today are often used to justify US military power.' (33) The idealism of altruism often serves as a mask for aggressive hegemonic expansion.

This partly explains why Casement's official work has been contained within layers of legislation protecting state secrecy and security beginning with the Official Secrets Act of 1911. As part of the inner circle at the Foreign Office, Casement himself was bound by both the restrictions and machinations of secrecy. Partly through that proximity he became a stalwart opponent of 'secret diplomacy', a position expressed forthrightly in his essay, *The Keeper of the Seas*, written in August 1911, at the very moment the Official Secrets Act was passing through the British parliament. (34) His writings published in Germany in 1915 in the *Continental Times* made persistent attacks on the use and abuse of secrecy. Casement became the most vocal and informed critic of the secret negotiations which led to the First World War and which he continued to condemn as undemocratic and criminal until the noose silenced him.



Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness (cover) - Irish Manuscripts Commission

Rumours, secrecy, silence and lies have thrived at the heart of the Casement story and the Black Diaries have both driven and fuelled these dynamics. Rumour was particularly destructive at the time of his trial and helped

confuse the groundswell of support for Ireland which arose in the wake of the execution of the leaders in early May 1916. Aspects of secrecy are clearly at play in the negotiations of the Irish Free State Treaty in 1921, when Casement's solicitor, George Gavan Duffy (the most reluctant signatory of the treaty), faced Casement's prosecutor, F. E. Smith, across the negotiating table. Why Michael Collins was shown the Black Diaries so deliberately by Smith at the House of Lords in early 1922 and why he felt it necessary to make a public statement about their authenticity and to open a file on 'Alleged Casement Diaries' suggests that Casement was a significant factor in the secret diplomatic negotiations between Britain and Ireland. This may also explain why Gavan Duffy refused to comment on the issue later in life, when his word might have tied up so many loose ends in the story. In 1965 Casement's body (or, rather, a few lime-bleached bones) were returned to Ireland at a moment when the public discussion of the Black Diaries had reached boiling point. After the state funeral and reburial ritual in Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin, the matter was silenced in the corridors of Anglo-Irish diplomacy and was judged at a political, press and academic level to be 'out of bounds'. By situating the story within the confines of secret diplomacy, there is strong evidence to suggest that the Black Diaries are part of 'the agreed lie' binding British and Irish diplomatic histories of the twentieth century.

The critic David Lloyd has written about 'nationalisms against the state' – forms of nationalism which are deemed anti-statist and therefore unacceptable. (35) This is why Casement remains problematic for both Irish and British histories. He understood that Ulster was the intrinsic keystone to Irish unity – without Ulster, Ireland would always be compromised and truncated. His identification with Northern Protestant Republicanism constrains him within an historical location unacceptable to both traditions. While being part of the consciousness of the state, he has not been part of its written history, partly due to the fact that he has not been contiguous with the Irish Republic's vision of itself. Only amongst nationalists in the troubled north of

Ireland does his name still invoke sympathy. Furthermore, the Black Diaries have suited the growth of a divided and modernised Ireland and a resurgent imperial historiography. However, as documents of world history relevant to the Congo and Amazon, they are ignored for their own internal contradictions and prejudices and sustained symbolically as a way of 'discrediting the rising' by intimating 'that its leaders were an odd lot, psychologically unstable, given to Anglophobia and dread homoerotic tendencies.' (36) In Britain, they help filter the trauma and maintain the sanctity of the imperial image and archive.

Luke Gibbons has commented that what the historian has to fear is 'history itself particularly when it is not easily incorporated into the controlling, seamless narratives that allow communities to smooth over, or even to deny, their own pasts.' (37) Certainly, the retrieval of Roger Casement in recent years has exposed prejudices, silences and methodological shortfalls among Irish 'revisionist' historians. Where the diaries once succeeded in closing Casement down to a point of sexual oblivion, the situation is now reversed. They are facilitating a flow of new critical interpretations which conventional history is incapable of stemming. The efforts to settle the matter of the Black Diaries 'conclusively', through the flight of the academy into the safe arms of 'science' and the nature of these scientific conclusions which 'prove unequivocally...', says more about the dilemma in the relationship between politics and history than it reveals anything new about the Black Diaries. (38) The question of Casement's sexuality is no longer at issue. He has an essential 'gay' dimension which will always be part of his own story and the meta-narrative of gay liberation. The question now hinges on textual authenticity which requires us to ask deeper and unsettling questions about the authority of the archive and the role of state secrecy in authorising knowledge. The value of the Black Diaries as propaganda tools in the war against Irish republicanism is over. Academics and public alike are now watching the disintegration of an official secret or agreed lie, which has been carried for too long through the corridors of

diplomatic negotiation. It is now up to historians and scholars from Latin America and sub-Saharan Africa to spearhead the next

generation of Casement's interpretation and decipher the hieroglyph in search of their own postcolonial past and present.

Angus Mitchell

Notes

1 Angus Mitchell has lectured on campuses in the US and Ireland and continues to publish on the life and afterlife of Roger Casement. He lives in Limerick.

2 Held in the National Archives (Kew, London) as HO 161/1-5, the authenticity of the Black Diaries has been disputed since they were first 'discovered' by the British authorities in 1916. They configure with the daily movement of the British consul Roger Casement as he made his investigation of crimes against humanity in the Congo in 1903 and in the Amazon in 1910 and 1911. For an account of the dispute, see Angus Mitchell (ed.) *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement* (Dublin & London, 1997) and *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: the 1911 Documents* (Dublin, 2003). The diaries were published in a comprehensive (and eccentric) edition by Jeff Dudgeon (ed.), *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries with a study of his background, sexuality and Irish political life* (Belfast, 2002).

3 The most complete bibliography is included in the biography by Seamás Ó Síochain, *Roger Casement: Imperialist Rebel, Revolutionary* (Dublin, 2007) and for a brief introductory biography see Angus Mitchell, *Casement* (London, 2003). The narrative of the Putumayo atrocities is dealt with by Ovidio Lagos, *Arana rey del Caucho: Terror y Atrocidades en el Alto Amazonas* (Buenos Aires, 2005) and Jordan Goodman, *The Devil and Mr Casement* (London, 2009). For proceedings from a Roger Casement conference, held at Royal Irish Academy in May 2000, including contributions by various academics and independent scholars working on different areas of Casement's life, see Mary E. Daly (ed.), *Roger Casement in Irish and World History* (Dublin, 2005).

4 Hansard Parliamentary Debates, 3 May 1956 Vol 552 no. 174 col. 749-760. Casement's name was raised again during the course of the second reading of the Public Records Bill (26 June 1967), reducing the period for which public records are closed from fifty to thirty years. An exception was made in the case of papers relating to Ireland. Gerard Fitt (West Belfast) felt it 'of paramount importance that every consideration should be given to the publication of all facts and circumstances relating to the arrest, imprisonment and subsequent execution of Sir Roger Casement.'

5 KV 2/6 – KV 2/10 – are the reference numbers for the largely unrevealing intelligence files declassified in 2000.

6 On issues arising from the release of documents and the Casement debate see Angus Mitchell, 'The Casement 'Black Diaries' debate, the story so far' in *History Ireland*, Summer 2001.

7 On 1 December 2000 a number of academics and archivists concerned with the Casement debate were convened at the Public Record Office in London where this list was circulated. It is an incomplete compilation of files relevant to Roger Casement held at the PRO.

8 Nicholas B. Dirks (ed.), *Colonialism and Culture* (Michigan, 1992) quoted by Catherine Hall (ed.) 'Thinking the postcolonial, thinking the empire' in *Cultures of Empire* (Manchester, 2000).

9 Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (London, 1993).

10 Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'manly Englishmen' and the 'effeminate Bengali' in the late nineteenth century* (Manchester, 1995), p. 11.

11 The most notable of these were the rumours circulating around the involvement of the explorer Ernest Shackleton's brother, Francis, in the theft of the Crown jewels, a celebrated case used by the advanced nationalist press against the Dublin Castle administration. See Bulmer Hobson, *Ireland Yesterday and Tomorrow* (Kerry, 1968), pp. 85-90. A recent popular biography, John Cafferky and Kevin Hannafin, *Scandal and Betrayal: Shackleton and the Irish Crown Jewels* (Dublin, 2001), is another valuable insight.

12 See Philip Hoare, *Wilde's Last Stand: Decadence and conspiracy and the First World War* (London, 1997). Hoare argues that war brought into focus the threat of homosexuality and that British intelligence was populated by men who imagined sexual perverts and German spies going literally hand in hand.

13 *Irish Press*, 11 February 1937.

14 E.D. Morel, *Red Rubber, The story of the rubber slave trade flourishing on the Congo in the year of Grace 1906* (London, 1907), p. 93-4.

15 *Ibid*, p. 94.

16 *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness: the 1911 documents* (Dublin, 2003), pp. 182-3.

17 C.T. Watts (ed.) *Joseph Conrad's letters to Cunninghame Graham* (Cambridge, 1969), p. 149.

18 *Irish Independent*, 5 October 1914.

19 Roger McHugh Papers, National Library of Ireland MS 31723, Roger Casement to Agnes O'Farrelly. 19 December 1907.

20 Bulmer Hobson, *A Short History of the Irish Volunteers* (Dublin, 1918), p. 23: 'There will also be work for women to do, and there are signs that the women of Ireland, true to their record, are especially enthusiastic for the success of the Irish Volunteers.'

21 See Lucy McDiarmid, 'The Posthumous Life of Roger Casement' in A. Bradley and M. Gialanella Valiulis (eds.) *Gender and Sexuality in modern Ireland* (Amherst, 1997). McDiarmid argues that Casement's 'camp locutions' in his letter of 28 October 1914 might be compared to 'deliberately girlish utterances of a faux-homosexual voice.' The fact that Casement was leading a revolution and was under close surveillance does not strike McDiarmid as a valid alternative explanation for his encoded communications.

22 Reinhard R. Doerries, *Prelude to the Easter Rising: Sir Roger Casement in Imperial Germany* (London, 2000) 49. Casement addresses a letter to Joseph McGarrity 'Dear Sister' and signs it 'Your fond sister, Mary'.

23 Archives of the Irish College, Rome. Papers of Monsignor Michael O'Riordan Box 17. Thomas Casey to O'Riordan, 3 August 1916.

24 Stephen Gwynn, *Experiences of a Literary Man* (London, 1926) 260, refers to Casement's 'personal charm and beauty ... Figure and face, he seemed to me then one of the finest-looking creatures I have ever seen.'

25 Richard Kirkland, 'Frantz Fanon, Roger Casement and Colonial Commitment', in Glenn Hooper & Colin Graham (eds.) *Irish and Postcolonial Writing: History, Theory Practice* (London, 2002).

26 TNA, HO 144/1636/311643/52 and 53

27 Efforts to place his meaning and that of the diaries into the narrative of gay history was recently undertaken by Brian Lewis, 'The Queer Life and Afterlife of Roger Casement', *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 14, No. 4, October 2005, 363-382. However, the analysis avoids any deep reading of the documents, or reference to the recent discussions on the relationship between propaganda and intelligence.

28 Basil Thomson, *Queer People* (London, 1922), p. 91: 'Casement struck me as one of those men who are born with a strong strain of the feminine in their character. He was greedy for approbation, and he had the quick intuition of a woman as to the effect he was making on the people around him.'

29 Peter Singleton-Gates and Maurice Girodias (eds.) *The Black Diaries, An account of Roger Casement's life and times with a collection of his diaries and public writings* (Paris, 1959).

30 Jeff Dudgeon (ed.), *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries with a study of his background, sexuality and Irish political life* (Belfast, 2002)

31 It is interesting to note that Robert J.C. Young begins his study of *Postcolonialism: an historical introduction* (Oxford, 2001) with Casement emerging from the Amazon in 1910.

32 Lynn Hunt (ed.), *Eroticism and the Body Politic* (Baltimore, 1990).

33 Eric Hobsbawm, 'America's imperial delusion', in *The Guardian* 14 June 2003 reprinted from *Le Monde Diplomatique* (June 2003).

34 *Sir Roger Casement's Heart of Darkness*, pp. 556-66. Casement's other important essay *The Secret Diplomacy of England*, published posthumously in *The Irishman* (9/3/1918) and reprinted in the Royal Irish Academy, *Roger Casement in Irish and World History* (Dublin, 2000) programme for the symposium. Among recent accounts on secrecy and the British state, see David Vincent, *The Culture of Secrecy – Britain 1832-1998* (Oxford, 1998).

35 David Lloyd, *Ireland after History* (Cork, 1999), pp. 19-36.

36 Seamus Deane, 'Wherever Green is read' in Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha and Theo Dorgan (eds) *Revising the Rising* (Dublin, 1991), p. 100.

37 Luke Gibbons, *Transformations in Irish Culture* (Dublin, 1996), p. 17.

38 Mary E. Daly (ed.), *Roger Casement in Irish and World History* (Dublin, 2005) contains a selection of the internal handwriting comparisons carried out on the diaries.

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