



The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement by Angus Mitchell; Roger Casement's Diaries, 1910:
The Black and the White by Roger Sawyer

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***The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement*, ed. Angus Mitchell, Dublin: Lilliput Press £20.**

***Roger Casement's Diaries, 1910: The Black and the White*, ed. Roger Sawyer, Dublin: Pimlico £10.**

Alone of those involved in the 1916 Rising, Roger Casement remains the object of special controversy. Opinions will differ about Pearse and Connolly, about motives and beliefs in that hectic period. But with Casement, as these two books show, we are on other ground. We cannot still be sure whether the evidence we already have is true or faked.

As is well known Casement was arrested in Kerry and taken at once to London. His London apartments were raided and his papers, including various diaries, journals and day books were impounded by the police.

Casement already had an international reputation as a humanitarian, and had many admirers in Britain, Ireland and America who did not share his political views about Ireland. Between his conviction and his appeal, certain influential persons, who had begun to campaign on his behalf, were shown by the Home Office typed up extracts from his private diaries. These were said to be of a morally objectionable kind, revealing the humanitarian to be a pervert. His defence refused to have anything to do with these documents, which it was suggested might form the basis of a plea of insanity.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who had been involved with Casement over the horrors of the Congo Free State, thought that Casement had become unbalanced since 1912, but he said that the diaries, whatever they showed, were irrelevant. Treason to the king was far worse than any mere sexual offence. Casement himself wished to be seen not as a stressed out lunatic, but an Irish patriot.

Since Casement was executed Irish Nationalists have sought to discredit the diaries, which were kept secret by the British authorities - to save embarrassment to the government of the Free State, Sawyer suggests. But they were not destroyed, as they might have been if they were fakes which had served their purpose.

Eventually one set of the typescripts was published in Paris in 1959, and the "Black Diaries" entered the public domain. And in due course the books themselves became available to scholars in the Public Record Office. Irish authors like Brian Inglis accepted that the diaries were genuine, and that Casement was a homosexual. Others, like Prof. Roger McHugh of UCD, remained unconvinced.

The editors of these two new books began work together to produce a scholarly edition of one of the most important diaries, those covering Casement's trip along the Putamayo to investigate the rubber workings in 1910. But they fell out. Sawyer now accepts that the diaries are genuine. Mitchell claims they are faked. An impasse remains unsolved.

These books are important, and for anyone interested in the Casement affair will be essential reading. Casement kept two different records for the same period, a day book which forms the Black Diary, containing notes of the writer's sexual encounters; and an open journal which is the White diary. Mitchell gives the White journal in full, while Sawyer includes in full the Black diary covering the period, but edits down the White journal.

To my mind there seems little doubt that the diaries are genuine. They reveal a strange obsessional side to Casement, and some passages will prove distasteful to many readers. It is a moot point whether the explicit passages, often amounting to no more than a phrase or two are actual records or mere fantasy. The obsessional nature of Casement was what enabled him to achieve all that he did. The man's energy is extraordinary.

But Mitchell's book, for all its strenuous efforts to show the hand of a forger at work, is the one of greater importance. The full version of the Amazon journal, literally a journal to hell and back, reveals the horrors of the exploitation of the Indians in the upper reaches of the River system. This area (once part of Greater Colombia) was disputed between Ecuador and Peru, and is now part of the Oriente province of Peru. Neither editor gives an adequate account of this dispute, or provides decent maps to illustrate it. This dispute meant that regular government hardly existed where Casement travelled, hence the outlaw rule of the rubber barons for all to see.

Mitchell suggests that commercial interests in London resented this, and acted through their friends in the British government to soil his name with faked diaries. But we are not told who these directors were, or how they were connected with ministers or civil servants of the day. The claim is made, but no real evidence brought forward to support it.

Sawyer is more even minded, but less full in his treatment of events. His work is by way of being an annex to his full length biography of Casement as a flawed hero. Accepting Casement's sexual nature he tries to enlarge our political understanding of his actions.

Irish nationalists, on the other hand, in defending Casement have actually harmed him. His sins are only to be expected - by now Christians should not be shocked at the manifestations of man's fallen nature. He is important not as an Irish patriot - his efforts to recruit Irish prisoners of war in Germany were a failure and he seems to have been confused about what should have been done in 1916. But his humanitarian work raises him to a very different level, into not only a hero of Ireland, but a lay saint of humanity.

A further instalment of the South American material edited by Angus Mitchell follows soon. The "morally objectionable" rule of King Leopold and Belgium in what is now Zaire is still bearing ugly fruit to this day.

One small, but not unimportant point, which shows how those researching Casement are not without flaw. Conan Doyle is referred to in these books as

donating £500 to Casement's defence fund, by far the largest sum from a single person. This is an error, which Montgomery Hyde put into circulation in the 1950's, by misreading the lists of donors in the papers of Casement's solicitor Gavan Duffy, now lodged in the National Library.

The Doyle referred to in his list was not Conan Doyle, but Casement's American lawyer, Francis Doyle, who received the money from John Devoy, as other papers in the series indicate. Devoy had been given the cash by the German Ambassador to the United States. Casement's defence was therefore paid by the German Imperial Government. What would the British have made with that had they known!

Peter Costello.

Anam Chara by John O'Donoghue, London: Baton Press, 1997, pp.281.

Anam Chara (Soul Friend) is one of the most popular books of the year, and has been at the top of the book-lists in Ireland for several months. It appears to be answering a deeply felt need in people for a spirituality that expresses itself in the language of poetry, in the retrieval of texts from sources available to the student of Celtic literature, and in a profound reflection/meditation on human living as it is experienced - especially in the more affluent parts of the world. The book draws again and again on John O'Donoghue's love of the beauty of nature as he has found it in his native place - in North Clare and in the West of Ireland. Images of landscape - stone, the valleys, the sea, water, earth - give the strong foundation in the natural environment - something we need to pay more and more attention to, if we move away from it to live in the city and in the metropolis. The images in *Anam Chara* evoke a mood of reverence and deep respect for all of creation.

In addition, O'Donoghue draws on his appreciation of Irish mythology and Irish poetry and folklore to discover the treasures of Celtic wisdom which he retrieves, and shows how a culture of modernity may lack an appreciation of these dimensions of human existence. Some of the images of modernity in *Anam Chara* are: the vast amounts of information available to some peoples at the end of the twentieth century - yet often they can lack true wisdom; the developments that have taken place in our knowledge; the neon lights of the modern city - that fail to allow for a gentler light of nature or of candle-light so that a gradual illumination of all that surrounds us can take place. O'Donoghue draws on his expertise in phenomenology to describe the situation of human life at various stages. He includes moving passages on our awareness, or lack of awareness, of death. He describes human loving and the fostering of deep relationships of love and friendship. He shows how human ageing can bring into a unity a full human life.

This is a beautifully written, beautifully crafted, and a beautifully produced book. It captures elements of the author's poetic gift, his training in philosophy