

## Hearts of Darkness: Conrad, Casement, and the Congo

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Once again, in the words of the refrain to Yeats's poem, "The ghost of Roger Casement / Is beating on the door" (306). In May 2000, the Irish government sponsored a symposium on Casement's place in Irish and world history, but the subtext, it appears, was once again the authenticity or forgery of the so-called "black diaries" which indicated that he was gay (Kennedy 50). Among those attending the symposium were the two scholars, Roger Sawyer and Angus Mitchell, who had recently published very different editions of Casement's diary material for 1910 (covering his investigations in the Amazon) because they had come to opposite conclusions about the black diaries—Sawyer concluding that they were genuine and Mitchell that they were not.

Casement had been knighted by the British for his humanitarian exposés of the plight of indigenous peoples in the Congo and the Amazon, yet he ran guns from Germany to arm the insurgents in the Easter Rising of 1916, who proclaimed an Irish Republic and sought, by means of an armed struggle, to end British rule in Ireland. Casement's role in the Rising seemed particularly egregious to the British because it had involved trying—even if with a minimum of success—to recruit Irish prisoners of war in Germany who were serving in the British Army (the First World War was of course underway) and, no matter how reluctantly, actually accompanying a shipment of arms to Ireland in a German submarine (Doerries). There is some reason to believe that Casement, like others involved, had come to believe that the Rising would be a disaster militarily, and would have preferred to call it off, but he did not get the opportunity to influence the leadership in Dublin (see, for example, Kennedy 46 and Reid *Lives* 362).

In addition to the charges levelled publicly at Casement in court—his traitorous status as Irish rebel and his dealings with the Germans

(which he entered into through his contacts with Irish-Americans and Clan na Gael during his stay in the U.S. in 1914)—he was accused in a campaign outside the court of being homosexual. The hidden agenda at Casement's trial was that the "black" diaries, circulated before and during the trial by the prosecution, proved that Casement was gay, and that he habitually bought sex from native men. There seems to be a good deal of agreement that, whether the diaries are genuine or not, in all probability Casement was homosexual (Kennedy 50). The secret if widespread circulation of extracts from the diaries among the influential tarnished Casement's reputation as a noble, selfless humanitarian, and offset the sympathy of public opinion in Britain that might have commuted a death sentence. They had the calculated effect of undermining a public petition for mercy, and his legal appeal for clemency. And when Casement was executed, the diaries denied him the martyred patriot status that his comrades had achieved in the aftermath of the Easter Rising in Dublin. Moreover, while Pearse, Connolly, et al. were also executed—they were shot by a military firing squad after courts martial in Dublin—whereas Casement was subjected to a highly publicized trial in London, incarcerated for a time in the Tower—the ancient prison historically associated with those who were deemed guilty of treason—and executed in the manner appropriate for common criminals.

My concern here, however, is not with the authenticity of the diaries that all but guaranteed Casement's hanging—and whether they were forged or not, the British authorities acted despicably in circulating them—but rather with the strange encounter in the Congo between Casement and Joseph Conrad, and the nature of their affiliation, which is redolent of Conrad's fiction, with its network of secrets, betrayals, political conspiracies, guilty association and psychological doubles.

Several writers on Joseph Conrad, including no less an authority than Ian Watt, refer to Roger Casement as Conrad's "friend" (160). This is not quite accurate, yet their lives and work were curiously intertwined and mutual. Both originated in European countries that were dominated for centuries by stronger neighbors in a virtual or actual colonial relation, countries whose citizens were moved to resistance according to

the ideology of romantic nationalism; both were adventurers in Africa, and on the basis of that experience and presumably their own origins became, to differing extents, opposed to colonialism. Casement was one of the first Europeans Conrad met on his voyage up the Congo in 1890, and certainly the first (and probably the only) sympathetic one. They shared a room for some two weeks, and Conrad's earliest impressions of the Congo surely must have been formed by his encounter with Casement, who had already been in the Congo for six years; he wrote in his Congo diary:

Arrived at Matadi on 13th of June, 1890 . . . Made the acquaintance of Mr. Roger Casement, which I should consider as a great pleasure under any circumstances and now it becomes a positive piece of luck. Thinks, speaks well, most intelligent and very sympathetic . . .

[June] 24th. Gosse and R. C. gone with a large lot of ivory down to Boma. On G.[s] return intend to start up the river. Have been myself busy packing ivory in casks. Idiotic employment. Health good up to now . . .

Saturday, 28th June. Left Matadi with Mr. Harou and a caravan of 31 men. Parted with Casement in a very friendly manner. . . . (159)

Perhaps Conrad was just passing the time packing ivory, but it was hardly an innocent, make-work activity—the “idiotic employment” to which he refers. Conrad had gone to Africa as the employee of a Belgian “society for commerce” in the upper Congo, and the name of the river steamer he served on and captained for a time was the *Roi des Belges*, an historical detail he suppresses in *Heart of Darkness*, like almost all the other names of places and characters.<sup>1</sup> Conrad wrote to Richard Curle that “explicitness . . . is fatal to the glamour of all artistic work, robbing it of all suggestiveness, destroying all illusion” (Sawyer 232). To name the boat, though—to take one instance of such artistically inferior explicitness—would also have made it painfully clear that the enterprise in which Conrad was engaged was part and parcel of Belgian imperialist ventures in the Congo.

Although neither Conrad nor Casement would have liked to admit it, surely they had both come to Africa not only in the spirit of adventure and exploration, but also in the hope of making their fortunes? “Exploring expeditions,” as they were euphemistically known, were inevitably driven by commercial interests—and Casement had been employed for a time by the Belgian Association, as indeed, was the famous “explorer” Stanley before him. Ivory becomes a symbol in *Heart of Darkness* for European corruption, but it is first of all the actual, material resource the European colonists plundered from Africa. Casement informed his friend Morell that he had gone “elephant shooting” for ivory in 1888 (Reid *Lives* 10), and in 1888–89 he had been in charge of a survey crew charged with finding a route for the Congo Railway Company between Matadi and Kinshasa. Presumably the rail link was designed to facilitate transportation of ivory and other commodities, and to avoid the troublesome and inefficient business of recruiting unwilling porters from the native peoples. Conrad later remembered, in a letter to John Quinn dated 24 May, 1916, that he and Casement negotiated with tribal chiefs to hire “porters for caravans to Leopoldville and Kinshasa” (*Letters* 597).

The hunt for ivory, the transportation of it and the recruitment of native porters made Casement and Conrad complicit in the Belgian imperialist enterprise, yet within a short time of their meeting in the Congo, both Conrad and Casement had, to greater or lesser extents, undergone a crisis of conscience that led them to reject colonialism. Conrad’s experience, we know, led him to write *Heart of Darkness*, published in 1899 in three parts in *Blackwood’s Magazine*. Casement’s experience led him to draft a parliamentary report, published in 1904, that helped force Leopold to make grudging reforms in the Congo. In the previous year, Casement—then British Consul in the Congo—had spent some ten weeks collecting evidence of Belgian atrocities. When he returned to England, Casement contacted Conrad to enlist his support for a Congo reform association. Conrad could only lend him moral support, excusing himself from greater involvement on the grounds that he was only a “wretched novelist,” and referring Casement to his activist friend Cunninghame Graham. In Conrad’s letter to Cunninghame

Graham of December 26, 1903, Casement becomes a virtual character drawn from Conrad's fiction: a romantic, insouciant colonial adventurer, at home in the jungle, attended only by a loyal native boy and a pair of bulldogs named after the patron saints of Ireland; but also, more ambivalently, he is the very embodiment of the contradictory impulses of imperialism—its mixture of conquering, exploitation and civilizing, Christianizing care:

I send you two letters I had from a man called Casement, premising that I knew him first in the Congo just 12 years ago. Perhaps you've heard or seen in print his name. He's a protestant Irishman, pious too. But so was Pizarro. For the rest I can assure you that he is a limpid personality. There is a touch of the Conquistador in him too; for I've seen him start off into an unspeakable wilderness swinging a crookhandled stick for all weapons, with two bull-dogs: Paddy (white) and Bidy (brindle) at his heels and a Loanda boy carrying a bundle for all company. A few months afterwards it so happened that I saw him come out again, a little leaner[,] a little browner, with his stick, dogs, and Loanda boy, and quietly serene as though he had been for a stroll in a park. Then we lost sight of each other. He was I believe B[riti]sh Consul in Beira, and lately seems to have been sent to the Congo again, on some sort of mission, by the Br[itish] Govt. I have always thought that some particle of Las Casas' soul had found refuge in his indefatigable body. The letters will tell you the rest. I would help him but it is not in me. I am only a wretched novelist inventing wretched stories and not even up to that miserable game; but your good pen, keen, flexible and straight, and sure, like a good Toledo blade would tell in the fray if you felt disposed to give a slash or two. He could tell you things! Things I've tried to forget; things I never did know. He has as many years of Africa as I had months—almost.— (*Letters* 101–2)

However, while Conrad's diary and letters record his encounters with Casement, it would seem that *Heart of Darkness* does not contain a

single character who is modelled to any great extent on Casement. Given Conrad's artistic method, such an absence is not altogether surprising, and yet the novella is in some sense ghosted by Casement's presence. Conrad's letter to Cunninghame Graham ("He could tell you things") suggests Casement's spiritual affinity with Kurtz, as though he and Kurtz were possessed of some profound, shocking, and dark wisdom that had come out of the experience of imperialism, but remained unspeakable. One might also detect Casement in the Russian harlequin figure, in the pure love of adventure he seems to have shared with this character. And the figure of the immaculately laundered accountant suggests Casement's elegant attire even in the jungle. Moreover, there is something of Casement's ethical idealism in Marlow's own evident moral superiority to the other Europeans in the Congo who, with the partial exception of Kurtz, are a low, rapacious crowd, interested only in ivory and maintaining their positions in the company. Conrad's revulsion at the common run of European adventurers in the Congo inspires one of his most sardonic jokes when The Eldorado Expedition disappears into the wilderness, with several donkeys to carry supplies, prompting Marlow to remark: "Long afterwards the news came that all the donkeys were dead. I know nothing as to the fate of the less valuable animals" (35).

At any rate, Conrad's romanticizing of Casement in his letter to Cunninghame Graham in 1903 was only a little more sophisticated than the popular press commentary: Casement was described in the *Morning Post* as the heroic character of colonial fiction, "the sort of man depicted in Jules Verne's novels, the man who is everlasting[ly] exploring and extricating himself from every imaginable difficulty by superhuman tact, wit and strength . . ." (Cited Inglis 80). When Casement wrote to Conrad, he must have mentioned that he had read *Heart of Darkness*, because Conrad wrote self-deprecatingly in a postscript to his letter to Casement of December 1st, 1903: "I am glad you've read the *Heart of D* tho' of course it's an awful fudge." If this is merely a modest disclaimer on his part, Conrad must nevertheless have felt that the novella was too complex in its artistic composition to convey the kinetic effect needed by Casement's cause. The letter to which this postscript is appended is a backhanded invitation to Casement to stay with Conrad, jocosely de-

scribing the travel from London to Kent and living conditions in the Conrad household as barbarous and requiring the same sort of “pluck” Casement displayed in Africa. Casement seems to have taken the hint and made a day trip of it; he enjoyed the reunion nonetheless, as he blithely records in his diary for January 3, 1904:

Went to Conrad at Pent Farm, Sanford, near Hythe, and spent a delightful day with him. Back by last 8:20 train and home to bed. Revised report in train. (Singleton-Gates 189)

In several letters to Casement around this time, Conrad offered corroboration of Casement’s findings in the Congo, roundly condemned the Congo State (“where ruthless, systematic cruelty towards the blacks is the basis of administration”), told Casement he could use his letters in any way he saw fit (21 December, 1903), and wished him good luck with his “noble crusade” (29 December, 1903)—obviously feeling that he had fulfilled his function as historical witness (*Letters* 97, 103).

So Casement wrote his parliamentary report after reading *Heart of Darkness* (although he might have read it at any time in the five years since the novella’s first publication), and after this renewal of his acquaintance with Conrad. It is tempting to look for the influence of *Heart of Darkness* in Casement’s report, but the styles of the two narratives are profoundly different: Conrad’s is characterized by a high degree of mystification, by the deliberate creation of a dream-like atmosphere, Casement’s by its sober, rational, fact-based tendency. Casement’s report is restrained, even a little skeptical at times about the veracity of his informants, and he seems to give the devil more than his due by conceding that the Belgians had succeeded in part of their civilizing mission in that they had largely eradicated cannibalism and slave raiding in the Congo. Of course, as Casement notes with a bland irony, the Belgians re-introduced slavery in the forced labor they required of the natives, and even on occasion actually purchased slaves. And if they attacked the problem of cannibalism, they did so in such a way as to outdo whatever was understood to be repellent in the practice: “It is perhaps to be regretted that in its efforts to suppress such barbarous practices the Congo Government should have had to rely upon, often, very savage agencies

wherewith to combat savagery" (44). Like Conrad, he also uses the language of the colonizers in referring to the indigenous peoples as "savages," but like Conrad, understands the irony that it is the Europeans who are cruel and savage to an extent that strains credulity, engaging in a campaign of terror, mutilation, murder and persecution that even worked against their own cold-blooded self-interest in extracting the greatest possible amount of labor from the natives. The concessions that Casement makes and the judicious and restrained tone of the report, however, work to enhance its indictment, so that the factual reporting of atrocities, at times paradoxically takes on the nightmarish colouring of Conrad's story. One understands from Casement's report that the Congo government, like Mr. Kurtz in Conrad's narrative, was able to move from its avowed purpose of eliminating "savage customs" to eliminating "savages" without any apparent embarrassment. Under threat of the most terrible punishments, the natives were expected to provide the colonial administration with food, to collect rubber and ivory, to be porters, to provide fuel and to pay unbearably heavy taxes. Casement reports several cases where parents had sold their children to pay such taxes. Small wonder that Casement reported massive depopulation: "Communities I had formerly known [he refers to his travel in this part of the Congo sixteen years previously] as large and flourishing centres of population are today entirely gone . . ." (22). Although Casement acknowledges that sleeping sickness may be partly responsible, the burden of evidence suggests that life for the native people had become intolerable, and many had simply fled their homes.

The pretence that the natives were paid for their labor (by the copper wire, bits of cotton, and so on, mentioned also in *Heart of Darkness*) is exposed by Casement as the flimsiest of fictions. And what seems at first reading most tedious in the report is ultimately, perhaps, most revealing. Again and again, Casement documents the ways in which the area's people are cheated and its resources systematically looted. The weights-and-measures aspect of the report reveals the extent to which the economic "development" (as well as the social and cultural development) of the Congo was no development at all, but rather, a transparent extortion and destruction. This is, incidentally, a penetrating critique of



imperialism, in that it exposes the absence of any transforming potential in the exploitation and destruction associated with mercantile (as opposed to industrial) capital (Brewer 50). Casement's report was widely disseminated: Mark Twain is reported to have acknowledged that his own attack on King Leopold, *King Leopold's Soliloquy*, "had been largely gleaned" from Casement's *Report* (Inglis 118).

The closest *Heart of Darkness* comes to Casement's analysis is revealed only in an incident, that I take to be a kind of Marxian slip, in which Marlow exasperatedly asks the overweight and ill white companion who inconveniently keeps fainting on the overland trek between stations, why he came to Africa at all: "To make money, of course. What do you think?" he said, scornfully" (23). This simple brutal fact is elsewhere repressed in *Heart of Darkness*, in the interests of preserving a certain cloudiness or indeterminability of meaning in the text, of making its meaning profound yet "inscrutable," to use one of Conrad's favorite words; the novella is an indictment of imperialism to be sure, but more and other than that in its never-quite-fulfilled promises of revelation, of laying bare some ultimate Truth. And most troubling is its apparent complicity, not so much with racism as Achebe alleges, as with a kind of thrilling poetics of terror that acknowledges—or at least Marlow acknowledges, despite all his reservations and ironies—that there is something admirable about Kurtz and his spiritual heroics.

Casement later undertook another exposé—this time in the Amazon, where he revealed the horrible treatment of the Putamayo Indians in another British government report (1912). Casement's private diaries—both his Congo diary of 1903 and his Putamayo diary of 1910—were at the least aide-memoirs for the official reports that did so much to draw attention to the plight of exploited native populations. But the diaries (if genuine) also contain references to Casement's sexual desire—this was Casement's heart of darkness. In his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault describes how sex became "the fragment of darkness that we each carry within us: a general signification, a universal secret, an omnipresent cause, a fear that never ends" (69). The secrecy and fear must have been much more of an affliction, though, in the case of a gay man in Casement's day than the term "general signification" suggests. On the

trip to Africa, his diary records Casement's troubled reaction to the news of the death by suicide of a Scottish officer in the British Army who was about to be courtmartialled for homosexual acts, and registers the need for a humane treatment of his "disease":

APRIL 17th . . . H.M.S. Odin arr. Brought news of Sir Hector Macdonald's suicide in Paris! The reasons given are pitifully sad. The most distressing case this surely of its kind and one that may awake the national mind to saner methods of curing a terrible disease than by criminal legislation. (Singleton-Gates 121–3)

At the same time, the repressed keeps returning (or being inserted) in the cryptic entries in his diaries recording Casement's homosexual interest or encounters. These occur mainly at the beginning and ending of the 1903 diary, at any rate, and not on the Congo journey itself, but are much more frequent and regular in occurrence in the Putamayo diary. (In neither diary, though, are these encounters troubled by Casement's misgivings about the manifestations of "this terrible disease" in his own case, nor by the fact that he might be guilty of a kind of colonizing exploitation himself, since he seems always to have paid his partners for sex.)

To be sure, the British government and public took a dim view of Casement's attempt to recruit an Irish brigade from British Army prisoners of war in Germany, and of his involvement in the abortive scheme to land German arms in Ireland for use by Irish rebels in the Easter Rising. Casement certainly bore the brunt of British resentment in 1916 because he had been knighted for his consular services in Africa and South America just five years previously, and might have been understood to be a loyal subject and not a rebel. As late as 1920, Conrad expressed this point-of-view in conversation:

Casement did not hesitate to accept honours, decorations and distinctions from the English Government while surreptitiously arranging various affairs that he was embroiled in. In short: he was plotting against those who trusted him. (Najder 415)

This was not quite true, however, for at least since his return from the Congo in 1904, and partly as a consequence of that experience, Casement had become publicly embroiled in Home Rule politics, had conceived of himself as an Irish nationalist, and had made common cause with other Ulster Protestant nationalists like Alice Stopford Green, Bulmer Hobson and Francis Joseph Biggar. Casement had helped organize and addressed the *feis* at Cushendall in June 1904, a traditional celebration of Irish language and culture which was attended by more than 2,000 people, including those just named; and he chartered a boat to bring Rathlin islanders to the event (Sawyer 46–7). His cultural nationalism evolved into more radical political involvement under the pressure of events in Ireland. When the majority of Ulster Protestants formed the Ulster Volunteers and paradoxically prepared to fight if necessary the forces of the Crown in order to defeat Home Rule and remain part of the United Kingdom, Casement helped to organize the arming of the *Irish* Volunteers. Commenting on the “mutiny,” in which British army officers stationed at the Curragh let it be known they would resign rather than move North to confront the Ulster Volunteers, Casement concluded with grim logic that “the only Government in Ireland is militarism” (Singleton-Gates 336).

The Ulster crisis had been averted by the outbreak of the First World War, in which the Ulster Volunteers now enlisted in the British Army as a sign of their loyalty to the Crown. But the Ulster crisis also fed into the politics of Casement’s trial. Casement’s prosecutor F.E. (“Gallop”) Smith had just a few years earlier encouraged the illegal arming of the Ulster Volunteers, and he and Edward Carson (the leader of the Ulster Protestant Unionist cause) issued a slightly ungrammatical declaration in 1913, the seditious intent of which is nonetheless clear: “If the Home Rule Bill passed, we shall consider ourselves absolutely justified in asking and rendering assistance at the first opportunity to the greatest Protestant nation on earth—Germany—to come over and help us” (Singleton-Gates 330). The point is that Smith and others had proclaimed themselves willing to engage in the same seditious and traitorous activities for which Casement was now being prosecuted. Yet their contemplated treason would, paradoxically, have been undertaken in

the name of loyalty to Britain and Empire, and even if they had proceeded with their threat, it is hard to imagine that Smith and Carson would have found themselves in the dock of an English court facing similar charges to those now levelled at Casement.

Smith was impervious to any such self-irony, and at the same time as he served in Asquith's cabinet as Attorney General, he also acted as prosecutor for the Crown against Casement, which office he fulfilled most zealously. Casement was imprisoned in the Tower of London, the ancient and ominous holding-tank for traitors, and his case was prosecuted under the almost never invoked treason act of 1315, a Norman-French law that "provides a uniform death penalty for treason and such offences as to imagine the King's death; violate the King's wife, or his eldest unmarried daughter, or the wife of the King's eldest son; counterfeit the King's seal or his money; commit religious heresy; etc." (Singleton-Gates 467). In one of the other rare cases in which this statute had been invoked in modern times, an Irish-Australian named Lynch who had fought on the side of the Boers in the Boer War, was in 1902 found guilty, and sentenced to life, which was commuted; he was then released and subsequently elected Member of Parliament. (Singleton-Gates 466–67). Casement's treatment was to be quite different—he was found guilty and sentenced to be hanged. In a Kafkaesque twist, Casement's appeal to the House of Lords had to gain the consent of the Attorney General, who was also, of course, the Crown prosecutor in the case against him. After consulting his conscience, and presumably motivated in part at least by his own partisan politics in the matter of the Irish question, Smith rejected the appeal. Casement's final appeal for a reprieve was to the Home Secretary, but despite strong support for such a reprieve in the United States, Ireland, and England, it was denied. As a way of countering the pressure of such public opinion, the government continued to release material from the black diaries during the appeals process. It was surely Casement's sexual life that was on trial, as much as his seditious activities, and on that account he belongs in the distinguished company of those other Irishmen—Charles Stewart Parnell and Oscar Wilde—who were ruined by English political and legal exposure of the irregularity of their sexual lives.

Copies of the documents incriminating Casement in homosexual activities were distributed to the King, the Archbishop of Canterbury, various writers (although not Conrad), journalists and intellectuals, and those who might be influential in the Irish-American community, such as John Quinn, with whom Casement had stayed in New York. The idea of distributing copies and extracts from the diaries was clearly intended to defeat the various appeals for clemency, and to prevent as much as possible the status of political martyrdom that had been conferred on the executed leaders of Easter Week from applying to Casement. The terms in which Sir Ernley Blackwell, “legal adviser to the Home Office,” represented Casement’s homosexuality in memoranda to the Cabinet, illustrates Foucault’s observation that the identity of the homosexual was created in the late nineteenth century by a certain kind of medical-scientific discourse. Blackwell pronounced gravely on Casement as case history:

Casement’s diary and his ledger entries, covering many pages of closely typed matter, show that he has for years been addicted to the grossest sodomitical practices. 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. (Singleton-Gates 27)

This last diagnosis of pathology in Blackwell’s memorandum is quite in keeping with the more positively expressed Arnoldian notion that the Irish were a feminine people, wonderfully gifted in cultural matters, but politically incapable. In this matrix of feeling, the categories of Irish, female, and homosexual run together in a pseudo-scientific discourse that registers distaste and suggests the need for regulation.

Conrad refused to sign the petition for clemency, and revised his former opinion of Casement (Najder 414). Remembering their days together in the Congo, Conrad wrote to John Quinn, implicitly describing Casement’s character as ineffectually feminine, as defined by mindless emotion and vanity:

We never talked politics. I don't think he really had any. A Home-ruler accepting Lord Salisbury's patronage couldn't be taken very seriously. He was a good companion; but already in Africa I judged that he was a man, properly speaking, of no mind at all. I don't mean stupid. I mean that he was all emotion. By emotional force (Congo report, Putamayo, etc.) he made his way, and sheer temperament—a truly tragic personality: all but the greatness of which he had not a trace. Only vanity. But in the Congo it was not visible yet. (*Letters* 597–8)

Casement had been deluded about Germany, Conrad argued; Germany would not do anything for Ireland if it won the war. Of course, Conrad's sympathies were markedly pro-British and his Polish origins may have given him additional reason to be anti-German. England was his adopted if not uncritically admired home, it was at war with Germany, and his son Borys was on active duty. Wanting to do his own part in the war, the aging Conrad wrote some propaganda for the British merchant marine and went on several coastal patrols in a minesweeper in the fall of 1916 (Meyers 316–17). Yet a few months earlier, as he distanced himself from the now notorious Casement, the evidence suggests that the repressed and patriotic Conrad may himself have been guilty of sexual misconduct, and unwittingly entered into a relationship with another person who was to be indicted for treason. Conrad fell in love with a beautiful young American journalist called Jane Anderson—he describes her in a letter as “quite yum-yum” (*Letters* 637). Conrad was fifty-eight and she was twenty-eight. Anderson had pro-German sympathies during the First World War and “In the 1930s, if not before . . . became a German spy, and during WWII took part in German propaganda broadcasts” (Najder n95 587). It was a reference to Conrad (who must have turned in his grave) in one of her pro-Nazi broadcasts that “enabled an informant to identify her as Jane Anderson” (Meyers 366). This was in 1944, twenty years after Conrad's death. Anderson was indicted for treason with Ezra Pound and six others, although the treason charges were eventually dropped in her case, in 1947, because of insufficient evidence.

Conrad would not concede that Ireland was oppressed or that Casement was other than traitorous. On October 16, 1918 he had written crustily to John Quinn, who was a supporter of Irish nationalism, to complain about Irish unreasonableness:

I who have seen England ever since the early eighties putting on the penitent's shirt in her desire for conciliation, and throwing millions of her money with both hands to Ireland in her remorse for all the old wrongs, and getting nothing in exchange but undying hostility, don't wonder at her weariness. The Irishmen would not be conciliated . . . they took the money and went on cursing the "oppressor" with renewed zest. What could be done with a people that, being begged on bended knees to come to some understanding among themselves, is incapable or unwilling to agree on the form of its free institutions? . . . I, (who) also spring from an oppressed race where oppression was not a matter of history but a crushing fact in the daily life of all individuals, made still more bitter by declared hatred and contempt. (Reid *Man* 360)

Conrad's attitude to Ireland remained disapproving, and when in 1923, William Butler Yeats was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, Conrad was sure this was just a piece of political correctness aimed at recognizing and dignifying the recently emerged Irish Free State. It is amusing how he anticipates the knowing response of so many in more recent times when the prize goes to a member of a formerly colonized country. Conrad told his friend Jean-Aubry in November, 1923: "Yeats has the Nobel Prize. My opinion about that is that it is a literary recognition of the new Irish Free State (that's what it seems to me), but that does not destroy my chances of getting it in one or two years" (Meyers 355). Unfortunately, Conrad died the following year, before getting the prize, of course.

For his part, Casement would have been bitterly disappointed that "the new Irish Free State" Conrad refers to here was not the whole of Ireland, and that his home province of Ulster, shorn of three of its counties in the partitioning of the country, still retained constitutional ties

to Britain and, for some, at least, represented the last remnant of the British Empire. But Casement's vision of an Ireland that, in the context of competing imperial powers, would be independent and neutral, was realized in the neutrality of the 26-county Free State during the Second World War (however controversial this proved in Britain). Ireland's significant role since the war in humanitarian work in Africa and elsewhere has been inspired in some measure by Casement's example. Yet Irish nationalism and Irish public life have also been troubled by Casement's homosexuality down to the present time (McDiarmid).

After his experience of the Congo, Casement had come "more and more [to] see the world in terms of colonizers and colonized" (Hochschild 268). In contrast, Conrad's experience of imperialism may have given him a sharpened sense of the human propensity for evil and folly, but it emphatically did not lead him to see the world as divided into colonizers and colonized, and the Irish as colonized subjects of England. Yet Casement was certain that it was precisely his awareness of himself as a colonized subject that enabled him to comprehend what he saw in the Congo: "Congolese exploitation was, he wrote to one correspondent 'a tyranny beyond conception save only, perhaps, to an Irish mind alive to the horrors once daily enacted in this land [Ireland]'" (Howe 47). It is as though life was imitating art in a particularly Conradian style when Conrad and Casement met in the Congo; like Conrad's fictional doubles (Marlow and Kurtz, for example), they shared many affinities, but these affinities masked a profound difference. Among the things that connected them was their status of being not quite British in Britain, because one was Irish and the other Polish. And then there was an instinctive sympathy and mutual regard between them, a fellowship in being aware that they were both more intelligent, sensitive and morally aware than the other Europeans with whom they were thrown together in the Congo. Moreover, they were both writers (Casement wrote short stories and poetry as well as parliamentary reports, though he was better, for the most part, at reports), and they shared the romance of adventure in an exotic and dangerous place. But there is something exemplary in the radically different use each man made of his shared experience of colonialism in Africa: the artist Conrad wrote a story that especially in-



vites a psychological interpretation in its web of dream-like images and symbols. The activist Casement, by contrast, wrote a factual parliamentary report aimed at political reform, and eventually proceeded to enlist in a revolutionary struggle against empire that cost him his life and, for a time, his reputation. What further separated them, though, as in the case of Conrad's fictional doubles, was even more profound, in that one person remained on the side of an ethical watershed that the other crossed. As far as Conrad was concerned, Casement committed treason, forfeited his status of gentleman (formally evident in his knighthood), and presumably only revealed additional criminality when his sexual behaviour was made known. If in *Heart of Darkness* Marlow persists in a sardonic admiration of Kurtz even after the revelations of his genocidal ideas and behaviour, and deliberately lies to preserve Kurtz's reputation after his death, Conrad certainly felt no such loyalty to Casement. So far from perpetuating Casement's mystique, he not only refused to extenuate Casement's ideas or forgive his behaviour, but even refused to ask for clemency on his behalf, when so many of England's writers and intellectuals did so. It is at this point in the relationship between Conrad and Casement that the resemblance between art and life ceases.

## Notes

- 1 In his 1903 diary, incidentally, Casement reports that as he went up-river on his fact-finding mission in the Congo, the *Roi des Belges* passed him going down (Singleton-Gates 147).

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