

## *Introduction*

In order to commemorate the centenary of Roger Casement's first voyage to the Amazon, this special issue of *ABEI Journal* No. 12 focuses on one of the most controversial figures of the 1916 Easter Rising.

Roger Casement played an important role during the Amazon rubber boom and his writings about his Brazilian expeditions may be placed in the wider context of antislavery activism. He was British Consul in Santos (September 1906 - January 1908), in Belém do Pará (February 1908 - February 1909) and Consul-General in Rio de Janeiro (March 1909 - August 1913). In 1910, he travelled to the Amazon, commissioned by the British Government to investigate crimes against humanity being committed on the border between Peru, Colombia and Brazil.

The story of the rubber industry connects the Amazon to central Africa during the reign of King Leopold II of Belgium, and to the commercial hubs of the industrialised world at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Rubber belongs to the celebratory narratives of western modernization and was a central issue in the Amazon where it acquired tragic proportions. It has also changed various regions of the world as a result of acts of violence practiced against the indigenous communities inhabiting the tropical rainforests.

In August 2010 the *W. B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies* at the University of São Paulo, the Brazilian Association of Irish Studies and the Federal University of Amazonas organized the first international interdisciplinary symposium on Roger Casement in Manaus, taking as its focus his 1910 voyage to the Putumayo. Co-organised by Laura Izarra, Angus Mitchell and Luiz Bitton Telles da Rocha, the conference discussed key aspects of Transatlantic and Latin American relations involved in the complicated politics of the Amazon rubber boom, as well as Roger Casement's political and literary legacy.

This issue contains some of the keynote lectures of the symposium, which are centred on five main concerns. Transatlantic history is explored by historian Angus Mitchell, who discusses the link Roger Casement discerned between the plight of the Amazon Indians and that of the peasants of Connemara, stricken by an outbreak of typhoid. The impact of Casement's photography of the Putumayo Indians on the United States Government is recorded by Jordan Goodman. The photographs are held in the National Archives in Washington D.C., and were personally annotated by Casement, in such a way as to form an atrocity narrative which provides a rare insight into the political power of the visual image. Colombian anthropologist Juan Alvaro Echeverri examines the question of memory, focusing on the way in which the scars of the rubber boom, a period referred to by the descendants of the Putumayo Indians as "Basket of Darkness", are being healed. The Brazilian social historian and art critic Otoni Mesquita paints a portrait of the social and political life of the city of Manaus in the 1900s by way of a background to Casement's brief stay in the city on his way to the Putumayo. Finally, American scholar Maureen Murphy looks at the poems written by Nobel laureate William

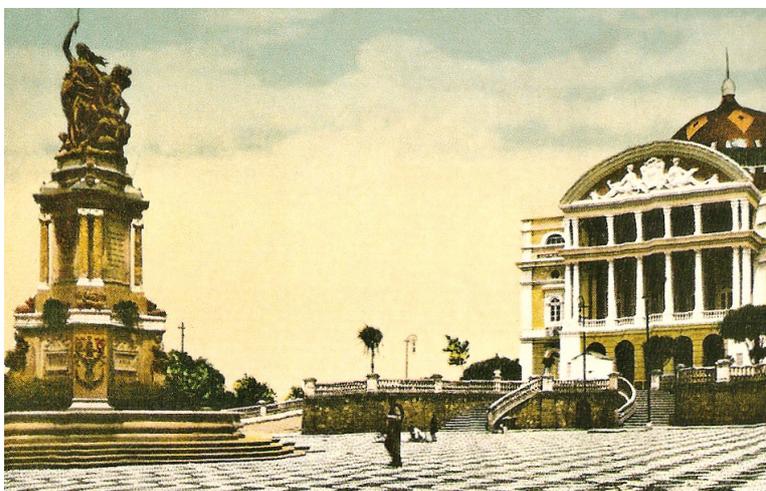
Butler Yeats in honour of Roger Casement, inspired by his reading of William J. Maloney's *The Forged Casement Diaries* (1936), demonstrating how Yeats returns to the ghost tradition in Irish folklore in the poems.

The life and writings of the Irish consul moved many writers, including Joseph Conrad, Arthur Conan Doyle, H. G. Wells and the Colombian novelist José Eustacio Rivera, to seek to represent the atrocities committed in Africa and the Amazon in the name of civilization. A few years ago, the Irish writer John Banville wrote a script on Roger Casement in the Amazon for a Neil Jordan film project, and, in November 2010, Nobel laureate Mario Vargas Llosa published his biographical novel about Casement, *El sueño del celta*.

In addition to these essays, the *ABEI Journal* presents the regular section "Voices from Brazil", in which Walnice Nogueira Galvão discusses Euclides da Cunha's novel, *Os Sertões* (1902), set during the Canudos War which was waged in the hinterland of Bahia in 1896-97. The death of Euclides da Cunha in 1909 was commented on by Roger Casement in his Brazilian writings.

The "Book Reviews" section includes Barbara Brown's review of Maurice Harmon's annotated translation of *The Dialogue of the Ancients of Ireland*, and a review of publications that have established a dialogue between the Caribbean and Ireland, and between Galician and Irish poets. The final review is of *Identidades Reescritas: Figurações da Irlanda no Teatro Português*, by Paulo Eduardo Carvalho, who is sadly missed following his untimely death on 20 May 2010. *ABEI Journal* No. 12 is dedicated to his dear memory.

*The Editors*



The Amazon Theatre, inaugurated on 31 December 1896, is an opera house built during the *Belle Époque* when fortunes were made in the rubber boom. The dome is covered on the outside with decorated ceramic tiles painted in the colours of the national flag. The monument "Abertura do Rio Amazonas à Navegação das Nações Amigas" (The Opening of the River Amazon to the Navigation of Friend Nations") is in São Sebastião square, in front of the theatre, where the black and white waving colours of the pavement in Portuguese style represent the encounter of the waters of the rivers Negro and Solimões. (Gerodetti, J. E. and C. Cornejo, *Lembranças do Brasil*. São Paulo: Solaris, 2004).