

Task #2: Ghostly readings – Literature about Roger Casement

Since Roger Casement's death in 1916, different stories have been written in which he, in one form or another, appears as a ghost.

1. Choose one of the following texts to read (you will only read a couple of pages).

A. *The Knight of the Flaming Heart* by Michael Carson, novel, 1995.

This novel begins as Boma, a young woman overwhelmed by her unwanted pregnancy and the recent break-up with her boyfriend, attempts to end her life by drowning herself in the Atlantic Ocean. However, she is miraculously rescued from the waves and led ashore by a tall stranger who turns out to be the ghost of Roger Casement, who asks people to call him by his nickname "Roddie." While only Boma and few other chosen ones are able to see "Roddie's" ghost, the town of Tralee and the rest of Ireland soon become obsessed with the apparition. In the passages you're about to read, Roger Casement's ghost talks to various inhabitants and visitors of Tralee, the small town on whose shore he landed and was arrested in 1916.



Figure 1: Roger Casement being led to the gallows on August 3rd, 1916



Figure 2: Alice Milligan painted by Estella Frances Solomons (1918).

B. "No Other Place" by Martina Devlin, short story, 2016.

This short story is about Alice Milligan (1866-1953), an Irish writer, journalist, publisher, activist and lecturer. She devoted her life to the cause of Irish Nationalism and was involved in the Celtic revival efforts. She was a friend of Roger Casement's and witnessed his execution in 1916 (adapted from Devlin 127-8). The title of Martina Devlin's short story is inspired by the inscription on Alice Milligan's gravestone: "is *Níor car fód eile ach Éirinn* – She loved no other place but Ireland" (Devlin 128). The story begins as Milligan is visited by a local police constable who does not appreciate the way she remembers Roger Casement, a hero of hers, on the anniversary of

C. "The Butterfly Collector" by Rebecca Solnit, essay, 1997.

This text is inspired by the author's visit to the Natural History Museum of Ireland in Dublin. The passage you will read begins after the author has come out of the museum and sits down in a nearby park, called St. Stephen's Green, to eat a sandwich and "digest the museum" (Solnit 38). What does a case of butterflies have to do with Roger Casement?



Figure 3: a display of butterflies collected by Roger Casement at the National Museum of Ireland.

2. Carefully read the text of your choice (A, B or C).

Please note that you will only read certain parts (“excerpts”) from the original text, not the entire essay. This is why some parts of the document have been covered up. Some words have been underlined. For these words, you can find clarifications at the end of your text.

3. Complete the reading comprehension exercises for your text (A, B, or C) below.

Make sure to write down your answers on a separate sheet.

A. *The Knight of the Flaming Heart* by Michael Carson, novel, 1995.

- ◆ In the church scene (pp. 138-140), why does Canon Dawson believe that Roddie does not deserve to return to the world from the beyond? And what does Roddie personally think about this “scandal” (p. 139)?
- ◆ Consider this sentence said by Roddie (the ghost of Roger Casement) to Canon Dawson: “I was made by my writing, then just as surely unmade by it” (p. 140). Is this sentence written in active or passive voice? How would you interpret this grammatical choice for this sentence?
- ◆ In the bar scene (pp. 190-193), what does Peter Coughlin believe is the reason why Roger Casement has come back from the dead? And why does Peter ultimately leave the bar?
- ◆ What word does Peter Coughlin use to describe Roger Casement’s sexual orientation? And what word do the younger men use? Do the words have different meanings? Why do they not use the same word?

B. “No Other Place” by Martina Devlin, short story, 2016.

- ◆ When Norman, the policeman, mentions his bike (p. 134, top), Alice Milligan’s comment creates an awkward tension between them which only intensifies as their conversation continues. What topic is it that they have oppositional opinions about? And what are their opinions?
- ◆ What kind of anniversary is it? What does Alice Milligan do to commemorate it? And what does Norman think about the person she is remembering?
- ◆ What words are used to talk about flowers in this story? Does the choice of words say something about the importance of the flowers? Why are the flowers important (or not)?
- ◆ Consider the passages where Alice thinks about the monarchy (p. 139, bottom) and Norman considers the Irish Nationalists (p. 136, middle). Which kind of pronoun do both Alice Milligan and Norman use? Why is the use of this specific pronoun fitting in these contexts?

C. “The Butterfly Collector” by Rebecca Solnit, essay, 1997.

- ◆ The text starts off just outside the museum but does not stay there for long. What other spaces are invoked in the text? And how does the author connect them to each other?
- ◆ Notice the different tenses in the text. Which is the most frequent? Is there a passage that deviates from the norm? Did the use of tenses in this essay help you or confuse you while reading?
- ◆ Have a close look at the words Roger Casement uses in his journal entries (p. 50, top half), specifically at the nouns in the September 30th entry and the adjectives in the various October entries. Do you notice a theme? Why do you think the author of the essay chose these specific journal entries for her text?
- ◆ What question does the author link the butterflies to (p. 51)? And what does she think is Roger Casement’s answer to that question?