**THE CULT OF THE SEXLESS CASEMENT**

**with special reference to the novel *'Dream of the Celt'* by Mario Vargas Llosa**

**(Nobel Prize winner for Literature 2010)**

**by Jeffrey Dudgeon MBE**

**Gay History Month, Dublin City Library, Pearse Street**

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I must thank Edmund Lynch, my chairman tonight and the organisers of Gay History Month for inviting me, and for the work they put in to effect this festival of history.

Edmund has recently returned from a triumph in Belfast when he showed his RTE documentary programme "*Did anyone notice us?* – *They did"* to Queer Space to what, for that city, was a large gay audience, and thence to London where I hope he had similar success.

My last lecture on Casement, strangely some may think, was to the Sinn Fein Cumann in Trinity College Dublin and to a receptive, if questioning, audience. I hope you too will ask questions even as I go along.

It remains unquestionable and remarkable – and maybe it tells you something – that the two best-known, and most written about, gay characters in the last 150 years have both been Irishmen, and both went to jail, although only one to the scaffold.

As the billing suggests, I am here to reclaim Casement, not as a gay icon or gay role model, but as a gay Irishman of consequence. As the centenary of 1916 approaches, it will become ever plainer that he was of great significance to, and in the creation of, an independent Ireland and particularly its foreign policy. He was an early and indefatigable Irish separatist. Even though the founding fathers, and now their children, have died, the creation myths have receded, and the country’s once dominant founding political party, Fianna Fail, has been broken, Casement’s legacy to the Irish Free State has not diminished.

You know the basic story of the Black Diaries, although I have to say every single fact about them has or will be challenged; perhaps here. Belief in their authenticity to many once, and some still, is heresy.

Briefly, after Casement’s capture in Kerry in April 1916 they were handed over to Scotland Yard by a Mr Germain who stored his luggage in Ebury Street, London. Casement never had a dwelling of his own so his life’s work and voluminous papers were scattered over many addresses.

The five diaries and notebooks cover four separate years 1901, 1903, 1910 and 1911. That of 1901 is of no import being little more than a jotter. There are two 1911 items, one a cashbook with frequent personal entries, and the second, a flowing or discursive diary, with substantive sexual descriptions. It has only ever been published in my 2002 book.

You can see from my hand-out, evidence of Casement’s mode and modus operandi, his cruising and musing. He was no shrinking violet either in sexual manners or manly achievement. As I have said, he was little different from many contemporary gay men. However he had little or no chance – and may well not have wanted – any form of substantive or long-term relationship. That opportunity has come to many of us only recently. Instead, he successfully compartmentalised his sexual life.

Two boyfriends did however cross-over and one, the Norwegian Adler Christensen, was to betray him, twice. The Ulsterman didn’t. A tiny number of friends worked it all out. I instance the historian Alice Stopford Green, of whom more later. Some others like his lawyer George Gavan Duffy probably knew but avoided expressing it directly.

None of this calls into question his effective humanitarian work on the Amazon or Congo rivers, or requires one to let his political work in Ireland and Germany pass without question. In the Irish department, Casement succeeded beyond his wilder dreams yet failed dismally in his chosen province of Ulster.

And it matters that Casement was gay, not least because it is unlikely otherwise he would have been such a rebel.

And what of icons?

One of the complaints of the forgery school is that homosexuals are trying to turn Casement into a gay icon. This unwarranted assertion infers that gay men are, as a class, historically minded which has a grain of truth. The notion however that Casement has a cult following like Marilyn Monroe, James Dean or Lady Gaga is laughable.

Up close, everyone is human so it is unwise to admire too much – Wilde, Auden, Isherwood, James Baldwin, Harvey Milk, Peter Tatchell might be or become gay icons. But they are, or were, all flawed, and at times horrible. My personal icon would be the 1950s law reformer and author of *The Other Love*, Montgomery Hyde, who wasn’t gay but did more for us than most, and paid the price in career terms. But he was a terrible snob and something of a chancer. No cult likely there, not least because he was the Unionist MP for North Belfast. Unionists along with Israelis are a uniquely unloved tribe.

With my lecture title, I do have to explain or prove two things: how and why did the cult of Casement come about? And why had he to be sexless?

First was he sexless? If the diaries are entirely fraudulent then he was, which in itself is a bit unusual.

Women gathered around him in numbers, most noticeably at his London trial where the audience included Lady Lavery, Alice Milligan, Eva Gore Booth, and of course his faithful and devoted Liverpool cousins Gertrude and Elizabeth Bannister. Also earlier, when a number of aristocratic Ulster women from the Caledon and Norbury families, Margaret Dobbs of Castle Dobbs, Rose Young (*Rois Ni Ogain*), Ada McNeill cousin of Lord Cushendun, and other titled English women such as Lady Constance Emmott and the Duchess of Hamilton befriended him. And that is not to mention literary giants who were friends or supporters like Conan Doyle, Joseph Conrad (but not in 1916), Rider Haggard and of course WB Yeats.

But there was never a hint of amorous activity with these women, some quite attractive and several of the marrying kind – rather the opposite. He even pleaded with his cousin Gertrude to get Ada McNeill to cool her interest writing, “I wish poor old soul she would leave me alone. These repeated invitations to go to meet her are a bit out of place. I have very strong feelings of friendship for her, and good will, and brotherly Irish affection, but I wish she would leave other things out of the reckoning.”

He had a number of gay male friends or people that it is reasonable to assume were gay, notably Sidney Parry who was to chastely marry his cousin Gertrude in 1916 after the execution, and the Belfast solicitor and antiquarian Francis Bigger. He was someone who cultivated boys and young men, particularly *Fianna* and Protestant rebels, something about which stories were exchanged, although none revealed impropriety.

There is no evidence that Casement and he discussed such matters while Bigger was sufficiently naïve only to discover the raw truth when he went through Casement’s correspondence and other diaries at his house, Ardrigh, after the outbreak of war. And unfortunately burnt the lot including probably his cache of boyfriend letters plus many interesting and unconnected items such as the largely missing, incoming E.D. Morel and Gertrude Parry correspondence.

The evidence Casement was a busy homosexual or sodomite is in his own words in the diaries, and is colossally convincing because of its detail and extent. You could hardly ask for more. There is also some corroboration from Norwegian interviews with friends and colleagues of Adler.

Was a cult developed around him, one that required him to be without the stain of sex and which would not have got under way otherwise?

It is that, to me, peculiar yet fascinating intense Irish Catholicism, one which took over this country for fifty years, that Casement was able in death to evoke. A couple of recently released letters[[1]](#footnote-1) exemplify the cult that was developing, not unlike that around Bobby Sands and the hunger strikers, one which the church militant finally put a stop to:

A nun at the Convent of the Holy Faith, Glasnevin, Dublin wrote to Gertrude: “Words fail to express the depth of my feeling for you in this most bitter sorrow. I had hoped to the last that the united prayers of so many would be granted ... What a glorious death – he was perfectly resigned to Almighty God's appointment – he bore no ill-will to his murderers – he loved God, he loved his fellow men and he died for his country.”

And Lily O'Farrelly wrote: “We are heart-broken and can't realise as yet the awful tragedy. I never imagined they would carry out their awful sentence. Thank God they can't touch his pure soul. His death was glorious and his memory will ever be enshrined in Irish hearts.”

His own defence counsel, Serjeant Sullivan, spoke later of “Casement worshippers,” warning cultists that “Casement was a megalomaniac.” They were not likely to listen to the lawyer, as he was a known enemy of Irish separatism, illustrated by a serious assassination attempt on him in Kerry in 1920. Casement left a clue to his own thinking on the matter when in his last days he wrote asking his friends to “roll away the stone from my grave.” Truly a demi-God.

Later in 1976, Roger McHugh[[2]](#footnote-2) at a Dublin meeting said the diaries “show a pathological condition and wildly promiscuous behaviour while what is known of Casement at the same time establishes his moral integrity and common sense.” This remains the forgery formulation of today.

Angus Mitchell, currently the doyen of the forgery school, and someone as devoted as any in the 1920s, says:[[3]](#footnote-3) “If he did write the documents, then we must contend that he deliberately authored diaries that executed him, dramatically compromised his work as an investigator of atrocities and betrayed himself as ‘a man of no mind’…if the Black Diaries Casement is the one true Casement, it is right that gay history should claim him as their own for Casement was the true martyr of the gay rights cause more than Oscar Wilde.”

This is dangerous territory for the forgery theorists – if Casement did write the diaries, he is in their words a truly awful person, worthy of jail if not the gallows.

Mitchell is by no means alone. He was promoted by Fianna Fail and in particular by former TD Martin Mansergh when that party was hegemonic. He works in concert with the old-fashioned Roger Casement Foundation and the swelling ranks of anti-revisionists, oddly now allied to older comrades in the British & Irish Communist Organisation/Irish Political Review/Athol Books nexus which had so much hidden influence in and on the north in the 1970s and 1980s. And, as I discuss later, he left an early and substantive impression on Mario Vargas Llosa, the Nobel prize winning novelist and author of *Dream of the Celt*.

So much so that he effectively wrote a history not a novel. His attempt at fictionalised history being described by an American reviewer as “more a matter of embroidery.”[[4]](#footnote-4) Even looking at the Spanish version which he kindly sent me I could see that it was history – so many names. *The Sunday Times* cruelly called it “an exercise in anaesthesia” with too many lists.

Casement’s martyr status was only accentuated by the extra trial he experienced, after execution, when his reputation was sullied by the diary publicity. Having added to the whole overheated atmosphere by becoming a Catholic in the death cell, he was further guaranteed saintly status. His Jesus-like looks, as in much popular Catholic iconography, brought a dramatically visual aspect to the whole confection. Being seriously handsome (with the beard) added to the potential for the creation of a hero-martyr – one whose public life had been dedicated to the poor and oppressed. Ironically the Black Diaries were to end up – while unseen – only convincing people more of his virtue.

That extreme version of faith had its origin in the peculiar combination of myth and religiosity which was to revolutionise Ireland. The Catholic nation, numerically devastated by famine, but strengthened by a vastly extended land ownership and a modernisation that had required seeing off the Gaelic language, was, in 1916, seriously out of step with its power potential. The English-speaking Catholic majority in the south had now been denied achievable Home Rule in their area for two generations. And they acted from 1916 on, easily obtaining the Free State.

Casement however presented both a problem and a challenge. As part of that sacrifice, and singled out to be judicially executed – hanged, not shot, months after the other leaders faced their firing squads or were reprieved, his death hurt Ireland and his leadership friends.

As that elite took power, his role was amplified and it could be seen how critical he had been for a number of reasons, not least his involvement in the founding of the Irish Volunteers and their initial arming, but also in his laying out of a foreign policy and *raison d’etre* for the new state.

But he was not just a party to the founding of the state, he was himself a saintly martyred figure, a humanitarian who sacrificed himself for others, both in Ireland and beyond. It was not and could not be conceivable to believers that he was a moral degenerate guilty of sex crimes that were once so awful Christians could not name them, *Inter Christianos non nominandum*, as Sir Robert Peel stated. Consequently the unseen diaries were specious and could only have been concocted – another crime to lay at England’s door.

No matter the evidence, that will remain the view of a critical number of old believers. They must not contemplate anything else or their faith dies; nor can they ever be convinced to let up their campaign. And they are joined by new recruits from abroad.

Even if Casement was homosexual, several hurdles remain for Irish nationalists. He often did it with boys, frequently out of doors and also wrote down the details. These difficult moral issues however need not be addressed, indeed can be avoided, if the forgery question stays centre stage.

Just as is the case with a fellow Irishman and Protestant nationalist, Oscar Wilde whose penchant for rent boys would land him in gaol, the prosecution itself became the issue, not the crime.

I have always maintained that Casement, the Irish separatist ideologue, was more important than Casement, the British government’s humanitarian trouble shooter, if not more so. He organised (for a decade), financed, and armed (twice) those Irish Volunteers who went out in 1916. But his diaries also give an amazing, almost unique, insight into a homosexual life lived hard and well over 100 years ago – our history, in other words, not just theirs to deny and redact.

I was startled, after I received the invitation to speak here tonight, to read the latest, extensive work of Angus Mitchell in Notre Dame University’s *Field Day Review.*[[5]](#footnote-5)He is the lead propagandist for diary forgery and the most furiously fixated of those questioning authenticity. He wears the mantle of an academic in Ireland, one with increasing Brazilian connections.

Angus had been largely silent since 2000 when, as he now writes, “acting on the advice of several senior Irish academics I had decided to remove myself from the [diary] controversy rather than engage with every new polemical development.”[[6]](#footnote-6) This self-denying ordinance came shortly after he reviewed my book (and Bill McCormack’s) in a highly dismissive manner describing it as a “queer reading…serving the cause of gay unionism.” He also accuses me of being no scholar. True, I am not an academic but I am a scholar if a scholar seeks after accuracy and where possible truth, and recoils from conspiracy theories.

Mitchell is consumed by a mammoth sense of what Italians call *dietrologia* – that what matters is under the surface. So no government employee and no academic apparently does anything except consciously, if secretly, to serve the interests of their masters. This is how he can seriously suggest the shadowy forces around British Intelligence and in universities didn’t just forge the diaries in 1916 but worked at them for a further “43 years to perfect the look[[7]](#footnote-7)” until they were suitable to be made available in the Public Record Office in 1959! The only problem is that no written trace of this colossal operation has survived let alone surfaced.

We are first required to believe that one (or more) forgers went to Naval Intelligence in 1916 and reported in as a highly experienced, open homosexual ready to do his duty for King and Country (against a fellow gay) by writing and researching more than a thousand diary entries which had to detail a great deal of rampant sexual activity alongside innumerable characters, many famous, plus a host of daily incidents and meetings mostly in South America.

Angus Mitchell did in 2009 say,[[8]](#footnote-8) “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...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.”

However he is now fully unleashed in the *Field Day Review[[9]](#footnote-9)* and writes at length, running over and annotating the whole diaries’ controversy (and Casement’s time in Germany). Throughout he acts like a defence lawyer not an historian, omission being his mode of avoidance. The piece is precursor to a big international conference on Casement in Tralee in October 2013 run by Notre Dame, possibly as part of *The Gathering*.

He points out that my book initially “gained academic approval, following a launch by Professor Lord Bew of Queen’s University, Belfast. This somewhat eccentric publication which included extensive passages from all the disputed diaries, along with fresh interpolations, and thoughtful omissions amounted to little more than an updated and camped-up version of the 1959 edition,[[10]](#footnote-10) with a few original insights into Casement’s early years in Antrim.

“Dudgeon upheld the diaries as the heart and soul of Casement’s biography[[11]](#footnote-11) and used them provocatively as a means of destabilising (or queering) the martial spirit of Northern Irish Protestant nationalism and representing it as some deviant youth movement. The book baffled academics, and was as unashamedly political as it was scholastically unsound.”

This deviancy refers to *The Neophytes*, a pre-Boy Scout group of young intellectuals formed by Francis Bigger that included the musician Herbert Hughes who wrote the memorable songs *My Lagan Love* and *She Moves Through the Fair*. Other in his circle included the poet Joseph Campbell who wrote the lyrics for the latter song and the singer Cathal O’Byrne, both Republican activists.

Angus obligingly mentioned that, “The most searing critique of Dudgeon’s book appeared in the ACIS *Irish Literary Supplement* (March 2004). The reviewer Coilin Owens…‘found disturbing contradictions with a Casement who on one hand was excoriating Belgians, British and Peruvians for colonial looting while, on the other, taking advantage of local men and boys. In Owens view the Diaries condemn Casement as a pioneer of sex tourism. He also dismisses the diaries as “repetitive, dull, almost entirely without originality…boring, tasteless, pathetic, pathological…Owens also criticised Dudgeon’s publication for ‘reinforcing the very stereotypes of the gay lifestyle what has been with us for so long: of the emotionally unstable, predatory, sadomasochistic, and promiscuous homosexual’. More problematically he condemned Dudgeon for throwing mantle of righteousness over pederasty and the sexual abuse of minors.”

I actually replied to Owens at the time saying, “I am not a Catholic and am an ethnic, not a religious, Protestant, so I did not concern myself with my subject’s spiritual hopes as Coilin would wish. It was also not possible for me, in the case of Casement’s youthful sexual partners, to “obtain records of the damage done to their lives, their psyches or their souls.” If they had been available, I would have quoted them but I suspect the damage, in most cases, was negligible or non-existent.” As I wrote, most were urbanised, consenting, indeed enthusiastic, young men.

In 2009, in *History Ireland,* Angus wrote that the latest phase “of the Casement controversy unleashed the arguments that Dudgeon has yet to either recognise or address: the separation of the issue of sexuality from the textual. In case he still hasn’t yet grasped the subtleties of the position, let me remind him once more. The argument is no longer about Casement’s status as a homosexual.”

None the less he is again and still querying the evidence of Casement’s homosexual status.

Casement’s most recent biographer, Séamas Ó Síocháin, writes, “When old ‘discrepancies’ or ‘contradictions’ have been found to be no longer sustainable, The forgery school has continued to reinvent itself by discovering new ones.”[[12]](#footnote-12) He also said that the few diary contradictions are paradoxically a sign of authenticity, when he dealt in an appendix with the small number of inconsistencies that Mitchell has ever drawn attention to.

By the way Angus has – and he is not alone in this – described me as homophobic, a word I rarely use. Another (gay) writer also described my book as prurient. I argued I was, to some degree, trying to put the sex back into homosexual. Some critics add that I may be using Casement’s sexuality against his causes, thereby trying to diminish them, much like those progressives and nationalists who taunt Orangemen with the doubtful story that King Billy was gay.[[13]](#footnote-13) These charges I take seriously.

It may be true that I have provocatively told some people they can’t have a hero who they also say is a gay villain (if the diarist). And if that is what they believe, and their hero is proved gay in their eyes (which is unlikely given the belief aspect) so be it. It’s their choice to risk diminishing their cause, be it Republicanism or an old-fashioned Catholicism with a lay martyr-saint, should it be proved that Casement was the diarist, someone they have labelled an exploiting sexual monster.

For my pains, I was told by Angus, “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.”

Can he, I asked, not engage in the Irish politics for a change instead of convoluted conspiracy theories?

Mario Vargas Llosa is described as “a recognised master story teller” and he truly is, particularly in his masterpiece novel *Feast of the Goat* about the assassination of Generalissimo Trujillo of the Dominican Republic.

But Mitchell has been betrayed and he turns on the master in a curiously nasty fashion, pointing up the novel’s poor reviews outside Spain. Llosa, he then says sadly, offered “some passing credence to the forgery theory” but “the Casement described is not merely sexually deviant but prone to bouts of psychosis and delusional dreaming” In truth, Angus got to the writer first and neutered a good novel; quite an achievement. Then he starts to lacerate him at length.[[14]](#footnote-14) Few other Casement authors however escape similar treatment in the piece.

Don’t ever think the authenticity question was resolved by the forensics tests arranged by Professor Bill McCormack with support and funding from the Irish government, RTE and the BBC. It is impossible for evidence to prove to such people that Casement wrote the diaries, or wrote the sexual parts of the diaries, or, if he wrote them, meant what he wrote, and if he did mean what was written, never did what he said he did. It is impossible to prove a negative but the forgery theorists have a jolly good try, now ably aided by Derridean deconstruction.

Mario Vargas Llosa won the Nobel Prize for Literature just months before he published his novel. There could be no more prestigious writer with a number of superb novels under his belt to take on the task of Casement. Not an easy subject, but made more difficult as his homosexual life was almost entirely out of sight and disconnected from his career and political work. The story is difficult to integrate in any art form, film, TV programme, or novel. His life is so complex and dramatic as to make a single product impossible, although Llosa tried. An exhaustive biography by Séamas Ó Síocháin of Maynooth remains the best and most definitive attempt to date.

My book, diaries aside, concentrated on only three parts: his family and background in Antrim, his early life mostly spent in England in genteel poverty – recently digitised newspaper reports of Roger and his brother Tom, being convicted of stealing in a London court reveal more of his dysfunctional childhood – and his Irish political life.

I would argue psychologically that his outlook was deeply shaped by being an ersatz Irishman brought up in England (not unlike Angus Mitchell, a London Scot devoted to anti-globalism an Irish nationalism). His Ulster Protestant family back in Ballymena and Ballycastle provided a degree of financial assistance but wouldn’t go the extra mile and put the bright boy through university, rather obliging him to leave school at 16 and go to his uncle’s shipping world in Liverpool to make a living.

Mario Vargas Llosa has adopted the view of the continuing diary forgery theorists that the sexual passages in the Black Diaries, if even genuine, were largely a work of fantasy. This colours his whole novel and makes Casement out to be more saintly than anything else. Someone riven with guilt about his activities and a sexual incompetent. He speaks of the diaries “with all their noxious obscenity.” This could not be further from the truth.

To be frank, it only occurred to me while I was researching and writing this talk, that Llosa had been so influenced by Angus Mitchell that he had adopted a postmodern approach to Casement and his sex life. But the clues were visible all along. Alice Stopford Green, the historian (who, along with her relatives, colonised Irish Secretary, Augustine Birrell), and whose biography Mitchell is presently researching, is given undue prominence in the novel, in a clunky fashion, and way beyond her role. She was always ‘Mrs Green’ to him. Others noted just how odd and tedious the repeated mentions of her were.

Obviously a woman was needed, over and above Casement’s mother, Anne Jephson,[[15]](#footnote-15) who in real life probably failed her children (if so, ably assisted by a feckless and over-opinionated father) but others were better choices like Gertrude Parry, his cousin, portrayed as “knowing” by Patrick Mason in his 2012 Radio Éireann play.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Carol Taaffe in the *Dublin Review of Books*[[17]](#footnote-17) was canny enough to say the novel “reads like a tedious history primer…that it is a means of exculpating Casement for the diaries’ contents…It is an approach that hints – in a faintly postmodern fashion – at the unreliability of documents, the pitfalls of interpretation and the inherent falsity of historical narratives.”

Roy Foster, described by Mitchell as “the doyen of the Irish revisionist agenda,” said in his *Times[[18]](#footnote-18)* review that the novel was “wooden, creaky and unrelievedly dull,” also pointing out that Alice Stopford Green is introduced “with the same information in almost the same words on three occasions within 80 pages.”

It is as if someone was sitting on the novelist’s shoulder. And seemingly had been.

Since Foster had previously reviewed Séamas Ó Síocháin’s definitive biography, as had this author,[[19]](#footnote-19) Mitchell added in the *Field Day Review*:[[20]](#footnote-20) “Both O Síocháin and Foster made clear their reliance and support for the work of Jeff Dudgeon, whose perplexing edition of the Black Diaries did much to reinstate belief in their authenticity, at a moment when their legitimacy was starting to collapse under the weight of unsustainable internal contradictions.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

The *Irish Times* reviewer,[[22]](#footnote-22) Alison Ribeiro de Menezes, spotted that Llosa’s “reiteration of the heroic nationalist vision of the 1916 rebels [was] curious given the author’s strident criticism of nationalism in other writings.” He is a noted anglophile but perhaps you can take the Spaniard out of Spain but not Spain out of the Spaniard, where England’s empire is concerned. (Llosa is actually a Peruvian, very much of the white Criollo caste and brought up in Bolivia by his mother and her family.) She also quotes him saying, “Casement wrote the famous diaries but did not live them at least not integrally – there is in them a good deal of exaggeration and fiction.”

My other reading of Llosa is that he is a straight guy, and one brought up in the 1940s with a strong sense of his mother. Square in 1960s terms. His family background is itself interesting and has occasional whiffs of Casement. He, if I am correct, revealingly, transfers it to Casement who in the novel is for ever dreaming about his mother and suggesting that had she lived he would have gone on to a better job, and a wife and family.

None of this seems to have concerned Casement in the slightest and of course was never going to happen if one believes, as I do, that sexual orientation for most gay men is set in, perhaps, the first four years of life and that an influential aspect to homosexuality is desynchronisation from standard surroundings. But that may be an unfashionable analysis and certainly another matter, although I could give examples.

I know Vargas Llosa bought my book and listened intently to what I told him on our couple of days together but was aware he had already written much of the novel in his mind, if not on paper – before he read it or indeed saw me. His first and primary influence unfortunately was Angus Mitchell who sewed the seeds in his head that there was great doubt in Ireland about the authenticity of the diaries and perhaps even if Casement wrote them he could never have lived them.

I recall Angus once telling me the fact that Casement recorded having sex with three different men on one day in Brazil (see diary extracts in appendix) was incredible as he had experience of how the heat meant one had little or no energy. Plainly he had never been in a gay sauna.

Colm Tóibín in the *London Review of Books[[23]](#footnote-23)* wrote: “Vargas Llosa’s efforts to evoke Casement’s childhood in Ireland are at the sugary end of historical novel writing. There are moments where it is hard not to feel that Jean Plaidy and Georgette Heyer had a hand in the book’s creation. [e.g.] The young Casement at Galgorm Castle ‘heard for the first time the epic battles of Irish mythology. The castle of black stone, with its fortified towers, coats of arms, chimneys, and cathedral-like façade, had been built in the 17th century by Alexander Colville, a theologian with an ill-favoured face – according to his portrait in the foyer – who, they said in Ballymena, had made a pact with the devil, and whose ghost walked the castle. On certain moonlit nights, a trembling Roger dared to search for him in passageways and empty rooms but never found him.’”

I have to say my heart sank when the novelist whom I was taking round Ballymena, saw the Colville portrait and homed in on it at speed. We heard the story from Christopher Brooke who was showing us his decaying castle and told us of the BBC filming an episode of their Ghost Busters programme there. I later heard that the mysterious sounds being investigated had been traced to a Ballymena taxi firm.

Llosa depicts a sexual Casement on only a small number of occasions and none convince. Indeed the following from the longest episode (pp 247-9) is exceptionally clumsy and I hope badly translated. Given that Casement does not record having sex with natives, let alone native boys – as opposed to urban or Europeanised individuals, it goes against the man in the diaries. However I can see the reason for Mitchell’s horror as it highlights and makes concrete a paedophile, or more accurately pederastic aspect to Casement.

The forgery theorists, Mitchell and Mansergh in particular, can be hoist with their own petards as they claim the diarist was “a psychopathic predator” and a “pederastic exploiter” (Mitchell), or someone who “had absolutely no conscience in regard to his own sexual life” (Mansergh). It is one thing to argue forgery but another to regard the diarist as a sexual monster; indeed it is quite perilous if that person is proven to be one and the same man whom Dr Mansergh has also stated it was “legitimate to co-opt…as a forerunner of Ireland’s independent foreign policy.” Which is not to say Casement did not on occasions groom teenagers.

Unsurprisingly Martin Mansergh has not endorsed the results of the forensic tests on the diaries encouraged by his own government which in 2001 found them to be written by Casement.

The sexual encounters are characterised by the Llosa themes where same sex sex is concerned, of shame followed by thoughts about mother and the lack of a family life. The Bakongo boys’ episode (pp 264-5) seems also to be more a description of inter-adolescent activity than anything else:

“Two young Bakongos were swimming there naked as he was…One of the two boys was very beautiful, He had a long blue-black well-proportioned body, deep eyes with a lively light in them, and he moved in the water like a fish…Roger feeling a kind of fever swam towards them…He felt shame, discomfort , and at the same time unlimited joy…then Roger felt someone else’s hands searching out his belly, touching and caressing his sex, which had been erect for a while…his body embracing the boy’s whose stiff penis he could also feel rubbing against his legs and belly. It was the first time Roger made love [no], if he could call it making love when he became excited and ejaculated in the water against the body of the boy who masturbated him and undoubtedly also ejaculated, though Roger didn’t notice that…What shame he felt afterwards.”

Compare this with Casement’s nostalgic and cheerful diarying on 10 May 1911: “Glorious day. May day. Season surpassing! …To Ballymena and back 4/-…Millar[his Belfast boyfriend] Postages 6d. Telegrams 8d…To B’mena demesne 3d. Beggar 3d. To Ballymena to Comptons. [his tailors] Very hot indeed. To old Turnpool by Braid and Devenagh Burn of Nov. 1877 !!! Rippling in brown and swift, and there too when I plunged across in Mch 1879! Glorious boys of Erin, big and fair. [This entry is very revealing as Casement is reminded of events and boys, out swimming in 1877, when he was thirteen, and later in 1879, when fourteen. It seems he was observing other males sexually as a young teenager and that his desires and sexual orientation were already fixed. It also appears he was not, even at that early stage, riven by guilt. This (deep) turnpool in the Braid river is on the Galgorm Castle demesne, the home of the Young family where the boy Casement often stayed.]”[[24]](#footnote-24)

In conclusion, Casement was plainly not sexless nor has the cult gone away. It is being led by a Casement clone with a fair number of anti-revisionist followers, some of whom should know better.

Nor should it go away, as Mario Vargas Llosa said, “The diary controversy did not end. Probably it will go on for a long time. Which isn’t a bad thing. It’s not a bad thing that a climate of uncertainty hovers over Casement, as proof that it is impossible to know definitively a human being.”

However it has to be said Casement gives us more information than most to make a good assessment. Perhaps because I know his flaws and failings and share few of his enthusiasms but much of his background, I can’t find my way into his heart. I see no real warmth except his capacity for pity, friendship and love of nature, and wonder if he was not overly self-regarding and obsessive, shallow despite his intellectual strengths, or in Conrad’s much quoted words, “a man of no mind…all emotion.”[[25]](#footnote-25) His ability to run a busy gay life effectively without guilt remains a remarkable achievement. His lack of curiosity about the matter given his radical and enquiring mind is equally so.

**The following 1911 Black Diary samples, terse and extended, tell of Casement’s cruising (and musing) his sexual enthusiasms and his dubious seduction technique on José, for one.**

**5 March 1911 (in Dublin):** “How”? 2/6 **X** .Trams 1/- "How"? 2/6 X 3.6 Enormous 19 - about 7" and 4" thick. **X** ...Supper at Jury's ...Enormous Dublin under 19. Very fair, thin leg knickers & coat, white scarf. Blue eyes & huge huge stiff, long & thick - a limb.

**11 May 1911 (in Belfast):** Glorious day....Swimming bath 3d...Saw the man, a glorious type get in Belfast. Fair hair and blue eyes and tall strong, well dressed at [Castle] "Junction". He looked and smiled and felt again and again. To Swimming Bath and four Beauties...Harry 10/- **X** ...at Northern Railway Company.

**4 September 1911 (in Bridgetown, Barbados):** “Then to bathe and met Stanley Weeks 20 years. Has certificate from Trinidad Electrical concern - trying to get work here at the Electrical. Bathed together first 9 a.m. Huge one and then 12.45: Huger still. Hung down curved and swollen, and wanted awfully. Poor boy. Wished I had taken him. Will try and get him to Iquitos. Was waiter once in a B'bados Hotel. Two scars on face from fall. One on thigh too.”

**15 September 1911** **(in Pará, Brazil):** “Bad headache Did not go out to João at 7 a.m. as was too seedy. Poor boy – will try & see him later. To Val de Caens at 10.30 to lunch with Harveys and then they brought me back in Lotus. Jigsaw at 7 to 8 p.m. with Ricudo & Dickey. Then out to Palace Square & at once entered Kiosque & huge long one (about 7½'' lying), tried to get me. Man of 27 or 28, like Barber wanted awfully. Saw “*Passear*” too, after at 8.30, so left to B. Campos – Whisky – None & then Paz none & Nazareth (twice) none & Theatre Square & round & round several times. None at all. Saw caboclo Indian at Paz who looked lovely but still at 12 none after another wait at Palace Square.”

**17 September 1911** **(in Pará, Brazil):** “To Sacramento with Andrews at 9 after many types & there after 6 for it then to zoo – & Huge ones on several & so home at 4.45. to beer & then my diary. In evg after rest, out at 7 to Palace Square & almost at once a beautiful moço in white looked & entered Kiosque. Met outside & invited to *passear* and away we went. Felt in darkness big head – & then to B. Campos & on by Souza tram to Marco where in dark travessa **[lane]** he stripped almost & went in furiously – awfully hard thrusts & turns & kisses too & biting on ears & neck. Never more force shown. From Rio. Returned 10 changed & out till 11.30. Huge one in café on moço.

**[On blotter:] X** “Rio” entered huge thrust.

**18 September 1911** **(in Pará, Brazil):** “I waited for two trams to pass and then walked along and was looking back at a lovely caboclo sailor when a moco hurried over and held out his hand and it was this boy. He had followed - at once took my arm and squeezed and led away side - and arranged meet at Nazareth Square at 8. To Dickey, ill, and then to Nazareth & at 8.15 he came and at once led me off. Felt, huge - thick as wrist - only 17 or 18. From Lisbon. 4 years in Pará. Walked to Sao Braz he squeezing hand and wrist all time and then "*assenta*!" [sat down] on grass in dark lanehe admitted his wish at once and so I took it. First spittle but so big could not get in - then glycerine honey and in it went with huge thrust and he sunk on me and worked hard.”

**25 November 1911 (in Iquitos, Peru):** “José came at 8.10 - sat down beside me with coat off and we started Spanish exercises - my hand on "muscles" and I felt it often. Then got him to stand against wall and to measure, and it was up, and I put my hand on it often and felt it swelling and stiff. He wanted awfully - blushing and loving and gleaming eyes. Sitting again - it up huge and I played with it.”

**‘DREAM OF THE CELT’ REVIEW AND AUTHOR INTERVIEW EXTRACTS:**

Colm Tóibín*[[26]](#footnote-26)* in the *London Review of Books:* “Ireland, in the meantime, remains on Casement’s mind. This is partly thanks to the Irish historian Alice Stopford Green, who is the occasion of one of the worst sentences…in the entire novel: ‘In those early months of 1904, Alice Stopford Green[[27]](#footnote-27) was his friend, his teacher, the woman who introduced him to an ancient past where history, myth, and legend – reality, religion, and fiction – blended together to create the tradition of a people who continued to maintain, in spite of the denationalising drive of the Empire, their language, their way of being, their customs, something which any Irish man or woman, Protestant or Catholic, believer or doubter, liberal or conservative, had to feel proud and obliged to defend.’”

“Were the diary entries written about things that didn’t happen, but belonged instead in the realm of the wishful, then they would surely have a much greater erotic charge[[28]](#footnote-28) than the scribbled notes that Casement wrote. Most of the entries merely record the transaction, sometimes with a reference to the size of the companion’s penis, the amount of money paid and the location where the sex took place. Sometimes there is another cryptic comment; occasionally an entry is entirely cryptic. Vargas Llosa’s question in his epilogue about the possibility of these notes having been ‘falsified’ is hardly worth asking. O Síocháin, having considered all the evidence, concludes that ‘the various pieces of evidence, positive and negative, suggest that the Black Diaries are the work of Roger Casement’ and could not have been forged.”

John Banville*[[29]](#footnote-29)* in the *New York Review of Books*: “In pursuit of this goal, the contents of secret diaries he had kept in the Congo and in Peru, detailing promiscuous sexual activity with young native men, which had been discovered in Casement’s London flat after his arrest, were circulated widely among the clubs and pubs of London, causing general shock and outrage. For many years Irish republicans and others regarded the so-called Black Diaries as forgeries concocted by British intelligence to destroy Casement’s reputation and ensure there would be no commutation of the death sentence that had been passed on him. It has since been shown that the diaries were not forged, although that is not to say that what is contained in them is entirely factual.

“Mario Vargas Llosa seems to regard the sexual adventures recorded in the diaries as for the most part fantastical, as romantic daydreams to aid in masturbation, or as wishful attempts at self-consolation. There is little doubt, however, that Casement was an active homosexual; whether he was criminally culpable in his exploitation of the boys and young man whom he paid to engage in sex with him is for the reader, and the historian, to decide. These sordid matters, even when they were considered the result of mischief-making by perfidious Albion, cast a shadow over Casement’s memory among Irish nationalists and made them wary of admitting him into what the historian Tim Pat Coogan used drily to refer to as the “pantechnicon of Irish heroes”.”

David Gallagher in the *Times Literary Supplement:[[30]](#footnote-30)* “Vargas Llosa holds – it is, he believes, his “right as a novelist” to do so – that the diaries were written by Casement, but that he did not do all that he described in them; he was promiscuous, and had a compulsive need to pick up young men, though not with the frequency recorded in the diaries. So Vargas Llosa’s Casement sometimes records a recent sexual exploit, and sometimes a fantasy of what might have taken place. We see him trying to fight his compulsions, feeling disgust after a night out and embarking on long periods of abstinence. But we also see him happy when the sight of some athletic young man re-awakens his yearning. These are moments when Vargas Llosa is at his best; sexual duplicity is a recurring subject in his work.”

“Vargas Llosa comes to his conclusion about the Black Diaries slowly. At first, his Casement is ambivalent about them. When asked about them by his prison visitors, he changes the subject or claims he does not know what they are talking about. He thanks Fr Casey for not asking about “those filthy things which, apparently, they are saying about me”. He tells the priest that he will not heed Cardinal Bourne’s outrageous request that, before he becomes a Catholic, he should repent of all those “vile things the press is accusing me of”. But we also see Casement reminiscing – alone in his prison cell – about his first homosexual awakenings; how in Africa he felt free of the constraints of Victorian society; how that boy in Boma, with whom he went fishing, suddenly closed up on him. “Shutting his eyes, he tried to resurrect that scene of so many years ago: the surprise, the indescribable excitement . . . .” Little by little, over the course of the novel, we see Casement picking up more and more boys. Towards the end, he falls in love with Eivind Adler Christensen, a Norwegian he picks up in New York in 1914, who travels with him to Germany. Christiansen was later to denounce him to the British – one instance where sex does real damage to Casement. Despite the betrayal, Vargas Llosa’s Casement has erotic dreams about Christensen at Pentonville.”

**Eileen Battersby interview[[31]](#footnote-31) in the *Irish Times****:* “The Casement who emerges in The Dream of the Celt echoes Parnell and Wilde. Vargas Llosa looks thoughtful at the mention of Wilde and admits he has not considered the parallels. The explicit homosexual content of his personal diaries effectively destroyed Casement. Although there had been suggestions that they were forgeries, Vargas Llosa feels Casement did write them. “But I believe that they belonged to a fantasy life, he imagined these happenings, but he didn’t live them. I see him as a lonely person, very gentle, too shy to have acted in such a brutal way.”

**Extract from Angus Mitchell (AM) interview[[32]](#footnote-32) with Mario Vargas Llosa (MVL):**

AM: The question of sexuality has played a disproportionate role in the discussion on Casement. Would it be wrong to guess that the so-called Black Diaries are central to the shaping of your own historical novel? In a recent interview in The Guardian you were quoted as saying that ‘There is a great debate about his [Casement’s] homosexuality and paedophilia that has never been resolved and probably never will be.’

MVL: Let me correct this a little bit. I don’t think that there is a possible doubt about Roger Casement’s homosexuality. I think he was a homosexual, but what I think is still, particularly after reading what you have done in The Amazon Journal, that it is still possible to discuss the authenticity of the Black Diaries. You give very strong perceptions of all the contradictions between the Black Diaries and the report. But I think he was a homosexual. This is another very dramatic, tragic aspect of his life if you place homosexuality in the context of the prejudices and persecution of homosexuals.

AM: I would say that the issue of authenticity is now more about the textual rather than the sexual.

MVL: That’s right, absolutely. Exactly. It is the textual which is controversial. It is very strange all these contradictions in very concrete facts in texts written almost simultaneously. I was in Oxford very recently with John Hemming and we were discussing this and he was saying ‘No, no, no the diaries are authentic. I assure you that they are authentic. There was no time for British Intelligence to fabricate them, there was no time.’ But I answered: ‘How can you explain the inaccuracies in the Black Diaries if he was writing both things at the same time. So I think this is something that can be discussed and still considered controversial. But not his homosexuality. The homosexuality was something which was another very personal element of the tragedy he lived all his life. No?

AM: Very interesting. A few years ago there was a brief exchange between two figures involved in the controversy about who could legitimately speak for Casement. The suggestion was put that only a gay man could really understand and speak for Casement. How would you respond to this point of view?

MVL: (Laughing) That is a terrible prejudice. If that was so a man couldn’t write about women or Peruvians couldn’t write about Europeans. No, no, I think literature is a demonstration of how this is all absolutely ridiculous prejudice. A writer can write about every type of human and character, because there is a common denominator which is more important behind the sexual orientation, the cultural tradition, the language, the races. No, I believe in the unity of the human kind, I think literature is the best demonstration of the universal experiences that can be understood and shared among people of very different extractions, very different identities and other levels of life including, of course, sex.

**DESCRIPTIONS OF CASEMENT AS ALMOST A DEMI-GOD**

* E.D. Morel: “I saw before me a man, my own height, very lithe and sinewy, chest thrown out, head held high – suggestive of one who had lived in the vast open spaces. Black hair and beard covering cheeks hollowed by the tropical sun. Strongly marked features. A dark blue penetrating eye sunken in the socket. A long, lean, swarthy Vandyck type of face, graven with power and withal of great gentleness. An extraordinarily handsome and arresting face.”
* Darrell Figgis (**A**n Englishman living in Ireland who assisted in the first gun running episode and whose love life was to end in a messy court case and his own suicide): “His face was in profile to me, his handsome head and noble outline cut out against the lattice‑work of the curtain and the grey sky. His height seemed more than usually commanding, his black hair and beard longer than usual…as I spoke he left his place by the window and came forward towards me, his face alight with battle. ‘That’s talking’, he said…Language had wandered far from its meanings when one man could say to another that he was talking, when his appreciation and brevity betokened an end of talking.”
1. NLI MSS 49,154/16/4 &5 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Senator Roger McHugh, an academic and active Republican wrote *Dublin 1916*, Arlington Books, London, 1966 which carries extracts from Casement’s German diary. He worked assiduously to prove the diaries were not Casement’s rather the work of a degenerate. He obtained the opinion of a Belfast psychiatrist, Pearse O’Malley, to confirm this. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. p. 117, *Roger Casement in Irish and World History*, (Ed. Mary E. Daly), Royal Irish Academy Dublin, 2005 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Richard Eder, *Boston Sunday Globe*, 29 July 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Angus Mitchell, pp. 1-125, *Field Day Review,* 8. 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *ibid* p. 110 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *ibid* p. 120 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Angus Mitchell, *Beyond the Hieroglyphic: Recontextualising the Black Diaries of Roger Casement*, Irish Migration Studies in Latin America 7:2, July 2009, <http://www.irlandeses.org/0907mitchell01.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Angus Mitchell, *Field Day Review,* 8. 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. That Olympia Press edition published in Paris by Maurice Girodias was followed by Roger Sawyer with the 1910 Putumayo report and black diary, Ó Síocháin with the 1903 Congo report and black diary, and Mitchell’s 1910 ‘Amazon Journal’ and 1911 correspondence (but no diaries). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Exactly not. I gave equal space to his family and upbringing and his role in Irish and Ulster politics, which role Angus Mitchell seems incapable of engaging with. My book’s title tells it precisely: *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries* – *With a Study of his Background, Sexuality, and Irish Political Life.* [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Séamas Ó Síocháin, *Roger Casement: Imperialist, Rebel, Revolutionary*, Lilliput Press, Dublin 2008, 656 pp. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. William Bentinck (Lord Portland) wrote to King William in 1697 that “the kindness which your Majesty has for a young man, and the way in which you seem to authorise his liberties…make the world say things I am ashamed to hear.” This, he added was “tarnishing a reputation which has never before been subject to such accusations.” William replied, “It seems to me very extraordinary that it should be impossible to have esteem and regard for a young man without it being criminal.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Angus Mitchell, pp. 117-121, *Field Day Review*, 8. 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Contrary to most writers’ belief, Casement’s mother was an Anglican Protestant from Portland St., Dublin who, after her marriage, converted to Roman Catholicism. Her son shared her view of the Church of Ireland as cold and stony. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Patrick Mason, *The Dreaming of Roger Casement,* <http://www.rte.ie/drama/radio/genres-history-thedreamingofrogercasement.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Carol Taaffe, *Dublin Review of Books*, Summer 2012, <http://www.drb.ie/essays/the-truth-teller> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Roy Foster, *The Times*, 26 May 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Roy Foster ‘Roger Casement versus the British Empire,’ *Times Literary Supplement* 24 September 2008, and Jeffrey Dudgeon, ‘He Could Tell You Things,’ *Dublin Review of Books*, 28 September 2008 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Angus Mitchell, p. 115, *Field Day Review,* 8. 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. At the talk in Dublin, only one significant internal contradiction was raised and that concerned Casement describing himself as a celibate. The meaning of the word is either unmarried or sexually chaste. Casement was certainly the first. Another member of the audience who had written a letter to the *Irish Times* as late as 2001 stating the diaries were forged admitted to having changed his mind on reading my book. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Alison Ribeiro de Menezes, *Irish Times*, 2 June 2012 <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/weekend/2012/0602/1224317090400.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Colm Tóibín, *London Review of Books,* 13 September 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Jeffrey Dudgeon, p. 280, *Roger Casement: The Black Diaries* – *With a Study of his Background, Sexuality, and Irish Political Life,* Belfast Press, 2002. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Joseph Conrad to John Quinn, 24 May 1916: “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, Putumayo - etc) he made his way, and sheer emotionalism has undone him. A creature of 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.” [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Colm Tóibín, *London Review of Books,* 13 September 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Mrs Green may have been a comrade of Casement but she could be quite acid in her attitude to him. In 1913, she is to be found, after listening to “a particularly vehement Irish tirade” once he had left, exclaiming “Sometimes when I listen to that man I feel I never want to hear the subject of Ireland mentioned again.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. I would dispute just one part of Tóibín’s view and that concerns the erotic effect of the diary entries. Given the recognised difficulty in good sex writing, this diarist, who was plainly not writing with a view to publication, by the very terse and direct nature of the words is successful where others who are trying, aren’t. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. John Banville, *New York Review of Books*, 25 October 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. David Gallagher, *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 December 2010 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Eileen Battersby interview with Mario Vargas Llosa, *Irish Times,* 2 July 2012 [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Angus Mitchell interview with Mario Vargas Llosa, *Irish Migration Studies in Latin America*, July 2009, [www.irlandeses.org/imsla0907.htm](http://www.irlandeses.org/imsla0907.htm) [↑](#footnote-ref-32)