**‘The Black Diaries of Roger Casement - The Development of Ireland's most intriguing Conspiracy Theory’**

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On 25 July 1916, the Attorney General of Great Britain, F.E Smith, denied a petition from Alexander Sullivan for a House of Lords review of his defendant’s sentence of death by hanging after being found guilty of High Treason in the British High Court.[i] Roger Casement uttered his final words, ‘I die for my country’, as the noose was placed around his neck on the morning of 3 August.[ii]

A strong clemency campaign had been silenced almost overnight by the distribution of extracts of diaries purportedly in Casement’s own handwriting showing him to be a homosexual pederast. For those closest to Casement, the revelations were a shock. The idea that Roger Casement, the British Knight turned Irish rebel, was a degenerate ‘pathic’ was an anathema to a republican ethos which was almost exclusively Irish and Catholic. The diaries, they believed, must have been a forgery.

This essay shall look at the near century long development of the theory that the Casement Diaries were forged by British authorities in an effort to dampen clemency appeals and blacken the legacy of Casement’s memory in order to prevent him achieving the same level of martyrdom that other leaders of the Easter Rising had reached.

The study will be in two chronological halves, divided by the publication in 1959 by Peter Singleton Gates and Maurice Girodias of The Black Diaries which prompted the British government to acknowledge the diaries’ existence. The dominant pre-1959 forgery theory was that the diaries were either Casement’s own notes on the sexual perversions of Amazonian natives or were a translation of another person’s diary. This essay will examine the development of this theory from its genesis, through its apparent manipulation and apogee in the publication of The Forged Casement Diaries in 1936 to its eventual collapse.

The latter half of this essay will look at how the forgery theories have adapted and survived since the release of the diaries in 1959. Finally, this study will conclude by looking at the modern day arguments surrounding the forgery theory and how, even after conclusive expert analytical analysis of the documents, the theory lives on and will inevitably live on until long after the centenary of their initial coming to light

From the day Casement was found guilty his Majesty’s government had been inundated with petitions seeking a reprieve. One petition was signed by six bishops, twenty-six MPs and fifty-one leading academics.[iii] Leading literary figures, such as Arthur Conan Doyle, and Jerome K. Jerome, lent their names to another plea for a stay of execution.[iv] American opinion was on the side of a reprieve also. The prominent Boston Senator, Henry Cabot Lodge, led a resolution in the Senate with a strong plea for clemency.[v] But no reprieve did come. Clemency appeals significantly dropped in momentum in the days before Casement’s execution and there is no doubting the reason why this happened.

The director of British Naval Intelligence, Reginald ‘Blinker’ Hall and the Assistant Commissioner of the London Metropolitan Police, Basil Thompson, orchestrated the distribution of extracts of diaries in the weeks between the end of the trial and Casement’s execution. The diaries, which showed Casement to be a homosexual pederast, were copied for distribution by a high ranking officer in the Ministry for Information, G.H Mair.[vi] Copies were shown to, among others, a wide selection of Casement sympathisers and British and American journalists.[vii]

Rumours surrounding Casement’s sexual practices spread amongst the fashionable clubs of London and became public knowledge on both sides of the Atlantic when the Daily Express and the New York Times wrote scathing editorials on Casement. The Daily Express editorial stated that ‘no man-and certain no minister of religion- would ever mention Casement’s name again without loathing and contempt’.[viii] Casement himself became aware of the diaries whilst in prison. Although he ‘could not get it into his mind that the British would stoop to such a forgery to destroy his character’ he totally repudiated the extract’s authenticity.[ix]

In Ireland the rumours were met with near universal incredulity. The national and local press poured scorn upon any suggestion that Casement’s character was any less than that of a virtuous Irish patriot. The Nenagh Guardian newspaper stated that ‘The hangman’s rope has taken the life from his body, but the poisoner’s pen must not be allowed to smirch his soul’.[x] In the Irish Independent Maurice Moore, of the Irish Volunteers, summed up the general feeling of nationalist Ireland when he wrote;

By the universal testimony of those who knew him during the last twenty years he was a man of unblemished personal character, and if stories to the contrary are secretly disseminated from official sources they should be treated with as much scorn as the Piggot forgeries which were used by similar people for similar purposes.[xi]

It was amidst this atmosphere of scepticism and mistrust amongst a nationalist community, buoyed by the glorious failure of the Easter Rising, that the seeds of forgery theories, which would live for generations, were sown. The inception of the first forgery theory began before Casement’s execution and originated from an American journalist with the Associated Press, Ben Allen.

Allen was shown one of the diaries by Reginald Hall following a routine weekly press conference shortly after Casement’s trial. Allen, who had previously met and had grown to admire Casement, was shocked at the diary’s contents and asked could he bring the diary to Casement to verify their authenticity. Needless to say, Hall politely turned down Allen’s request but he still, on a weekly basis up until Casement’s execution, showed Allen the diaries. In what seemed to have been a last ditch effort to encourage Allen into reporting on the diaries, Hall produced from his desk typed copies of the most explicit passages. Allen considered them nothing but the ‘ravings of a victim of perversion’.[xii] Concerned at Hall’s unscrupulous behaviour, Allen wrote to one of Casement’s closest friends in London and fellow Sinn Féin supporter, Nannie Dryhurst.

He told her that British and American journalists were being shown diaries purportedly in Casement’s handwriting describing homo-sexual acts carried out by the author. Allen surmised that the diary he was shown was in fact a copy made by Casement of another diary he had acquired in the Putumayo.[xiii] Allen’s letter prompted Mrs. Dryhurst into action. Shortly after her correspondence with Allen she wrote to Sir Sydney Olivier elaborating upon Allen’s theory with her own memories of conversations with Casement. Mrs Dryhurst explained to Olivier that the depraved passages, which by that time, were being publicised by the Daily Express were ‘notes of the evidence Roger Casement took down in Putumayo…He told us…he had found unspeakable horrors had been committed upon the unfortunate natives there. And the evidence was such that he could not employ a woman secretary to take it down: the work he translated from the Spanish or Portuguese himself.’[xiv]

Olivier, a man of considerable political clout and signatory of a clemency petition, wrote to Scotland Yard conveying the theory. In a letter of response, Basil Thompson pointed out that the diaries also describe acts committed in London and Ireland as well as South America and regardless of this, he said that he was ‘not interested in the defences of Casement provided by a fellow-Irish rebel’. [xv]

The theory that the diaries were forged using either ‘Casement’s own notes of testimony of degenerate behaviour by others’ or a translation of a diary was shared by members of Casement’s family including his sister Nina and cousin Gertrude Bannister. [xvi] However, it is salient to note that there is little evidence to suggest that either Ben Allen, Nannie Dryhurst, Sidney Olivier, or members of Casement’s family believed that the documents being passed off as Casement’s diaries were in fact, specifically, the translated diary of the man whose name became synonymous with the forgery theory in the 1930s; Armando Normand.[xvii]

It was not for another fifteen years that the name of Armando Normand was attached to their existing supposition. The development of the ‘Normand Theory’, culminating with William Maloney’s 1936 book, The Forged Diaries of Roger Casement, is as intriguing as the story of the Casement diaries themselves. Before outlining the development of the Normand Theory from beginning to shuddering end it is exigent to look at the elusive character of Armando Normand.

He first came to the attention of British authorities through the reports of an American railway engineer, Walter Hardenburg. During a trip up the Amazon he suffered an attack from the military expedition of the Peruvian Amazon Company, a London based corporation with British directors.[xviii] His companion, W.B Perkins, whom he had been separated from for a time, had witnessed a massacre and this prompted Hardenburg to approach British publishers to expose the criminality they had witnessed. The Truth magazine picked up his story and in September, 1909 they published ‘The Devil’s Paradise’ exposing the extent of criminality and exploitation in the Putumayo.[xix]

In Hardenburg’s subsequent 1912 book The Putumayo: The Devil’s Paradise, letters are published which identify an Armando Norman as a barbaric section chief for the Peruvian Amazon Company.[xx] In Casement’s diaries and correspondences, he slightly alters the spelling of the villain of Hardenburg’s recollections to ‘Armando Normand’.[xxi] However, he still maintains the same callousness; in his Putumayo Journal, Casement describes how Normand had killed hundreds of Indians in cold blood.[xxii] The first public mention that the diary extracts which Scotland Yard circulated in 1916 were in fact Casement’s translation of the diary of Armando Normand occurred in an RTÉ radio interview with Bulmer Hobson in the early 1930s.[xxiii] Soon afterwards Hobson deposited a statement into the National Library of Ireland (N.L.I) in which he recalled a conversation he had with Casement shortly after his return from the Putumayo;

Among other things he told me of a diary belonging to one of the worst of the scoundrels engaged in ill-treating the natives. He had got possession of his diary and had translated it and sent it to the Foreign Office along with his report and other papers containing evidence against the company and its employees. The diary was concerned with acts of sexual perversion and was un-publishable....As his intimate friend for the proceeding twelve years I knew how completely impossible were the allegations that the diary was his own...[xxiv]

Despite not naming the ‘scoundrel’, Hobson was certainly alluding to Armando Normand.[xxv] The theory was further ascribed to by P.S O’Hegarty. Just as Hobson had done, O’Hegarty deposited his own statement into the N.L.I in which he recalls visiting Casement in London and discussing the Putumayo;

He was full of his Putumayo experiences and would speak of nothing else...he blamed most of all a man called Normand or Armand...He told me that this man’s private diary recorded in his own hand details of the most abominable and unnatural crimes. He told me that he had captured this man’s private diary... he said he that he had sent the diary to the Foreign Office and had kept a copy of it…[xxvi]

O’Hegarty and Hobson were friends and no doubt spoke frequently about Casement and the smearing of his character. It is obvious that both of their statements are remarkably similar and were made merely five weeks apart. For these reasons alone, the genuineness of the statements must be brought into question. Nevertheless, the theory that British authorities had a diary of Armando Normand in Casement’s handwriting in their possession and that they used the perversions contained within as the blueprint for obscene forgeries was alluded to and elaborated upon by contemporary biographers of Casement.

The first such book was Denis Gwynn’s 1930 biography The Life and Death of Roger Casement. Gwynn writes ‘it is a curious fact that he mentioned to [Hobson and O’Hegarty] that among the documents which he was sending to the Foreign Office was an indecent diary of precisely the character which he was afterwards accused of having kept himself’.[xxvii]

In 1936 Geoffery Parmiter wrote ‘Casement mentioned to several friends … that among the documents he was ending to the Foreign Office, together with his report, was an indecent diary… It is possible that this indecent diary was the one which was said to be a record of Casement’s own experiences.’[xxviii] Both Parmiter and Gwynn had both sought official information regarding the Casement diaries. In both of the responses they received, the British Home Secretary refused to acknowledge whether the diaries existed or not.[xxix] In the eyes of diary deniers at the time, this was a sign that the British authorities were hiding something.

This belief was reinforced by the publication of the most significant pre-1959 contribution to the diary debate. William Maloney’s 1936 The Forged Casement Diaries was released amidst much publicity and public comment. In this 275 page tome, Maloney describes a British legal system determined to destroy, not only Casement’s mortal life, but his character and legacy. He cites other examples of ‘atrocity stories’ published by England during the Great War.[xxx] The ‘atrocity diary’ which the British forged in order to destroy Casement’s image was, according to Maloney, merely a reworked version of the Normand diary. Maloney suggests that since ‘the author of a diary seldom refers in it to himself by name, and as this translation of Normand’s diary was in Casement’s handwriting, all that was needed was the changing of its dates so as to make them correspond to those of Casement’s Putumayo investigation’.[xxxi]

Maloney made a very convincing argument. However, all was not as it seemed. The intriguing story behind the publication of The Forged Casement Diaries was fully exposed in 2002 in Bill McCormack’s Roger Casement in Death or Haunting the Free State. McCormack deconstructs the ‘forgery theorist’s bible’ and, through a close study of documents in the National Library of Ireland, he uncovers a transatlantic project to reclaim Casement’s good name, and ward off any believer of the authenticity of the diaries.

The main thrust of his book looks at the involvement of three men in the book’s publication; Joseph McGarrity, the leading Philadelphia Clan na Gael leader; Patrick McCartan, McGarrity’s republican friend, and former TD for Laois/Offaly; and Bulmer Hobson, who acted as Maloney’s ‘agent’ in Ireland. According to McCormack these three men ‘managed’ Maloney’s publication. Hobson suggested to Maloney not to publish a three volume biography on Casement and to instead focus on the Diaries. The puppeteer’s hand of Hobson can even be seen in the choice of illustrations that were to be included in the book.[xxxii]

McCartan arranged for the financing of the publication and crucially, he organised the distribution of free copies to influential people such as W.B Yeats.[xxxiii] McGarrity assisted Maloney in a case of what McCormack calls ‘deliberate archival engineering’, whereby letters, sworn affidavits and personal statements relating to the Casement Diaries were collected together and incorporated into the McGarrity papers in the National Library of Ireland.[xxxiv]

The carefully considered deposit of papers into the collection was designed to, as Eunan O’Halpín wrote, ‘stack the deck for future historians’ and convince them of the truth of the forgery case.[xxxv] McCormack also revealed the lengths to which Maloney’s ‘managers’ were prepared to go to, to stop the ‘whispering campaign’ regarding Casement. Eccentric Monaghan landlord, Shane Leslie had entered into correspondence with a former acquaintance of Casement’s, Joseph Bigger, who told him that the Bigger family knew that ‘Casement was a homo’.[xxxvi]

McCartan wrote to Hobson saying that ‘If Shane [Leslie] or any other Irishman help to substantiate the charges against Casement Maloney will have a lot more to say…Some of the men involved in shooting [Sir Henry] Wilson on his own doorstep are yet alive & they will get all the facts from me’.[xxxvii] McCartan also suggested that he could send Seán Russell to visit Joseph Bigger and give him some ‘friendly advice’.[xxxviii] Clearly these threats were relayed, as a few weeks later Leslie wrote a positive review of Maloney’s book for the Irish Times.[xxxix] The Forged Casement Diaries reignited discussion on the subject in the public. A doctor who accompanied Casement for much of his Amazon investigation, H.S Dickey, attempted to write a book offering his perspective on Casement but died before it could be published.

His most significant contribution to the debate was his assertion that the forgery was based upon Casement’s notes on a conversation he had had with Dickey regarding the sexual pervasions of uncivilised tribes. The conversation was sparked by a supposed letter sent to Casement by Arthur Conan Doyle inquiring into the sexual habits of the natives of the Amazon.[xl] W.B Yeats was convinced by the free copy McCartan had given him. Within a month he wrote two poems in memory of Casement. He levelled the finger of blame at Alfred Noyes in one poem;

Come, Alfred Noyes, come all the troop

That cried it far and wide

Come from the forger and his desk

Desert the Perjurer’s side.[xli]

Alfred Noyes, a professor of English literature at Princeton University, was shown copies of the Black Diary in 1916 in his role as a paid a paid British propagandist. Soon afterwards, in an article for a Philadelphia newspaper, Noyes said of the diaries he had seen; ‘Page after page of his diary would be an insult to a pig’s trough to let the foul record touch it’. He concludes the matter by saying ‘The Irish will canonise these things at their own peril.’[xlii]

However, in a response to Yeats’s 1937 poem, Noyes wrote to the Irish Press admitting that he may have been deliberately misled in 1916 and suggested that a board of inquiry be established so as to find the truth.[xliii] The Free State government was not going to support such a board though. Irish authorities always kept their distance from the diaries controversy. Eamon de Valera had refused a request to write a preface for Maloney’s book.[xliv] Shortly after Noyes’s suggestion of establishing a board of inquiry, de Valera declared that he would not take up the matter with British authorities as ‘Roger Casement’s reputation is safe in the affections of the Irish people’.[xlv]

The real reason for not wanting to contest the issue was that in all likelihood, de Valera believed in the authenticity of the diaries. During the Civil War, Michael Collins and Eamon Duggan were shown the diaries by Lord Birkenhead and Collins, being familiar with Casement’s handwriting, believed they were genuine.[xlvi] The assurances of Michael Collins were certainly enough to convince many politicians of their authenticity.

The Emergency in Ireland quietened the diaries debate but they were reignited once more in 1954 with the publication of Herbert Mackey’s The Life and Times of Roger Casement. In terms of adding new insights into the debate, Mackey’s book did nothing. But this did not mean that the debate had gone stale.

A review of René MacColl’s 1956 biography of Casement in the Irish Times by Thomas Hogan began a string of letters which showed the depth of feeling that still existed on both sides of the debate. A case in point is Alexander Sullivan, Casement’s former defence counsel, who wrote a number of rambling letters to the newspaper in which he denounced his former client, calling him a ‘meglomaniac’ and refuting M.F Doyle’s assertion that Casement denied the authenticity of the diaries.[xlvii]

In hindsight, the one thing that marked these correspondences was the amount of conjecture with which people used in their arguments. These people were discussing diaries which none of them had ever seen. The British Home Office still refused to confirm or deny their existence. One can note frustration in the tone of Robin Dudley Edwards’s letter as he asks René MacColl ‘Ha[ve] you seen the diaries? If so, who showed them to [you]?’[xlviii]

Little did Edwards know, MacColl had been shown copies of the diary by the one man outside of the British Home Office who had a copy. Peter Singleton Gates, a former Fleet Street journalist, had been given typed copies of the 1903 and 1910 diaries of Casement, along with a ledger book from 1911. Despite refusing to divulge the identity of the donor of the material, it is generally accepted that it was Basil Thompson who ‘filched’ the documents and gave them to Singleton Gates.[xlix] In 1925, following an intervention from Casement supporters, Singleton Gates was prohibited from publishing the Black Diaries and was forced to hand over the copies.[l] However, the astute journalist had made duplicates and over thirty years later, Singleton Gates toyed once more with the idea of publishing the diaries.

He showed copies to MacColl, Brian Inglis and Letitia Fairfield, before accepting Maurice Girodias’s offer to publish the diaries in Paris, outside the Official Secrets Act’s jurisdiction.[li] With the Black Diaries in the public domain, the British Home Secretary, R.A Butler was left with no option but to admit to their existence and granted limited access to the diaries for historical research in 1959.[lii]

The opening up of the Diaries for examination can be seen as the great dividing moment in the forgery debate. For nearly four decades proponents of the forgery theory relied on external analysis to substantiate their claims; Scotland Yard’s motive in forging a diary to blacken Casement’s name, Basil Thompson’s confused explanation of the Diaries provenance, half remembered conversations regarding a copied diary, possibly that of Armando Normand, etc. Now that internal analysis was possible, many of the previously held forgery theories were shattered.

The briefest of readings of the diaries repudiate the contention that they either consisted of or were constructed from another person’s diary. Thus the shaky ground upon which the Normand Theory always stood fell completely away.

Armed with his preview of the Black Diaries in 1954, René MacColl denounced the Normand Theory, with much sarcasm, in his 1956 biography. [liii] Further Casement scholars have tried to explain how Hobson and O’Hegarty got it so wrong. B.L Reid suggests that they may have misinterpreted Casement, and that what they thought was Armando Normand’s diary may have been a diary of Frederick Bishop which was given to Casement during his Putumayo investigation.[liv]

The leading modern day forgery proponent, Angus Mitchell, suggests that they mistook Casement’s explanation of the Parades Report, which detailed atrocities in the Putumayo and which Casement made a handwritten copy of, as being the diary of Armando Normand.[lv] Others have been far less kind; Jeffery Dudgeon suggests that Hobson and O’Hegarty made the whole story up.[lvi] And following Bill McCormack’s indictment of The Forged Casement Diaries, one would be forgiven for agreeing with him.

However, internal examination of the diaries did not end the forgery theories. It merely served to mutate them; from looking at the story around the diaries for an explanation, forgery proponents began to look at the story in the diaries. The first person to publish a refitted theory post-The Black Diaries was Herbert Mackey.[lvii] His book, I Accuse, is short on paper and shorter on credibility. The book’s title and form invoke Émile Zola’s 1898 ‘J’accuse’ letter in defence of Alfred Dreyfus. However, Herbert Mackey is no Émile Zola.

His accusation that Basil Thompson and Reginald Hall used the private diaries of a man to blacken his character in order to attenuate clemency appeals is warranted. However, his explanation, based upon a brief internal analysis of the diaries, that the diaries were forged does not hold up. He outlined his ‘smoking gun’ in more detail in his final contribution to the forgery debate, Roger Casement, The Forged Diaries. He claims that a forger altered the originally innocuous entry of 28 October, 1910 to an account of a thoroughly homosexual evening.[lviii] Mackey contends that the ‘Miller’ [sic] in the entry was in fact originally ‘Bulmer’. He even goes to the trouble of pointing out to the reader that the names ‘Miller’ and ‘Bulmer’ share three letters.[lix] Therefore, it would have been quite easy for the forger to move around letters and transform a quiet evening with Bulmer Hobson into something else entirely. He goes on to mix internal analysis with external for his definitive ‘proof’; The ‘G Central Hotel’ described in the diary, never existed in Warrenpoint.

However, Mackey was wrong on both accounts. Either through carelessness or deliberate elision, Mackey failed to notice that the central character of the 28 October entry was Millar (not Miller) thus weakening his claim of letter rearranging. Also, as was pointed out to Roger Sawyer, the events of the 28 October took place before the pair left from Belfast for Warrenpoint.[lx] There was a Grand Central Hotel in Belfast and it existed until 1972 as a kind of physical debunking of the theories postulated by Herbert Mackey.

A far more coherent forgery argument was published by Roger McHugh in 1960.[lxi] McHugh, an English lecturer at UCD, brought a much needed academic voice to the forgery debate. McHugh’s main reasons for suspecting the diaries authenticity were the ‘suspicious internal discrepancies and contradictions’ which hint toward the hand of a forger and the diary’s physical evolution from the descriptions of eyewitnesses in 1916 to the physical appearance of the diaries made available in 1959.[lxii] His latter reasoning was given extra credence when Ben Allen, the only known surviving eyewitness to the diaries in 1916 at the time, declared in August 1960 that none of the documents in the Public Record Office bore any resemblance to the buff coloured diary he was shown by Reginald Hall in 1916.[lxiii] McHugh concludes his article by echoing Alfred Noyes’s 1937 appeal, urging the establishment of a board of international experts to which the diaries could be submitted to.

However, the Irish government’s attitude to the diaries had clearly not changed much since 1937. Roger Casement’s body was repatriated in 1965 and a State Funeral was held concluding with his burial in Glasnevin Cemetery. Afterwards Herbert Mackey, who had played a key role in the campaign for Casement’s reburial, was taken aside by President de Valera and he told him ‘I want to make it plain that the government will not give you any support, or be associated with your efforts in the matter of the Casement diaries. We do not know you, and in this matter you are on your own.’[lxiv] Diary agitation was minimal in the 1970s and 1980s and it was not brought into the public sphere again until the unfettered release of the Diaries in March 1994 under the British government’s ‘Open Government Initiative’.

Later that year Eoin O’Máille led the publication of a rather unique take upon the forgery argument. [lxv] The Vindication of Roger Casement was a short booklet which postulated that only Basil Thompson, the perverted man of base morals, could have had it in him to forge the diaries. The crux of O’Máille’s argument surrounds a complex computer programme study in order to find the linguistic fingerprint of the diaries. The findings were poorly presented and were widely disregarded as a plausible piece of evidence for the forgery theory by both Roger Sawyer and Jefferey Dudgeon. They both cite correspondence with a computer systems analyst and distant relation of Roger Casement, Hugh Casement. Hugh Casement said that O’Máille ‘does little credit to his cause by using a computer programme which was designed to tell the ‘reading age’ of North American schoolchildren...Linguistic analysis is something a little more subtle than that!’.[lxvi]

On 25 April 1999 An Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, asked the Royal Irish Academy to organise a symposium where the differing evidence surrounding the diaries could be discussed.[lxvii] The Symposium took place on 5 and 6 May 2000 and for the first time, truly academic arguments were proposed in the debate. The most significant contributions to the symposium were from two former colleagues, Roger Sawyer and Angus Mitchell, whose papers showed the extent to which the Diaries controversy was alive and well.

Before the unfettered release of the diaries, Mitchell shared the opinion of the majority of Casement’s biographers that they were genuine. He entered into a publishing agreement with Roger Sawyer to co-edit previously unpublished Diary extracts. But following six weeks of research into Casement’s personal papers in the National Library of Ireland he ‘began to have grave doubts about the authenticity of the Black Diaries’.[lxviii]

At the Royal Irish Academy symposium, Mitchell outlined eight reasons why he suspected that the Diaries were forgeries. His reasoning follows in the same vein as Roger McHugh’s doubts expressed forty years previously. Mitchell cites forty-two examples of discrepancies and inconsistencies between Casement’s 1910 Black and White Diaries. Some of these anomalies are striking such as the development of a debilitating eye infection which preoccupied Casement for several weeks in private correspondences but is only mentioned in his Black Diaries the night the infection reduces him to blindness.[lxix] But some of the discrepancies are too subtle to take seriously. For example, Mitchell describes the differing spelling of a town called Yucca which is spelt with one ‘c’ in the Black Diary and with two ‘c’s in the White Diary.[lxx] This example of anal retentiveness is a step too far for Jeffery Dudgeon who questions the strength of Mitchell’s argument.[lxxi]

Roger Sawyer further questions Mitchell’s argument when he points out that inconsistent spelling was a feature common to all of Casement’s writings.[lxxii] The release of the Casement Diaries on 28 March 1994 reignited the debate in the public domain as well as in academic spheres. The national press reported at length at the revelations. The Irish Independent front page read ‘Diaries confirm Casement was a homosexual’ whilst the Irish Times went as far as publishing verbatim some of the more explicit entries from the 1903, 1910 and 1911 diaries.[lxxiii]

Numerous letters were sent to the editor of the Irish Times echoing the weak theories of William Maloney and Herbert Mackey. In August 2001 Eoin Neeson, the former director of the Government Information Bureau, stated that a Swiss Forger, Zwingelman, had forged the diaries.[lxxiv] Neeson’s source was an article in the Barnes Review, an avowed holocaust denial periodical, which claimed that during a CIA interrogation in 1948, Heinrich Mueller revealed that Zwingelman had forged Casement’s diaries. The ‘Zwingelman theory’ which Roger Sawyer had already conclusively proved was a total falsification is an example of how easily the truth can be obscured in the public debate.[lxxv]

In 2002 Dr. Audrey Giles conducted the fourth substantial analysis of the Casement Diaries to determine their authenticity.[lxxvi] She came to the same conclusion as her predecessors; ‘the handwritings can be identified conclusively as those of Roger Casement’. Dr. Giles’ findings were publicised in a press conference in London, a documentary aired on RTÉ television and was discussed on that bastion of Irish opinion; Joe Duffy’s Liveline.[lxxvii]

Despite the conclusiveness of the study co-funded by the BBC and RTÉ and conducted by a woman with over twenty-five years of experience, doubts were expressed. The disinterest of Giles, who began her career in Scotland Yard was brought into question. Doubts were also expressed over the lack of fingerprint analysis with one forgery proponent reminding Irish Times readers that ‘five eminent handwriting experts authenticated the forged [Dreyfuss] documents’.[lxxviii]

The son of a Catholic mother and a Protestant father, Casement rose from humble beginnings to become a shining example of the loyal and noble British Consul, Knight of the British Empire and the first true colonial humanitarian who exposed the wrongs being meted out to the less fortunate. He turned his back on the Empire he had served with such distinction, as the love of his native country inspired him during his last mission; a mission which assured his place amongst the host of republican martyrs. How could this man, who removed his shoes in humility to receive communion on the morning of his execution, be the same man described in The Black Diaries? As this essay has detailed, the genesis of the theory that the Casement diaries were forged began before Casement met his final punishment in Pentonville prison. Key figures such as Bulmer Hobson, Joseph McGarrity and Patrick McCartan manipulated the debate in order to clear Casement’s good name. Others, such as Herbert Mackey and Eoin O’Máille, fuelled by a genuine belief in Casement’s ‘innocence’, proposed weak arguments which served to mitigate the forgery theory as a whole. Angus Mitchell continues to wear the forgery proponent’s cap and will probably continue to articulate his theory in his upcoming biography of Casement. [lxxix]

It is likely that no amount of scientific evidence will ever settle the matter conclusively. As Jeffery Dudgeon says ‘for those who believe in their forgery, it is a matter of faith and faith can accept the supernatural or the extraterrestrial’. [lxxx] One is reminded of the words of one letter writer to the Irish Times in April 1956; ‘Is the real truth this - everyone despite [their] protestations is a little afraid of the truth’.[lxxxi]

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Letter from Ben Allen to Dr. William Maloney, 2 Dec. 1932. NLI MS 17,601 (1).

Statement of H.S Dickey made before a New York lawyer, 16 May 1938, NLI MS 17,601(3).

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Statement of Eamonn Duggan on Casement diary, (undated), NLI MS 17,601 (6).

Statement of Bulmer Hobson on the Casement diary, 17 Feb. 1933, NLI 17,601 (8).

Statement of P.S O’Hegarty on the Casement diary, 4 Jan. 1933, NLI 17,601 (11).

[i] Michael Laubscher, Who is Roger Casement? A New Perspective (Dublin, 2012), p. 219.

[ii] Laubscher, Who is Roger Casement?, p. 235.

[iii] Leitrim Observer, 5 Aug. 1916.

[iv] W.J McCormack, Roger Casement in Death or Haunting the Free State (Dublin, 2005), p. 23.

[v] Alfred Noyes, The Accusing Ghost or Justice for Casement, (London, 1957), pp 10-11.

[vi] Denis Gwynn, The Life and Death of Roger Casement (London, 1930), p. 20.

[vii] Extracts were also shown to King George V, the American Ambassador in London, Walter Page, the Rev. John Harris (on behalf of the Archbishop of Canterbury), Irish Party leader, John Redmond and the tenor, Count John McCormack. See Brian Inglis, Roger Casement (3rd ed., Belfast, 1993), p. 373.

[viii] Brian Lewis, ‘The queer life and afterlife of Roger Casement’ in Journal of the History of Sexuality, 14:4 (Oct. 2005), pp 363-382 and William J. Maloney, The Forged Casement Diaries, (Dublin, 1936), p. 15.

[ix] Statement by Michael Francis Doyle, National Library of Ireland [NLI], MS 17,601(4).

[x] Nenagh Guardian, 5 Aug. 1916.

[xi] Irish Independent, 4 Aug. 1916.

[xii] Letter from Ben Allen to Dr. William Maloney, 2 Dec. 1932. NLI MS 17,601 (1).

[xiii] Years later, in a letter to William Maloney, Allen said ‘I like your method of approach toward disproving the Casement diary- my own theory is that it was a diary copied by Sir Roger during his Putumayo investigations.’ Letter from Ben Allen to Dr. William Maloney, 2 Dec. 1932. NLI MS 17,601 (1).

[xiv] Quoted in McCormack, Roger Casement in Death, p. 24.

[xv] Quoted in McCormack, Roger Casement in Death, p. 25.

[xvi] B.L Reid, The lives of Roger Casement (London, 1976), p. 479.

[xvii] The exception to this is a brief comment made by Letitia Fairfield in a letter she wrote to the editor of Belfast based literary journal, Threshold in which she says that Professor Giovanni Costigan ‘had begged the Irish public to drop the preposterous Normand story suggested originally by Mr. Ben Allen’. Letitia Fairfield’ ‘Letter to the editor’ in Threshold, 4:2 (autumn/winter, 1960), pp 91-93.

[xviii] Roger Sawyer, Casement, The Flawed Hero (London, 1984), pp 81-82.

[xix] Inglis, Roger Casement, p. 178.

[xx] José Antonio writes that ‘On the 15th of June 1907, I arrived at the section Matanzas, which is under the orders of the sanguine and criminal Armando Norman, the chief of the section… Norman stepped up and asked three old Indians and two young women, their daughters, where the rest of the Indians were. They replied that they did not know, as several days before they had all dispersed in the forest, owing to the fear they had of him. Norman then grasped his machete and murdered these five unfortunate victims in cold blood.’ W.E Hardenburg, The Putumayo: The Devil’s Paradise, Travels in the Peruvian Amazon region and an account of the atrocities committed upon the Indians therein (London, 1912), pp 250-251.

[xxi] W.J McCormack postulates that the alternate spelling may have arose out of Casement’s greater degree of familiarity of the name. He also, far less plausibly, suggests that Casement added the letter ‘d’ as ‘he may have been bamboozled by the near-palindrome of Armando/Normand’. McCormack, Roger Casement in Death, p. 5.

[xxii] Roger Casement, The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement, Angus Mitchell (ed.) (Dublin, 1997), p. 461.

[xxiii] Angus Mitchell, ‘Appendix II: The Parades Report Debunking the Myth of the Normand Diary’ in Roger Casement, Heart of Darkness: The 1911 Documents, Angus Mitchell (ed.) (Dublin, 2003), pp 741-745.

[xxiv] Statement of Bulmer Hobson on the Casement diary, 17 Feb. 1933, NLI 17,601 (8).

[xxv] In his autobiography, Hobson describes the same conversation, and names Normand as the man he alluded to in his NLI statement. Bulmer Hobson, Ireland Yesterday and Tomorrow (Tralee, 1968), p. 80.

[xxvi] Statement of P.S O’Hegarty on the Casement diary, 4 Jan. 1933, NLI 17,601 (11).

[xxvii] Gwynn, The Life and Death of Roger Casement, p. 18.

[xxviii] Geoffrey C. Parmiter, Roger Casement (London, 1936), p. 316.

[xxix] Parmiter, Roger Casement, p. 316n and Gwynn, The Life and Death of Roger Casement, p. 316n.

[xxx] Maloney accuses the British having ‘charged its German enemies with cutting off the hands of Belgian babies; with dropping from airplanes, candies to poison children; with boiling the fat from the bodies of the slain; with crucifying a Canadian soldier…’ Maloney, The Forged Casement Diaries, p. 158.

[xxxi] Maloney, The Forged Casement Dairies, p. 199.

[xxxii] McCormack, Roger Casement in Death, p. 38.

[xxxiii] McCormack, Roger Casement in Death, p. 38.

[xxxiv] The McGarrity papers consist of 182 folders of manuscripts held in the Manuscript Department of the National Library of Ireland, Kildare St., Dublin. McCormack, Roger Casement in Death, p. 52.

[xxxv] Irish Times, 12 Oct. 2002.

[xxxvi] McCormack, Roger Casement in Death, p. 77.

[xxxvii] Quoted in McCormack, Roger Casement in Death, p. 79.

[xxxviii] Quoted in McCormack, Roger Casement in Death, p. 79.

[xxxix] Irish Times, 1 Mar. 1937.

[xl] In a sworn statement Dickey writes ‘Roger then asked me if I could supply specific instances. As I had then been in practice eleven years mostly among primitive people I had directly noted many instances and had been told by the natives of as many more. I recounted several to Casement...for at least the next half an hour perhaps even three quarters I recited instance upon instance of sexual perversion among the Indians. As I dictated Sir Roger copied word for word into this notebook. He filled several pages.’ Statement of H.S Dickey made before a New York lawyer, 16 May 1938, NLI MS 17,601(3).

[xli] W.B Yeats, Roger Casement, published in the Irish Press, 2 Feb. 1937.

[xlii] Evening Public Ledger (Philadelphia), 30 Aug. 1916.

[xliii] Irish Press, 12 Feb. 1937. Indeed Noyes came full circle and published The Accusing Ghost or Justice for Casement in which he concluded that the Casement diaries were forged.

[xliv] McCormack, Roger Casement in Death, p. 59.

[xlv] Angus Mitchell, ‘The Diaries Controversy’ in Casement, Amazon Journal, p. 21.

[xlvi] In a written statement Eamonn Duggan says ‘Michael Collins and I saw the Casement Diary by arrangement with Lord Birkenhead. We read it. I did not know Casement’s handwriting. Collins did. He said it was his. The diary was in two parts-bound volumes-repeating ad nauseam details of sex pervasion-of the personal appearance and beauty of native boys-with special reference to a certain portion of their anatomy. It was disgusting. There was nothing to suggest that it was the copy of another man’s diary. I think unless [Maloney] can definitively prove that the diary was a copy, to suggest without proof, that it was will merely advertise a thing that very few people know. Statement of Eamonn Duggan on Casement diary, (undated), NLI MS 17,601 (6).

[xlvii] Irish Times, 11 Apr. 1956 & 25 Apr. 1956.

[xlviii] Irish Times, Apr. 27, 1956.

[xlix] Peter Singleton Gates, ‘Foreword’ in Roger Casement, The Black Diaries, Peter Singleton Gates and Maurice Girodias (eds) (Paris, 1959), pp 9-13 and Roger Sawyer, ‘Introduction’ in Roger Casement, Roger Casement’s Diaries,1910: The Black and The White, Roger Sawyer (ed.) (London, 1997), pp 1-25.

[l] Jeffery Dudgeon, Roger Casement: The Black Diaries, with a study of his background, sexuality and Irish political life (Belfast, 2002), p. 238.

[li] Inglis describes the moment Singleton Gates showed him the Diaries in 1956; ‘the diaries [were] wrapped up, as I recall, in a paper parcel; we watched him untie it with some trepidation, as it might contain an explosive device. And, in a sense, it did’. Inglis, Roger Casement, p. 15 and Herbert Mackey, Roger Casement, The Forged Diaries (Dublin, 1966), p. 44.

[lii] If one was deemed acceptable to view the Casement Diaries by the Home Office the following restrictions were imposed; no copies were to be made, and one could not place known examples of Casement’s handwriting beside the Diaries. Mary E. Daly, ‘Introduction’ in Roger Casement in Irish and World History, Mary E. Daly (ed.) (Dublin, 2005), pp 1-10.

[liii] René MacColl, Roger Casement (London, 1956), pp 281-284.

[liv] On 28 October, 1910, Frederick Bishop gave Casement his diary in which he had observed the criminality of Normand. In his Putumayo Journal Casement writes ‘After dinner Bishop came with a sort of written diary of [Normand’s] doings since he left’. The Black Diary states ‘Bishop brought a written statement of all that has transpired since he left me.’ Casement, Roger Casement’s Diaries, p. 103 & p. 215.

[lv] Mitchell, ‘The Parades Report’ in Casement, Heart of Darkness, pp741-745.

[lvi] Dudgeon, Roger Casement, p. 539.

[lvii] Herbert Mackey, I Accuse; one of the world’s most celebrated cases of a miscarriage of justice (Dublin, 1959).

[lviii] The entry in Casement’s 1910 Black Diary for October 28 reads ‘Left for Warrenpoint with Millar. Boated & Huge Enjoyment…He came to lunch at G Central Hotel…’ Casement, Roger Casement’s Diaries, pp 52-53.

[lix] What Mackey failed to tell the readers was that ‘Miller’ and ‘Bulmer’ in fact share four letters! Mackey, Roger Casement, The Forged Diaries, p. 61.

[lx] Sawyer, Casement, p. 139.

[lxi] Roger McHugh, ‘Casement, The Public Record Office Manuscript’ in Threshold, 4:1 (Spring/Summer, 1960), pp 42-62.

[lxii] McHugh, ‘Casement’, pp 56-57.

[lxiii] Affidavit of Ben Allen states ‘On the second day of August 1960 at the PRO, London, I examined manuscripts now known as ‘Casement’s diaries’ which are in volume form. They do not include anything remotely resembling the manuscript shown to me by Captain Hall in 1916 at the conclusion of the press interview.’ Sworn Affidavit of Ben S. Allen before J. Noel Tanham, Commissioner for Oaths, City of Dublin, 19 Aug. 1960. NLI MS 13,452.

[lxiv] Irish Independent, 9 May, 1966.

[lxv] Eoin O’Máille, M. ui Callanán and M. Payne, The Vindication of Roger Casement, Computer analyses & comparisons of the Dublin 1910 diary & the London 1903 & 1910 diaries (Dublin, 1994).

[lxvi] Dudgeon, Roger Casement, pp 567-568 and Roger Sawyer, ‘The Black Diaries: A Question of Authenticity’ in Roger Casement in Irish and World History, Mary E. Daly (ed.) (Dublin, 2005), pp 88-98.

[lxvii] Bertie Ahern seems to have been the Taoiseach most determined of all, to bring an end to the controversy. Aside from his request for the symposium, Ahern, in one of his first exchanges as Taoiseach with Tony Blair, asked the Prime Minister to ensure that all documents relevant to Roger Casement be made open to the public. Irish Independent, 13 Mar. 2002.

[lxviii] Angus Mitchell, ‘Preface’ in Casement, The Amazon Journal

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