

Mario Vargas Llosa In Dublin

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Mario Vargas Llosa will be in Dublin on June 10th as a guest of the Dublin Writers Festival to discuss his work and in particular his new novel, *The Dream of the Celt*, based on the life of Roger Casement, which will be published by Faber on June 7th.

In an interview two years ago (August 29th, 2010) with *El País*, Llosa told Iker Seisdedos that he had spent three years writing his Casement book after first coming across its subject in a biography of Joseph Conrad.

Seisdedos makes the point that Casement’s “fervent nationalism” is a surprising quality in a Llosa hero:

**“Llosa:** I have always had a horror of this form of fanaticism. Nationalism seems to me man’s worst invention. And the most extreme form of nationalism is cultural nationalism. And yet in some circumstances it can represent liberating values ...

**Seisdedos:** Is there a good nationalism?

**Llosa:** In the case of certain peoples crushed by colonisers, which aspire to free themselves of the occupier, nationalism has a positive value. But the danger is when it becomes an ideology. Nationalism means violence, prejudice, distortion of values. Casement represented the more idealistic side, which is the struggle against the oppressor...”

[More on the Dublin Writers Festival:](http://us4.campaign-archive1.com/?u=2ffa5b524937ac6ed2189bd59&id=0fa3b71bd7&e=8659839aed)

[El Pais interview (in Spanish):](http://elpais.com/diario/2010/08/29/revistaverano/1283032801_850215.html)

Considered one of Latin America’s most significant novelists Mario Vargas Llosa was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2010 'for his cartography of structures of power and his trenchant images of the individual's resistance, revolt, and defeat'. His rich literary works include amongst others The Time of the Hero (1963) – one of the key novels which pioneered the 'Boom' period in Latin American literature, The Green House (1966), Captain Pantoja and the Special Service (1973), The Storyteller (1987) and The War of the End of the World (1981).  
Join him for this very special in-conversation as he discusses his latest work The Dream of the Celt, a fictional portrait of Irish humanitarian, revolutionary and poet **Roger Casement** taking you on a journey through Liverpool, Dublin, The Congo and Peru.  
  
**Venue: Gate Theatre**

Date: Sunday June 10th

Time: 3.00 pm

Tickets: €15 / €12.50

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**Mario Vargas Llosa in conversation**

Nobel laureate Mario Vargas Llosa is one of Latin America’s greatest writers. Join him for this very special in-conversation as he discusses *The Dream of the Celt*, his fictional portrait of Roger Casement, controversial hero of Irish nationalism.

Casement might appear at first glance an incongruous subject for a new novel by the South American master. Yet on closer inspection the match seems entirely apposite. Casement was famously and ignominiously hanged by the British in the wake of the Easter Rising, his reputation destroyed by the ‘Black Diaries’ scandal which had outed him as a secretly gay man. Yet before this he had been widely feted (and indeed knighted) as a pioneering humanitarian, fighting to improve the lives of oppressed peoples across the world, including in Vargas Llosa’s native Peru. Yet when Casement dared draw parallels with the colonial injustices committed by the British in Northern Ireland, his fate was sealed.

[Vargas Llosa said he believes that these diaries were not entirely fabricated, but were rather exaggerations of actual encounters. Whatever the case, the diaries did their trick.]

Vargas Llosa himself has always been politically outspoken and a staunch defender of free expression. He was President of PEN from 1976 to 1979 and his most resonant work – from *War of the End of the World* to *The Feast of the Goat* – is politically charged and international in scope. Chairperson to be confirmed.

David Gallagher TLS review – “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.

His novelist’s conclusion about the diaries is plausible. Some of Casement’s sexual exploits took place in remote places in Africa and South America, where he would have had enemies spying on him. If the exploits had been as numerous as the diaries suggest, he would have been found out and denounced many times. When one of Casement’s sexual adventures is described by Vargas Llosa, we get a strong sense of risk; this is a public figure who picks up strange men in bars and public baths, sometimes going off with more than one.  
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.