

# *The Literature of Testimony and Biographic Fiction in the Twenty-First Century*

Mail Marques de Azevedo

**Abstract:** *Having participated in the translation of The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement edited version by Angus Mitchell, I developed a great interest in the historical figure of Roger Casement. Both his acute evaluation of the euphemistically called rubber industry in the Amazon region, as well as his undaunted defense of native populations, on the brink of extinction, came very close to my personal feelings in the matter. From the standpoint of Casement's Amazon journals as historical documents, I saw fit to analyze them according to Paul Ricoeur's epistemology of historical sciences: 1) testimony and registration of testimonies; 2) questioning of registers; 3) writing of the historical representation of the past. As researcher of literature, I will complement the writing of the historical representation of the past with references to Mario Vargas Llosa's biographic fiction The Dream of the Celt.*

**Keywords:** *Roger Casement; The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement; Mario Vargas Llosa; The Dream of the Celt; testimony.*

In his essay “Las raíces de lo humano”, Mario Vargas Llosa analyzes the dialectic between civilization and barbarism in *The Heart of Darkness*: Joseph Conrad's novel, based on his experiences as a steamer captain on the Congo, would be an accusation against the atrocities committed by Belgium's King Leopold II through his private holding company, disguised as a humane enterprise intended for the exploration and civilization of the Congo. Estimates of the death toll of natives range from two to fifteen million, in the period between 1885 and 1906. Among the voices raised in protest, says Llosa in the prologue to his essay, those of the Irishman Roger Casement and of the Belgian Edward Morel “would deserve to be honored in a great novel” (2007, 38).

Vargas Llosa proved true to his intent. His novel *El sueño del celta* [*Dream of the Celt*, 2010], which reconstructs Roger Casement's trajectory, was published in Spanish – speaking countries in November 2010, merely a month after the author was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature. Llosa had spent three years in extensive research in the three places of the globe where the action develops and which gave titles to the chapters

– “The Congo”, “Amazonia”, “Ireland”. The research material laid the foundation for the construction of his protagonist, Roger Casement, from his childhood in Ireland to the agonizing days in Pentonville prison, condemned to the gallows for high treason, due to his engagement in the revolutionary events of the 1916 Easter Rising. The Celt who dreamed of bringing freedom to oppressed peoples is himself imprisoned in painful and humiliating conditions, living in the hopeful expectation that his sentence might be commuted in answer to petitions of mercy signed by internationally prominent figures.

In Llosa’s own words his novel is “a type of writing that is similar to historical chronicles, to personal reports and diaries (,,,) which uses a simulacrum of those genres, in order to bring the book closer to the time of the action”<sup>1</sup> (*O Globo*, 14.05.2011).

In fact, the language of the Celt’s dream comes very close to the style of the historical Roger Casement in his Putumayo diary, which was edited and published by researcher Angus Mitchell, in 1997, as *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement*.<sup>2</sup> This is the first element of the *corpus* analyzed in this article which makes a complementary study of Vargas Llosa’s biographic fiction, *The Dream of the Celt*. It argues mainly for the possibility of studying the two works as different phases of the historiographical operation, according to Paul Ricoeur’s epistemology of historical sciences: testimony and registration of testimonies; questioning of registers; writing of the historical representation of the past. *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement* will be discussed at both stages, **testimonies and archives** as well as **questioning and discussion** of received testimonies which leads along the epistemological path to the **historical representation of the past**; it will be also complemented by references to Vargas Llosa’s biographic fiction

Paul Ricoeur explains that the phases of his historiographical operation are not distinct chronological stages, but methodological stages interwoven with one another:

No one consults an archive apart from some project of explanation, without some hypothesis for understanding. And no one undertakes to explain a course of events without making use of some express literary form of a narrative, rhetorical or imaginative character. (Ricoeur 2007.147)

It is only in the development of the historiographical operation, whose structure I borrow for my analysis, that these phases become successive steps in a linear trajectory.

### **Foreward: the Putumayo diary and the Black Diaries**

Among the personal documents of Roger Casement’s, in the archives of the National Library of Ireland, in 1995, Angus Mitchell had access to the voluminous manuscript of the Putumayo voyage, which had so far been practically untouched, in all probability because of its size. Mitchell was to edit and publish that material in 1997 as *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement*, grouped in three parts titled “The voyage to the Putumayo”,

“The diary of the Putumayo” and “On the way to London”, preceded by information about the controversy aroused by Casement’s so-called *Black Diaries*.

The diaries were mentioned in public for the first time on the fourth day of the trial for treason and aroused heated dispute in the press and among British intellectuality. The *Black Diaries* encompass material apprehended by Scotland Yard among Roger Casement’s papers. Side by side with innocuous notes, the material contains descriptions of homosexual intercourse in London, the Congo, Madeira, in the Canary Islands and in Serra Leone, especially with native prepubescent boys. In Edwardian England, a crime almost as heinous as treason.

Specialists in graphology and people from Casement’s inner circle of friends identified his handwriting in *fac similes* of the manuscripts, but general confidence in Casement’s high moral stand raised distrust in the material’s authenticity, that might have been forged by British Intelligence. Opinions remain divided, nearly a hundred years after the events.

For the British government the case is closed. Since the 1950s, however, adepts of the theory of forgery have recurrently questioned the authenticity of the *Black Diaries*. In 1994, the material that makes up the *Diaries* as well as over a hundred and seventy closed archives were made available to the public. Nevertheless, the direct exam of the documents has not brought the expected elucidation and the positions of both the British Government and of the media, in the matter of the so-called Gay Traitor, as well as that of groups that question the authenticity of the diaries, remain unaltered.

On the other hand, the authenticity of Casement’s personal archives which gave origin to the diary of the Putumayo<sup>3</sup> has never been questioned. The very physical aspect of those archives, – mountains of carefully dated disordered manuscripts which had not ever been handled before – speaks in favor of the veracity of the information. When he examined those archives in 1995, Angus Mitchell began to doubt the authenticity of the *Black Diaries* which he had heretofore accepted. He was struck by recurrent discrepancies between dates and reports of events registered in the diaries and those in other exhaustively-handled archives, long open to the public. Mitchell was led to believe in a brilliant plan concocted by the British Intelligence in order to avoid making a patriotic martyr out of Casement.

The diary of the Putumayo is a report of Casement’s voyage to the Peruvian Amazonia, when he was British consul in Brazil, in order to investigate shocking news of atrocities committed against Indian populations in the extraction of rubber, that circulated at the time in the British press. The harrowing details of the pseudo-commercial exchanges with the natives in Casement’s manuscripts reveal the fearless and undaunted characteristics of the historical Roger Casement which inspired Llosa in the creation of his fictional counterpart (Mitchell 1997. 29)

The analysis of Casement’s letters as well as of his *Amazon Journal* – as a hybrid literary genre comprising both documents and personal reflections – plus its simulacrum in Llosa’s novel, provide the foundation for the profile of the diarist character, as revealed by his acts and thoughts.

## The historiographical operation – Stage of testimony and archives

In the prelude of the chapter titled “History/Epistemology”, in *Memory, History and Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur refers to Plato’s *Phaedrus* as a means to explain the mythical birth of the writing of history and the prevailing value of orality. –“the discourse of actual memory, its legitimate birth inscribed in the soul”. Both written and oral discourses are, nevertheless, kinds of writing, and it is allowed to say that they are related and “in a way, the written one can be fairly called an image (eidólon) of what is living breathing memory” (Ricoeur 2007. 153).

In order to draw the profile of the historical Casement it would be necessary to *hear* either what he had to say or what was said about him. In the absence of oral testimonies, however, I made use of the next best available source, the letters and the careful notes written on his voyage to the Putumayo, – the second part of Mitchell’s edited *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement* – in which the reader learns of his concerns over the difficulties of his mission.

S.S. Hilary – At Sea

My dear old Bulldog,

We are having a pleasant voyage – altho’ I see far too much of the Peruvian Amazon Company Commission. Colonel Bertie is very anxious to rope me into his councils, and already is trying to get me to regard myself as one of his party. ... I intend to keep aloof as much as can be done with regard to politeness. I don’t think much good can come of this journey – indirectly yes, but directly no. We shall be fairly well hoodwinked I think – the good will be in a general cleaning up and more care for the future perhaps. ... The chief difficulty for me is the seeming necessity I am under of travelling everywhere as the guest of this Commission. It is very hard, well nigh impossible to arrive at an independent judgement or to take any independent line of investigation when from start to finish I shall be doing everything ‘by your leave’. ...

With every kind thought of you all.

Yours ever –

Tiger

(Mitchell 1997. 66)

Bulldog and Tiger are familiar nicknames exchanged between Edward Dene Morel – the Belgian mentioned by Llosa – and Casement, symbols of the loyalty, force and courage that strengthened their longstanding friendship from their days in the Congo, and will have a melancholic finale when Casement is accused of treason and, particularly, of sexual perversion. Morel was among those who refused to sign the petition for clemency.

A double task was ascribed to the Commission of the Peruvian Amazon Company, which was formed by Englishmen connected with the Company itself: to check the

accusations of cruelty against Indians in the Putumayo, the region of the joint British-Peruvian enterprise, and to supervise their commercial operations.

Casement's specific task is to examine the situation of British citizens from Barbados, accused of being the physical executors of the acts of cruelty denounced in the British press, exemplified by the polemic article written by journalist Sidney Paternoster titled "The Devil's Paradise: a British-Owned Congo", published in the periodical *Truth*. The testimonies of the Barbadians as well as reports of informal conversations with people connected with the Peruvian Amazon Company correspond to the first stage of the historiographical operation: that of "testimonies and archives".

Casement's mission is complex and rife with all kinds of geographic, linguistic and, mainly, political obstacles: in order to reach his destination, Iquitos, the main city in the province of Loreto and seat of the Company, as well as the several rubber-collection stations in the Putumayo, Casement must use the Company's boats and to lodge in its facilities; the few interpreters of the main indigenous languages, the Huitoto and the Borá, are closely connected with the Company; the political power of Julio Arana, the Company's president, is superior to that of the Peruvian government itself. He is the one who backs up the payment of salaries to judges, policemen, civil servants, and the military. Furthermore, Arana enjoys enormous national prestige as the patriot who guaranteed the Peruvian dominion of extensive territories disputed by Colombia.

Casement is fully conscious of the uncertain outcome of his unequal struggle against such powerful enemies:

If we were a proper Commission invested with authority and power to really investigate and to compel evidence on oath and had proper interpreters and guides with some local knowledge of men, places and affairs, what strange revelations of montaña 'labour supply' and 'rubber estates' and 'Indian labour' we might bring to light. (Mitchell 83)

Once in Iquitos, notwithstanding his limited official power, Casement manages to start investigating the accusations through carefully recorded informal contacts – which sometimes turn into interrogatories – with the town's Mayor, Rei Lama, with Company's officials, and with the editor of the local newspaper.

Casement is the right person for the mission, in view of his previous defense of natives in the Belgian Congo. Firmness and intrepidity stand out as mainstays of the historical Casement's character, recurrently evidenced in his tireless struggle against the exploitation of indigenous populations, meant to satisfy the ever-increasing demand for rubber by contemporary industry. His Amazonian report, published in 1912, along with its Congolese predecessor, makes Casement an early champion in the defense of human rights.

Random notes or registers entered in the diary that Casement starts writing on the 23rd September 1910, exactly at 2:15 a.m., make up the first documentary stage of the historiographical operation, the preservation of memory in archives. The

first register is an account of Bishop's testimony – the first of the Barbadians to be interviewed by Casement. In a strange premonition of the issue of forgery concerning the *Black Diaries*, Casement expresses fear that his papers might be tampered with, in a letter to William Tyrrel,

I am keeping a diary, and part of the statement of Bishop is really a leaf of my diary – the last part. It is only sent you in case I might get lost or disappear or something up there, or die of fever, and my papers might be overhauled long before they reached Iquitos, or they would be at the mercy of the people, who are in dread of our visit. I am viewed with grave suspicion already, I think, but as I have got the commission with me we are all right. (Mitchell 99)

Casement registers the day-to-day events of his mission meticulously, and offers possible addressees a spontaneous testimony of facts that he registers as soon as he witnesses them. The short space of time between observation and registration of facts in diary writing, which precludes any alteration in the recollection of facts, is a powerful argument in favor of their veracity. In the diaries of the Putumayo, the objective register of facts is followed by their refraction in the author's consciousness, and that lends them a quasi-confessional intimate tone. In fact, Philippe Lejeune remarks that it is difficult to find a chemically pure diary: at some points introversion supersedes extroversion, or vice-versa, in the spirit of the diarist. As he steps into the local situation, Casement confides his misgivings to paper:

And so here I am with the clock on the verge of 3 p.m., waiting to interrogate the Barbadian hands of this stronghold of wrongdoing. What shall it be? A real interrogation covering the ground of their relations to the Company and the duties they have been put to perform, or a merely sham one to allow me to 'save my face' and assure Tizon that the men 'seem happy, and all say they are well treated and properly paid' etc. (Mitchell 1997.121)

Such is Casement's predicament: how to collect and preserve testimonies that directly indict the Company's top hierarchy. What is the legal value of testimonies given by dark-skinned foreign ex-employees of the Company, themselves accomplices of their employers' acts?

Paul Ricoeur emphasizes the existence of a common nucleus to testimonies in diverse situations. Be it in everyday dialogical exchanges or in confrontation with several testimonies and witnesses, in a space of controversy, we are immediately faced with the crucial question: how far is that testimony reliable? Our suspicions follow "a long chain of operations starting in the perception of a lived scene, proceed to the stage of retention of a recollection, and lastly concentrate on the narrative stage that reconstitutes the traits of the event" (Ricoeur, 2007. 171). Joshua Dyal's testimony about his participation in heinous acts of punishment and torture of Indians sounds like an absurd tale of horrors.

Saturday, 24th September – 8 A.M.

As his statements are so grave, he owning up to five murders of Indians by his own hands, two he shot, two he beat to death by 'smashing their testicles' with a stick under Normand's orders and with Normand helping, and one he flogged to death, I thought it wise to have his evidence stated in full before the Commission and Sr. Tizon. (Mitchell 1997.124)

In his dialogue with Casement, the Barbadian Joshua Dyall testifies to the veracity of the scenes in which he had played an active role. In the act of testifying, Dyall does what Dulong calls "an autobiographical authenticated narrative of some past event, whether the narrative occurs in informal or formal conditions" (qtd. in Ricoeur 43). The witness asks to be given credit as someone present at the act: "I was there." Casement's part comes next: the authentication of the testimony by the response in echo of the receiver who accepts the testimony. "From this point onwards, the testimony is not merely authenticated, but also credited" (Ricoeur 175).

With regard to the Barbadians they accused themselves, which, in great part, went to prove the truth of their statements. I could not see what motive should induce any man to charge himself with grave and dastardly crimes as Dyall had done, unless it were that he was confessing. If these men were guilty, as I believe they were, of criminal acts, it was not they so much as the men who had ordered them to do these things who were the real criminals, and if there was a question of punishing anyone, I should seek to defend these men and should ask for legal advice and help. (Mitchell 1997.125-126)

Casement accepts as truthful the testimonies of the Barbadians, who are "witnesses against their will" in Ricoeur's saying. Opinions are divided between bringing the Barbadians and the station chiefs into confrontation or waiting until some kind of legal action is possible. Casement is in favor of an immediate and direct confrontation. The Barbadians are willing to repeat their testimonies, despite being aware of the inevitable consequences. The witnesses' willingness adds a supplementary dimension of moral order that reinforces the credibility of their testimonies. In his entry of September 25th, Casement reaffirms his belief that confrontation is the only possible means to test the veracity of the Barbadians' testimonies. In fact, it is crucial that testimonies should be shortly followed by verification, in order to avoid, in Freud's words "secondary elaboration" (qtd. in Ricoeur 2004. 173)

AT LA CHORRERA – SUNDAY 25TH SEPTEMBER

At the meeting I spoke at length. I explained that Mr Tizon thought it very undesirable to confront the Chiefs of Sections we were about to visit with the accusing black men who had been their servants. On the other hand, I pointed out that this confrontation was the only means in our power of establishing

the truth or otherwise of the statements the Barbadians made against their employers. (Mitchell 1997. 127-128)

Juan Tizon, the member of the Company who accompanied Casement and the Commission in their voyage to the Putumayo, tries to minimize the accusations. Observing personally the methods in use by the rubber industry, however, he becomes Casement's ally in his struggle in favour of the Indians. There are clear evidences of cruel physical punishment at La Chorrera: broad red welts are visible across thighs and buttocks of some Indians. To Casement's chagrin, the members of the Commission remain indifferent.

Why have not the Commission themselves questioned anyone? They do nothing. They sit in their rooms and read, or they are occupied in the purely commercial and economic aspects of the Station and the Company's affairs. ... They have not sought to find out why the Boras Indians were flogged. ... No one says a word about it – it is quite natural – the accepted state of things – and you can't find out the reasons for it. (Mitchell 1997. 133)

We follow the slow upriver course of the boat to the next Station, Occidente, through the careful register of events and reflections in Casement's diary. The situation remains the same: *muchachos* – armed “civilized” Indians – hunting down their fellow natives in the forest; Boras murdering Huitotos and vice-versa to ensure the profits of their masters who, in the end turn against them (for a variety of reasons) and kill them.

Before leaving Iquitos, Casement had been warned that the most dangerous Stations were those closest to the Colombian border and that Matanzas (slaughter, carnage) held the worst reputation among them. Long before getting to Matanzas, news of the cruelty of the Station's chief, Armand Normand, had reached Casement.

Bishop, who had accompanied Casement since Iquitos, firmly believes the stories told him by Donal Francis, a fellow Barbadian at Normand's service for nearly two years, about how his chief had killed Indian children smashing their brains against tree trunks or burning them alive.

It is, therefore, with disgust and silent rage that Casement must endure the sight of Armando Normand, and be with him under the same roof at Matanzas.

#### SUNDAY 16TH OCTOBER

About 5:30 we heard a rifle shot in the woods to the South and a murmur of ‘Normand’ was heard from the boys and servants. It was like the advent of a great warrior! ... He came up, I must say, to all one had read or thought of him, a little being, slim, thin, and quite short, say 5'7” and with a face truly the most repulsive I have ever seen. ... I felt as if I were being introduced to a serpent. (Mitchell 1997. 256)



Anxious not to see more of Normand than he could help, Casement makes up his mind to leave as soon as he interviews the other Barbados men, James Lane and Levine, both separately and in confrontation. In spite of Levine's evasions and half-truths, Casement manages to elicit from the two men the testimony of the assassination of five Indians, who were flogged to death. The account of the cruel death of Kodihinka, the eldest, makes Casement sick. He is put into the *cepo* alongside the five others, all with bleeding backs and limbs, and there he dies within three days of receiving these lashes. His flesh, according to Lane stinking and rotten –his wife and child alongside him, pinned like wicked animals with their feet in iron-wood holds. "God! what a state of things!" is the diarist's interjection.

The testimonies of the Barbadians are registered and filed in the Putumayo journals. Besides the constitution of archives as re-presentation of the past, those testimonies will reappear as narratives. Firstly, as the report presented by Casement to the Foreign Office, on his return to England, that caused tremendous international stir. Casement was awarded the title of "Sir", although he was not present at the ceremony for alleged physical reasons.

But the official narrative, the history of Sir Roger Casement, the humanist who betrayed an Empire for the love of his country, is still to be written.

### **Stage of investigation: explanation and comprehension**

Representation in its narrative aspect is basic for the architecture of historical knowledge. It is not added from the outside to the stages of documentation and explanation, but accompanies and supports them. The stage of the historiographical process that Ricoeur calls of explanation and comprehension has to do with the means of connection between documented facts. The concept of interpretation has the same application as that of truth. In that sense interpretation is part of every stage of the historiographical operation: at the level of documentation through the selection of sources; at the explanation-comprehension level, in the choice among concurrent modes of explanation and, finally, at the level of narrative representation, as the interpretation of the collected material.

Angus Mitchell reveals the epic character of Casement's investigation in the Putumayo and the profound change wrought in his view of the benefits of Imperial colonization. In a conversation with Victor Israel, – a Maltese Jew who had made his fortune in rubber –, at the beginning of his journey, Casement defends at length British methods of colonization and "the legal safeguards that had been and were being set up by [British] Colonial govt. to protect natives and above all their rights over their lands" (Mitchell 1997. 79).

His faith in the civilizing principles of Empire is rudely shaken by the barbarous cruelty he witnesses in the Putumayo and it is a sadly disillusioned Casement who returns downriver:

ENTRE RIOS, TUESDAY, 25TH OCTOBER

The tragedy of the South American Indian, I verily believe, the greatest in the world to-day, and it certainly has been the greatest human wrong for well-nigh the last 400 years that history records. There has been no intermission from the day Pizarro landed at Tombes, no ray of a dawn to come. (Mitchell 1997. 312)

### **Stage of writing: historical representation of the past**

The history of the world is the history of the men who lived in the past. It is the history of their lives or, in Ricoeur's words, of our historical condition. But the question whether things happened exactly as represented keep bothering us till the end of the stage of representation. At that point, though, it is possible to distinguish the antinomial pair historic narrative/ fictional narrative. They are distinguished from each other by the nature of the implicit contract between the writer and the reader. The reader presupposes implicitly that the historian's report is honest and truthful, the closest we can get to what was once "real", and as such opposed to "unreal" fiction. In the textual world, however, effects of fictional and historical narratives intermingle, and visibility is subjected to readability.

*The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement*, written in the precise style of historical documents, make up a representation of facts directly witnessed by the diarist, and, as a corollary, relevant "testimonies and archives" of world history in the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

At the time of his trial, however, the investigation of Casement's archives focused mainly on the controversial issue of the scandalous *Black Diaries*. As interpreted officially the archives draw Casement's profile as paradoxical: a man who fights bravely to protect native peoples, but, on the other hand, perverts them to satisfy his erotic desires; an exemplary servant of the British Empire who betrays his principles and commitments. His sexual perversion mirrors the betrayal of his loyalties.

The controversial image of humanitarian heroism and sexual perversion prevails to this day in reports and commentaries. The 1973 edition of the Britannica presents an objective and impartial entry about Sir Roger David Casement: an Irish patriot, whose execution during World War I placed him among the foremost martyrs of the Irish nationalist cause; his several posts in the British consular service; his international fame for his investigations in the Congo and in the Putumayo; the publication of his report on the latter, which created international sensation and earned him a knighthood (1911); and his disastrous attempt to join the Irish nationalist fight for independence with German interests in the First World War. The extent to which opinion was unfavorably influenced by the circulation of the *Black Diaries*, reputedly written by Casement and containing detailed descriptions of homosexual practices was a matter of much subsequent controversy. Angus Mitchell informs us that a recent BBC series, about the Empire's hero who betrays his allegiance, concentrated mainly on the authenticity of the *Black Diaries*,

and made no reference to the movements that contest it. The fact is that notwithstanding the considerable number of petitions for clemency at the time, coming from the world over, Casement's reprieve was not granted.

For the British Government the case is closed. Our study, however, must move on to another phase, the "historical representation of the past", complemented by Vargas Llosa's biographic fiction. Whether familiar with the protagonist's biography or not, the reader is ready to follow the author's construction of a fictional being on the foundations of the historical figure, Sir Roger Casement.

The portrait of Casement as the protagonist of *The Dream of the Celt*, drawn by Llosa, mirrors the contradictory interpretations of the testimonies written by the historical Roger Casement in his diaries. The novel's epigraph, an aptly chosen saying of José Enrique Rondó's, prepares the reader for the multi-faced nature of its main character: "Each of us can be, successively, not one, but many. And those successive personalities that emerge from one another can offer the strangest and most amazing contrasts" (my translation).

In the epilogue of his novel, Mario Vargas Llosa acknowledges that there were two sides to the figure of Roger Casement: a generous man, very strict in his values, totally devoid of political or professional ambition; the reverse of the coin shows, however, the mysterious Roger Casement of some intimate moments in his diaries, which may have been the fantasy of a solitary man.

The story begins in the Pentonville prison where Casement has been imprisoned since the failure of his quixotic attempt to recruit Irish-born prisoners of war in Germany to fight the British, in April 1916. The genesis of the Celt's dream follows the hero's interior monologue to the key moments of the plot that reveal his successive personalities.

The first division of the novel, "The Congo", depicts the trajectory of the young idealist who joins the great epic European surge to bring civilization to primitive peoples. His personal contact with his former heroes, such as Henry Morton Stanley, whom he admired as benefactors of the natives, opens the young man's eyes to the ruthless cruelty of the whole enterprise, under the auspices of the believed great humanitarian, King Leopold II of Belgium. Casement's reports about the cruelty perpetrated against native peoples were received with both indignation and denial: the passionate Irish nationalist and defender of humanitarian causes was vilified in the international press, subsidized by King Leopold. Casement faced them with unrelenting courage.

"Amazonia", the second part of the novel, shows Casement as an experienced British civil servant, a shrewd analyst of the exploitation of human and natural resources, both in Africa and in South America, who sincerely believes in the ethical foundation of British imperialism. The above-mentioned conversation with Victor Israel, registered in the diary of the Putumayo, becomes a heated argument in Vargas Llosa's novel. The fictional Casement attempts to convince his opponent of the inhumanity of destroying entire tribal societies to satisfy the white man's greed. The plot follows the gradual transformation of the exemplary British consul – whose reports would earn him a knighthood – into a champion of peoples oppressed by the objectives and methods of

the imperialist process. The realization that the position of Ireland in the historical and political context of the British Empire is similar to that of African and South-American indigenous peoples stirs him into his disastrous passionate fight for his country's independence.

In "Ireland", the third division, the idealist dreamer concentrates his energy on retrieving the primary dignity of Eire as a nation. He takes classes in Gaelic, and attempts to establish contact with an Ireland he was not familiar with, that of peasants and fishermen hardened by their unrelenting struggle against the hostile nature. The chilly air of field and *moor feels pure and invigorating in contrast with the unhealthy miasma of the tropics.*

*The Dream of the Celt* can be said to be a full biography inasmuch as it attempts to cover all episodes of Roger Casement's life, from his childhood in Ulster to the moment of his execution, *his eyes blindfolded by the hangman.* Llosa's fiction would be a substitute for the historical analysis of archives and testimonies which has not been written. Angus Mitchell argues that the *Black Diaries* damaged Casement's historical reputation to the point that his name is never mentioned in the writing of the history of both colonial Africa and the Amazon and in the scripting of Ireland's own revolutionary history (188).

Despite the distinction that in principle exists between real past and unreal fiction, according to Paul Ricoeur, a dialectical treatment of this elementary dichotomy imposes itself the interweaving of readability (style) and visibility (history) in the world of the text. It is through the portrayal of characters in the narrative, whether life stories, fictional narratives or historical discourse, that visibility (history) clearly surpasses legibility (style). Characters are inserted in the plot simultaneously with events that make up the historical narrative, as illustrated by *The Dream of the Celt.*

Its unfavorable comparison with the author's preceding historical narratives does not detract from its value as a fictional representation of the past: it has brought to public notice a historical figure of the stature of Roger Casement, and his pioneering fight for human rights. Mario Vargas Llosa has, in fact, fulfilled his claim that the Irishman's voice, raised in the defense of native Africans, "would deserve to be honored in a great novel".

## Notes

- 1 Translations into English of this passage as well as subsequent passages from Ricoeur's and Vargas Llosa's cited works are mine.
- 2 *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement's* edited by Angus Mitchel. Organizers of the Portuguese translation Laura P. Z. Izarra & Mariana Bolfarine. Trans. M. Bolfarine, M. Marques de Azevedo and M. R. Viana. A project of the W.B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies at USP.
- 3 For the purposes of identification, Angus Mitchell refers to the journal that Casement kept during his 1910 seventy-day Amazon voyage as the Putumayo Journal, which forms the bulk of Casement's *Amazon Journal*. This document is written on one hundred and twenty-eight unbound loose leaves of lined, double-sized foolscap and covers the period from 23 September to 6 December 1910. Its authenticity has never been questioned (Mitchell 1997. 29).

## Works cited

*ABEI Journal*, No. 11, November 2009. 183-202.

Izarra, L. & M. Bolfarine (orgs.) *Diário da Amazônia*. Trans. M. Bolfarine, Mail Marques de Azevedo & Maria Rita Viana. *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement* edited by Angus Mitchell. São Paulo: EDUSP, 2016.

Llosa, Mário Vargas. *La verdad de las mentiras*. Madrid: Santillana, 2007.

\_\_\_\_\_. *O sonho do celta*. Trad. P. Wacht e A. Roitman. Rio de Janeiro: Objetiva, 2011.

\_\_\_\_\_. Interview. *O Globo*. 14 May, 2011.

Mitchell, Angus. *Roger Casement no Brasil A borracha, a Amazônia e o Mundo do Atlântico. 1884-1916*. Ed. Laura P.Z. Izarra. Trad. Mariana Bolfarine. São Paulo: Humanitas, 2011

\_\_\_\_\_. (Ed.) *The Amazon Journal of Roger Casement*. London: The Lilliput Press, 1997.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Unframing the Black Diaries of Roger Casement". *ABEI Journal*, No. 11, November 2009. 183-202

Ricoeur, Paul. *A memória, a história o esquecimento*. Trad. Alan François [et al.]. Campinas: Unicamp, 2007.