



The Trial of Roger Casement

Fionnuala Doran



**"I assert from this dock that I am being tried here,
not because it is just..."**

In 1911, Roger Casement was knighted by King George V for his groundbreaking humanitarian work in Africa and South America. Five years later, he was hanged for treason. *The Trial of Roger Casement* charts the events that led a man renowned for his compassion to the noose.

Based on real events, Fionnuala Doran's absorbing graphic novel explores Casement's startling downfall, from his efforts to secure German backing for an independent Ireland to his disastrous return home and subsequent arrest. Condemned as a revolutionary, his sexuality laid bare by the circulation of his private journals, Casement's fate was all but sealed. And yet, on his final day in the courtroom, he delivered a brave, impassioned speech that would resonate long after his death.

"...but because it is unjust."



THE TRIAL OF ROGER CASEMENT

Fionnuala Doran



THE TRIAL OF



ROGER CASEMENT

REBEL

Fionnuala
Doran

CONSUL

Cover and blurb for *The Trial of Roger Casement*.

Artist Statement & Work Produced

The Trial of Roger Casement

Published - August 2016

Publisher - Self Made Hero (United Kingdom), Abrams (International)

125 pages.

My first graphic novel, *The Trial of Roger Casement*, examines the last 18 months in the life of (the former) Sir Roger Casement, who was hung for treason in 1916 after the failed Irish Easter Rising. It combines fiction and non-fiction- in parallel to how he recorded his own life in his public-facing 'white' diaries (intended for publication) and his private, intimate 'black' diaries. I do not want to simply replay the known facts (as much as they can be known) of his last years. Casement is an opportunity to explore our (or my) inability to truly know the inner life of another person (or oneself). The comic form is perfect for exploring the different levels of self- the inner life as perceived by others (such as a biographer), the observable outer life, the inner life as perceived by oneself (in a diary) and the actual, lived experience of one's own life. I explore this through what is drawn and how it is drawn. The same sentence can be said by the same (named) person, but when coming from a figure drawn in two different ways the effect of those words will be different. *The Trial of Roger Casement* is as much about the failure of biography as it is a biography.

Casement rose to prominence from a civil servant of the British Empire to expose the grotesque human rights abuses committed by the regime of King Leopold II of Belgium in the Congo Free State. His 1904 report for the British Parliament was the first expose published from within an institution of European colonial power to detail the brutality and horror inflicted for profit in the aftermath of Europe's Scramble for Africa. His first-hand reporting showed the hollowness and hypocrisy of European colonial expansion and capitalist exploitation, the legacy of which still resonates today.

Casement's work with exploited people in the Congo and Peru radicalised him against imperialism, at home and abroad. He returned to Ireland to join the campaign for Home Rule and-when that became frustrated by political manoeuvring not dissimilar to contemporary British politics-he began to work on what would become the 1916 Easter Rising alongside other seminal figures of Irish and socialist history such as Countess Markievicz and James Connolly.

Among the Irish revolutionaries, he was also an outsider. He did not believe in pressing ahead with the Easter Rising plans, knowing that the rebels were outnumbered and outgunned compared to the British army. He argued passionately against the loss of lives that action would cause. Casement was also a gay man who had multiple intimate and sexual relationships at a time of public revulsion against homosexuality. His trial for treason and hanging were a direct consequence of his sexual identity. A gay man was not seen as worthy of a military tribunal and execution by firing squad. While the bodies of the other 1916 Rising leaders were returned to their families, Casement's was thrown into a lime pit outside of Pentonville Prison.

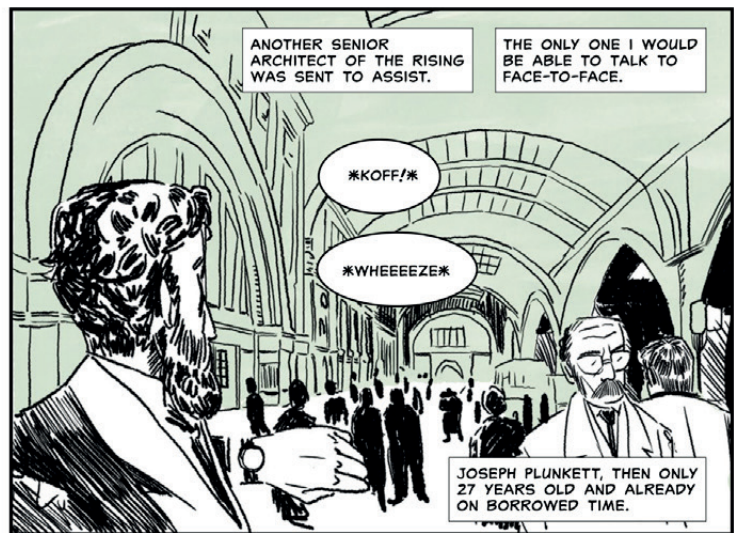
The diaries he kept chronicling his sex-partners and gay cruising were circulated to his former friends and allies, such as Arther Conan Doyle, who might otherwise have pleaded for clemency. His public outing caused him to be written out of both Irish and British history, and even today he is a problematic figure, refusing to fit into any pre-defined conceptions of masculinity and heroism often applied to early 20th Century narratives. Casement's life touches on issues still relevant today: European exploitation, the inner and outer lives of individuals, the right to demand a society for all, and the quixotic dream of freedom.



Excerpt from *The Trial of Roger Casement*, page 28.



Excerpt from *The Trial of Roger Casement*, page 43.



Excerpt from The Trial of Roger Casement, page 48



Excerpt from The Trial of Roger Casement, page 50



Excerpt from The
Trial of Roger Case-
ment, page 54



**Excerpt from The Trial of Roger
Casement, page 55.**



The Trial of Roger Casement, page 91.

Related Conference Papers

The Potential of Comics to Interpret the 1916 Easter Rising

Event: Graphic Brighton 2016 - University of Brighton, United Kingdom
(peer-reviewed conference)

Duration: 9 Dec 2016 - 10 Dec 2016

Abstract

In this paper I address the representation of the 1916 Irish Rising, running parallel—and in response—to the Great War, through comics.

I will primarily refer to my own graphic novel, *The Trial of Roger Casement*, and the depiction of the protagonist's journey from a respected, knighted human-rights advocate at the outbreak of war in 1914 to his execution for treason in 1916, at the height of British patriotic fervour. His mission—to seek political and military assistance for the Irish independence movement from Germany, the primary rival to Britain for European dominance—was thrown into chaos by the outbreak of hostilities.

The paper examines the challenges and opportunities of using the graphic novel form to depict the life of Casement, a man whose life and legacy has been fought over for a century. His private diaries, documenting his sex-life as a gay man in the pre-legalisation world, were seized by the British secret service and forwarded to Casement's former allies and friends in the emerging human-rights movement.

These diaries have since been debated and contested, with some allies claiming forgery and defamation while others have accepted them in their entirety.

The combination of word and image and disregard for taxonomical distinctions within the comic-book provides the ability to blur the lines between objective and subjective truths, and offers a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations to the reader. The graphic novel may provide a way for creators to engage with the 1916 Rising without becoming overwhelmed by the weight of history, offering the potential to deal with socio-political themes in a way that can combine history with poetry.

I will also look at the approach of other creators to similar figures from the 1916 Easter Rising in a new breed of Irish-history graphic novels. This will include Sean Charleton's 'James Conolly: The Irish Rebel', the Nerve Centre, Derry's short comics focusing on Winifred Carney and Gerry Hunt's 'Blood Upon the Rose'.

Related Conference Papers

Combining Law & Poetry: The Potential of Comics to Interpret Division in Ireland

Delivered: 06 Apr 2017

Event: Socio-Legal Studies Association annual conference 2017 (peer-reviewed conference), Newcastle University, United Kingdom

Abstract

In this paper I address the representation of the 1916 Irish Rising and the subsequent partition of Ireland and sectarian conflict through comics. I will refer to my own graphic novel, *The Trial of Roger Casement*, and the depiction of the protagonist's journey from a respected, knighted human-rights advocate at the outbreak of war in 1914 to his execution for treason in 1916, at the height of British patriotic fervour. His mission—to seek political and military assistance for the Irish independence movement from Germany, the primary rival to Britain for European dominance—was thrown into chaos by the outbreak of hostilities.

The paper examines the challenges and opportunities of using the graphic novel form to depict Irish conflict and civil-war in the 20th Century, the interpretation and legal basis of which has been constantly disputed and re-interpreted on both sides of the border. The combination of word and image and disregard for taxonomical distinctions within the comic-book provides the ability to blur the lines between objective and subjective truths, and offers a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations to the reader. This multiplicity of meanings can mitigate against clarity, particularly legal clarity.

The graphic novel may provide a way for creators to engage with the issues inherent in such a small island's division into two very different states without becoming overwhelmed by the weight of history, offering the potential to deal with socio-political themes in a way that can combine history and law with poetry.

I will also look at the approach of other creators to conflict in Ireland in a new breed of graphic novels. This will include Sean Charleton's *James Conolly: The Irish Rebel*, Garth Ennis and John McCrea's *Troubled Souls* and *For a Few Troubles More*.

Related links:

<https://www.slsa2017.com/> <https://media.wix.com/ugd/9fec2ac6b4682b481d47baa03d6cc87caf07c8.pdf>

Related Conference Papers

Combining History & Poetry: The Potential of Comics to Interpret Division in Ireland

Delivered - 26 Jun 2017

Event: International Conference of Graphic Novels, Bandes Dessinées and Comics 2017 (peer-reviewed conference) University of Dundee, United Kingdom

Abstract

In this paper I address the representation of the 1916 Irish Rising and the subsequent partition of Ireland into two separate, opposing states through comics. I will refer to my own graphic novel, *The Trial of Roger Casement*, and the depiction of the protagonist's journey from a respected, knighted human-rights advocate at the outbreak of war in 1914 to his execution for treason in 1916, at the height of British patriotic fervour. His mission—to seek political and military assistance for the Irish independence movement from Germany, the primary rival to Britain for European dominance—was thrown into chaos by the outbreak of hostilities.

The paper examines the challenges and opportunities of using the graphic novel form to depict 20th Century Irish history, the interpretation of which has been constantly disputed and reinterpreted on both sides of the border. The combination of word and image and disregard for taxonomical distinctions within the comic-book provides the ability to blur the lines between objective and subjective truths, and offers a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations to the reader. The graphic novel may provide a way for creators to engage with the issues inherent in such a small island's division into two very different states without becoming overwhelmed by the weight of history, offering the potential to deal with socio-political themes in a way that can combine history with poetry.

I will also look at the approach of other creators in a new breed of Irish graphic novels. This will include Sean Charleton's *James Conolly: The Irish Rebel*, Garth Ennis and John McCrea's *Troubled Souls* and *For a Few Troubles More*.

Related links: <http://internationalgraphicnovelandcomicsconference.com/>

Related Public Talks & Panels

Queer History in Comics, as part of Aye! Write Festival, Glasgow
10 March 2017, Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow, United Kingdom

In *Queer: A Graphic History*, a ground-breaking non-fiction graphic novel, cartoonist Julia Scheele illuminates the histories of queer thought and LGBTQ+ action. From identity politics and gender roles to privilege and exclusion, it explores how we came to view sex, gender and sexuality in the ways that we do; how these ideas get tangled up with our culture and our understanding of biology, psychology and sexology; and how these views have been disputed and challenged. Fionnuala Doran's *The Trial of Roger Casement* traces the astonishing downfall of an Irishman once feted for his humanitarianism but later condemned both as a revolutionary and as a homosexual. This politically charged and enlightening graphic novel follows Casement from his interrogation at Scotland Yard to the courtroom, where he delivers one of the greatest speeches of all time.

Art in the A.M. with Fionnuala Doran, Talk at Town Square, Belfast.

Public talk accompanying the July 2016 exhibition of Keiler Robert's diarised comics, at the Naughton Gallery at Queen's University, Belfast.

Roger, Roger, with Alan Phelan, film screening and talk.
18 December 2016, Naughton Gallery, Belfast.

Marking one hundred years since the death of controversial Irish figure Roger Casement, the Naughton Gallery presents *Roger, Roger*, a discussion and screening event with artists Fionnuala Doran and Alan Phelan. Within their practices, both artists have been inspired by Casement, a complex man now remembered variously as a patriot, a traitor, and a gay icon. Doran's graphic novel, *The Trial of Roger Casement* (SelfMadeHero, 2016), explores the startling downfall of Casement in comic book form, from his efforts to secure German backing for an independent Ireland to the circulation of his private journals, laying bare his sexuality.

Fionnuala Doran and Marcel Ruijters, talk as part of Edinburgh International Book Festival 2016
28 August 2016, Baillie Gifford Corner Theatre

Two brilliant biographies in graphic novel form. Fionnuala Doran's *The Trial of Roger Casement* charts the downfall of a man knighted in 1911 for humanitarian work, but condemned later as a revolutionary and a homosexual. Marcel Ruijters treats his graphic novel biography of Hieronymus Bosch in an entirely different manner. Since few facts remain about the medieval painter, Ruijters has created a work of fiction.

[More information here.](#)

ART IN THE A.M. WITH FIONNUALA DORAN FRI 29 JUL 2016, 9-10AM

A series of conversations between artists and curators in the early hours of the day. This time we're joined by illustrator Fionnuala Doran.

CONNECT WITH US

For the full Naughton Gallery experience, find us on your favourite social media platforms.



NEWSLETTER

Sign up to our mailing list for invites to exclusive events, and to learn about our Collections.

Your e-mail

GO



© Naughton Gallery at Queen's
Queen's University Belfast,
University Road, Belfast,
BT7 1NN, Northern Ireland, UK

T: +44 (0)28 9097 3580

E: art@qub.ac.uk

Art in the A.M. with Fionnuala Doran, Event Promotional Page, Naughton Gallery Belfast

Public talk accompanying the July 2016 exhibition of Keiler Robert's diarised comics, at the Naughton Gallery at Queen's University, Belfast.

ROGER, ROGER



ROGER, ROGER

Fionnuala Doran / Alan Phelan

18.12.16

The Great Hall, 4pm-6pm

Marking one hundred years since the death of controversial Irish figure Roger Casement, the Naughton Gallery presents *Roger, Roger*, a discussion and screening event with artists Fionnuala Doran and Alan Phelan. Within their practices, both artists have been inspired by Casement, a complex man now remembered variously as a patriot, a traitor, and a gay icon.

Doran's graphic novel, *The Trial of Roger Casement* (SelfMadeHero, 2016), explores the startling downfall of Casement in comic book form, from his efforts to secure German backing for an independent Ireland to the circulation of his private journals, laying bare his sexuality.

Phelan's film, *Our Kind* (2016), adopts a different approach, imagining a future for Casement had he not been executed in 1916, set twenty-five years later in Norway, where he is living in exile with his partner. The film - commissioned by Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane - is counterfactual, reflecting on the subjectivity common in historical interpretation, and trying to question the muddled scholarship around this multi-faceted historical figure.

The Naughton Gallery's Ben Crothers will discuss both works with Doran and Phelan, followed by a screening of *Our Kind*. Original sketchbooks and drawings by Doran will also be on display.

**Roger, Roger, Event Promotional Page, Naughton Gallery
Belfast**

Aye Write! Julia Scheele & Fionnuala Doran

Fri 10 March 2017

7.45pm, £6 + £1 booking fee, Clubroom

All ages

[Book online](#) / 0141 352 4900



JULIA SCHEELE & FIONNUALA DORAN: Queer History in Comics

In *Queer: A Graphic History*, a ground-breaking non-fiction graphic novel, cartoonist J illustrates the histories of queer thought and LGBTQ+ action. From identity politics ar to privilege and exclusion, it explores how we came to view sex, gender and sexuality that we do; how these ideas get tangled up with our culture and our understanding of psychology and sexology; and how these views have been disputed and challenged.

Fionnuala Doran's *The Trial of Roger Casement* traces the astonishing downfall of an I feted for his humanitarianism but later condemned both as a revolutionary and as a h This politically charged and enlightening graphic novel follows Casement from his inte Scotland Yard to the courtroom, where he delivers one of the greatest speeches of all

**Fionnuala Doran & Julia Scheele: Queer History in Comics,
Promotional Page, CCA Glasgow and Aye Write! Festival.**

Press Coverage

Interviews & Features

[BelfastLive: Roger Casement's life immortalised in comic book on centenary of his death, 513 words, United Kingdom, 03 Aug 2016, Paul Ainsworth.](#)

[The Northern Echo: Irish revolutionary in comic book form, 294 words, United Kingdom, 08 August 2016, Julia Breen.](#)

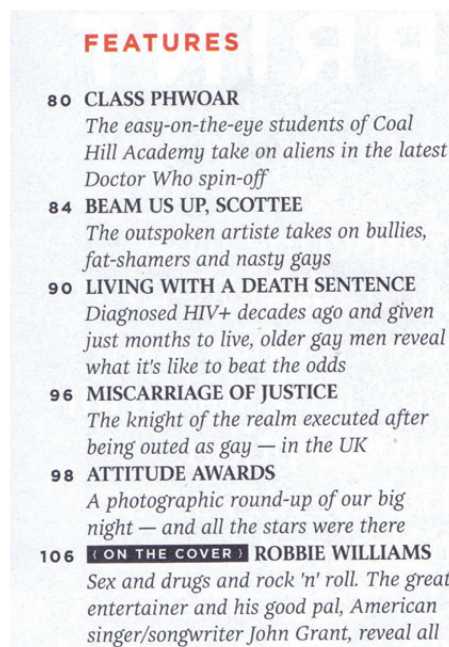
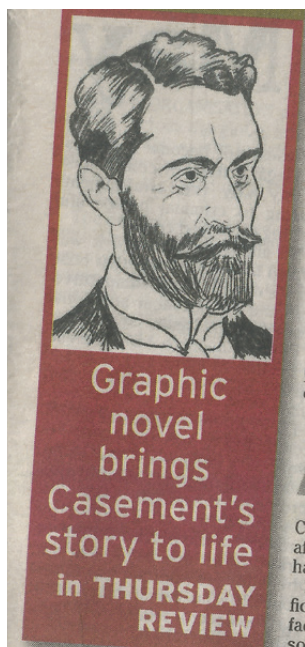
[The Irish News: The graphic tale of Irish revolutionary Roger Casement, 1029 words, United Kingdom, 11 Aug 2016, Joanne Sweeney](#)

[The Irish Echo: Casement's road to Banna Strand, 697 words, United States, 28 Sept 2016, Peter McDermott](#)

[The Irish Examiner: A new graphic novel tells the tale of the Trial of Roger Casement, 737 words, Ireland, 14 Oct 2016, Don O'Mahony](#)

[A Place to Hang Your Cap: Interview: Fionnuala Doran, Author of The Trial of Roger Casement, 1179 words, United Kingdom, 01 Nov 2016, Fred McNamara.](#)

[Attitude: A Miscarriage of Justice in Graphic Detail, United Kingdom, 01 Dec 2016, David McGillivray.](#)



Reviews

Reviews

[Front Row Reviews: The Trial of Roger Casement, 415 words, United Kingdom, 28 Aug 2016, Front Row Reviews.](#)

[Starburst Magazine: Review: The Trial of Roger Casement, 367 words, United Kingdom, 08 Sep 2016, Andrew Musk.](#)

[Bookmunch: The Trial of Roger Casement, 556 words, United Kingdom, 09 Sep 2016, Valerie O’Riordan & Peter Wild](#)

[The Slings & Arrows: Review: The Trial of Roger Casement, 529 words, United Kingdom, 01 Jan 2017, Ian Keogh](#)

[The Socialist Review: The Trial of Roger Casement, 467 words, United Kingdom, 01 February 2017, Richard Rose.](#)

[GScene: BOOK REVIEW: The Trial of Roger Casement by Fionnuala Doran, 214 words, United Kingdom, 21 Feb 2018, Eric Page.](#)

International

[Publishers Weekly: Review: The Trial of Roger Casement, 165 words, United States, 01 Oct 2016.](#)

[The Beat: Review: Two successful bios of very different men, 770 words, United States, 18 Oct 2016, John Seven.](#)

[Shelf Awareness for Readers, issue 558: The Trial of Roger Casement, 259 words, United States, 15 Nov 2016, Carol H. Hood](#)

A MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE

in graphic detail

ROGER CASEMENT WENT FROM ADMIRER KNIGHT OF THE REALM TO CONDEMNED TRAITOR IN THE SPACE OF JUST FIVE YEARS. HIS STORY IS NOW THE SUBJECT OF A GRAPHIC NOVEL BY FIONNUALA DORAN, WHO THINKS IT WOULD MAKE A GOOD MOVIE. SHE COULD BE RIGHT

WORDS: DAVID MCGILLIVRAY

imagine the reaction if a man honoured by his country for humanitarian work was then denounced as gay — and executed. The rest of the world would be in uproar. But this is pretty much what happened in Britain just 100 years ago — with hardly a murmur of disapproval. Even in 1916 this was a travesty of justice. Roger Casement was Irish and allegedly committed treason in Germany. But the British government managed to have him tried in the UK. After he was condemned to death, the government discouraged an appeal for clemency by circulating papers that implied Casement was homosexual. His supporters backed off and he was hanged at London's Pentonville prison.

Today, in Ireland and Germany, Casement is regarded as a political martyr. He should be regarded throughout the world, along with Oscar Wilde and Alan Turing, as a gay martyr. But his story is not that well-known. Freddie Mercury and Ian McKellen are included in Paul Russell's influential book *The Gay 100* but Casement isn't even mentioned.

Artist Fionnuala Doran thinks that's unfair and has written and illustrated a book, *The Trial of Roger Casement*, to tell his story in a graphic novel.

She's been fascinated by comic strips



since she was a child in Lurgan, County Armagh.

"It seems to me to be the most natural form of storytelling that combines words and images in a sequential format," she says. "In my opinion, it's inherent in humanity." Her interest in Casement has grown throughout her life. She first wrote about him in 2011 while a student at the Royal College of Art.

"It's something I've gradually become aware of," she says. "In Ireland, there's

Casement Park, which is a Gaelic football stadium [in Belfast], and he's buried in one of the big graveyards in Dublin."

After her art school project, she began serious research into Casement's life. Photos show him as an imposingly attractive young man. He wouldn't look out of place today in one of London's hipster enclaves.

His friends confirmed what the pictures suggest. "Imagine a tall, handsome man of fine bearing,"

Herbert Ward wrote in 1910. "A pure Irishman he is, with a captivating voice and singular charm of manner."

After joining the British colonial service, Casement became a consul in the Congo, a Belgian colony. Shocked by the way King Leopold II was exploiting the native people working on his rubber plantations, Casement wrote a report that hastened reforms.

Sent by the Foreign Office to South America, he discovered that Peruvian Indians were being tortured and killed by representatives of a rubber company registered in the UK. His reports again resulted in a major shake-up and, ultimately, the collapse of the rubber industry in Peru.

In 1911, Casement was knighted. Nobody was aware at the time that while he was doing good works in far-off places, he was also having sex with young men. Unlike many men of the period, whose sexuality is a matter of conjecture, there is strong proof that Casement was indeed gay — his sexual exploits were detailed in journals that came to be known as *The Black Diaries*.

Although not all historians believe that the diaries are genuine and some forensic experts remain dubious, a report written as recently as 2002 states that there is no doubt that the entries are in Casement's handwriting.

The respected gay historian Colm Tóibín was certainly convinced, referring to Casement as a sex tourist.

But Doran says: "I thought it very unfair to make those allegations when I couldn't see anything to back them up. I don't imagine it would have been that easy if you were a gay fellow a hundred years ago in Peru to find other gay guys and keep yourself safe at the same time."

Casement's downfall came about because he saw Irish Republicanism as just another humanitarian cause.

He was rash enough to campaign for the cause in Germany after the British declared war on the Germans in 1914. In 1916, Casement landed in Ireland hoping to find that German weapons had arrived to support the Easter Rising. The intention of those who fought was to end British rule in the country and form an Irish republic.

Instead, he was arrested by the British and taken to London for trial. Before his conviction, Casement read

REFERENCE: JAMES DOUGLAS



a prepared statement in which he protested that an Irishman could be charged with an English law passed in 1351.

The speech is movingly portrayed in Doran's book. "It was a very 21st-century take on personal freedom and democracy," Doran says.

No sooner had Casement finished speaking than the judge passed sentence.

Government agents circulated Casement's diaries to his distinguished supporters, men who still felt, following the conviction of Oscar Wilde, that homosexuality was an abomination. How shocking were Casement's confessions? Not very by our standards. "It's not that scandalous

when you read it now unless you're very sheltered," Doran states.

"He really only talks about penis size and it's not that big a deal."

But in 1916 things were different. Casement's friends deserted him.

Doran is aware that more and more graphic novels are being adapted for the screen. "I'm surprised no one's made Casement's story into a full-length movie. It has all these juicy elements to it," she enthuses.

"I've been saying to everyone that Michael Fassbender could finally get his Oscar if he decides to take on a Casement project. That's my goal, to get this graphic novel to him."

She continues: "He does look quite a bit like Casement. Also it would

"HE SHOULD BE REGARDED THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, ALONG WITH OSCAR WILDE AND ALAN TURING, AS A GAY MARTYR"



make people a lot more aware of the gay history of Ireland. Until the referendum last year, it's been relatively ignored." (Encouragingly, Fassbender has just announced that he intends to spend more time developing scripts for his production company).

While she waits for the call from Hollywood, Doran plans a graphic novel about Countess Markievicz, a socialist and suffragette who became one of the world's first female government ministers. "She broke a lot of gender roles," Doran says. "Like Casement, she was on the outside." ■

The Trial of Roger Casement is published by **SelfMadeHero**. selfmadehero.com

