

# Naming 'the nameless one'

*Barrister MacDermot's undercover role in providing the then-damning 'homosexual' poem and the critical timing of its publication strongly suggest that this was an MI5 exercise*



Belfast Unionist MP H Montgomery Hyde

by Paul Hyde

## Montgomery Hyde implies Casement's alleged authorship of a "homosexual" poem means he wrote the infamous diaries

On 28 April 1957 the Belfast Unionist MP, H Montgomery Hyde (no relation), published a lengthy article in the *Sunday Times* arguing strongly for the authenticity of the 'Black Diaries' of Roger Casement, colonial civil servant, chronicler of colonial abuses and frustrated 1916 gun-runner. His article purported to be a review of a new book by Alfred Noyes entitled 'The Accusing Ghost or Justice for Casement' which was due on sale the following day.

Noyes' book, arguing that the diaries were forged, was the first since William Maloney's 1936 volume 'The Forged Casement Diaries'. The diaries implicated Casement in extensive homosexual activity. Hyde's article presented evidence aimed at refuting Noyes' arguments and closed with the comment: "Finally, there is in the National Library of Ireland the manuscript of a poem by Casement, entitled The Nameless One. In my view it betrays strong homosexual feelings in its author. Those who may read it below can judge for themselves of this".

The poem consists of seven quatrains and does bear the interpretation indicated by Hyde. By simple inference readers would conclude that the author of the

poem must also be the author of the diaries.

Only five days after publication, the *Sunday Times* editor who commissioned the article contradicted Hyde's claim about a manuscript in The National Library of Ireland (NLI). On 3 May Leonard Russell, the literary editor, wrote "My information is that Casement wrote two poems under the same title, and that the one we published is on microfilm in the National Library of Ireland – it was given to the Library by the New York Public Library".

Indeed, Hyde did not state he had seen a manuscript; he alleged only the presence of a manuscript which he had not seen.

## Debunking the poem's authorship in three stages

I shall apply a three-stage logical analysis to isolate the authorship of the 'homosexual' poem.

**I** Alfred Noyes was a retired professor of literature, a former Nobel Prize nominee and a respected poet and author. His name had been linked to the diaries controversy since 1916: while working in the News Department of the Foreign Office, he had seen the police typescripts at the height of the smear campaign. As an Englishman, a distinguished professor and author, his voice could not be ignored.

Far from being ignored, Noyes' book provoked extensive attention with articles and letters in the press including *The Economist*, the *New Statesman*, *The Sunday Press*, the *Observer*, *The Spectator*, the *Evening Herald* and not least in the *Sunday Times*.

On the day following publication, a Dublin doctor, Herbert O Mackey, visited NLI and asked to see the poem. Staff brought him a manuscript of a poem



Where MacDermot obtained his text remains a matter of speculation: MacDermot had long nourished an antipathy towards Casement

entitled *The Nameless One* the text of which referred entirely to the Hamidian massacres of Armenians in 1895-6. The poem consisted of six stanzas of six lines. Dr Mackey was assured that this was the only manuscript poem of that title in the library.

Mackey was well known to library staff on account of his frequent visits to research Casement matters. He was chairman of The Casement Repatriation Committee which for years had sought the return to Ireland of Casement's remains. On that Monday, 29 April, Mackey hand-copied the text of the Ottoman poem and obtained a certified Photostat of the manuscript. He then wrote to the Editor of the *Sunday Times* enclosing the hand copy of the poem and explained that this was a copy of the only manuscript in the library of that title.

Russell wrote on 2 May to Hyde advising him of Mackey's letter and poem and asked 'What do I tell him?' He also replied to Mackey: "The only thing I can do is to pass your letter on to Mr. Montgomery Hyde, and write to you again when I have his answer". The answer came only a day later as cited above but the locution "my information is..." concealed who gave Russell the information.

It follows from the letter of 3 May that Hyde did not take his version of *The Nameless One* from a manuscript when he visited NLI some ten days before publication.

Nonetheless, his article attests to the presence of a manuscript (A) while Russell's letter of 3 May attests to the presence of a different manuscript (B) of the same title. However, manuscript (A) was not present on 29 April when Dr Mackey enquired for it. Therefore Hyde's claim in his *Sunday Times* article is false.

It is an undisputed fact that the purported NLI manuscript of the published poem has never been seen by anyone at any time.

The Hyde text of *The Nameless One* was later published by Singleton-Gates in his *Black Diaries of 1959* citing Hyde as source and it was republished by Brian Inglis in 1973 citing Singleton-Gates as source.

Neither had seen a manuscript nor did they refer to a microfilm. This latter is explained by the fact that the purported microfilm source cited in Russell's letter to Mackey remained private and was discovered by this author only in February 2021.

Three microfilms of Casement documents in the Maloney collection were indeed made by NYPL in 1946 and were sent to NLI. Obviously, the poem published by Hyde did not come from either of the sources cited at the time. The fact that the source of the published poem was concealed in 1957 indicates that there was no option but concealment. It follows that there are solid grounds for suspicion that the published poem was not written by Casement.

**2** It is imperative to determine the true provenance of the *Sunday Times* poem. The

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Readers must decide if they find it credible that curators of the Casement papers in NYPL were authorised to destroy documents which purport to authenticate manuscripts entrusted to their care. If not there is only one explanation for their existence today on the NLI microfilm. In 1957 the microfilm was manipulated to include the forged side-notes and the forged version of *The Nameless One*

Ransom Center at the University of Texas holds Hyde's papers and these reveal the provenance to be former senator Frank MacDermot, barrister and *Sunday Times* journalist from 1938 to 1950. The poem, typed on a single A4 page, was sent from Dublin by MacDermot on 13 April directly to Russell at the *Sunday Times*. Therefore Hyde had no role whatsoever in sourcing the poem.

The papers in Texas also reveal that in early April 1957 MacDermot informed Russell of a "homosexual poem" which he could provide for his proposed article. MacDermot did not give the source of the poem and this fact made Russell somewhat suspicious.

On 15 April Russell wrote to Hyde confirming receipt of the typescript poem from MacDermot but asking Hyde to "authenticate its presence in the Casement material" when in NLI. Obviously Hyde could not do this because there was no such manuscript in NLI. Nonetheless, and without having seen any manuscript, Russell published the poem as a prize exhibit; it was a 'scoop' for the *Sunday Times*.

The Hyde papers also reveal that the proposal for the press articles came from MacDermot, not from Hyde, and that MacDermot did not wish his name to appear in print: "information is offered freely and gladly...provided my name is not mentioned".

Nowhere in those papers is there an indication of how MacDermot obtained the text of the poem. However, the reference in Russell's letter to Mackey to a microfilm sent to NLI from NYPL can safely be attributed to MacDermot since in a letter dated 15th January 1960, recently found in Mackey's papers, he stated that the poem was on a microfilm in NLI.

"The poem I referred to was 'The Nameless One' – not that given by Dr Mackey but that published in the *Sunday Times* by Mr. Montgomery Hyde. You can find it on one of the Casement microfilms in the National Library".

This establishes as fact that MacDermot knew in April 1957 of these microfilms in NLI but did not inform Hyde of their existence and deceived him into believing his source was a non-existent NLI manuscript. It also establishes that MacDermot knew of the existence of a manuscript of the same title in NLI (the Ottoman poem) and also



Barrister, *Sunday Times* journalist and likely MI5 collaborator Frank MacDermot

knew of the existence of a manuscript poem in NYPL with the title *The Nameless One*.

The obvious question now is: why before 3 May did MacDermot conceal from Russell and Hyde the existence of the NY manuscript?

A poem of that title was indeed listed in the NY file of Casement poems. That MacDermot made no reference to it requires explanation and the only explanation which satisfies common sense and probability is that MacDermot knew the NY manuscript was another copy of the same Ottoman poem held in NLI. Casement often made more than one manuscript of his poems, and manuscripts of several poems in NLI can also be found in the NYPL file.

MacDermot could not have foreseen the intervention of Mackey in NLI or that he would send the Ottoman poem to Russell. This predicament constrained MacDermot to invent the implausible remedy of two poems with the same title. It is simply not credible, far less probable, that Casement wrote two poems with radically different themes and gave them the same title. They have nothing in common. There is no reason why any poet would do this any more than a novelist would publish two utterly different novels with the same title.

**3** A collection of poem manuscripts attributed to Casement can now be found on one of the NLI microfilms. Among these is a photograph of a manuscript poem with the mis-spelled title



The published poem did not come from a manuscript in NLI as alleged. It did not come from a microfilm in NLI as alleged. It did not come from a manuscript in NYPL.

Therefore it came from somewhere else and its true provenance in 1957 was concealed and this concealment was intentional and therefore necessary.

There is only one explanation for the necessary concealment of its provenance – the poem was not composed by Casement

*The Namless One.* It is recorded that Dr. Maloney donated Casement poem manuscripts to NYPL in December 1940. A typed contents list with the file in NY records a poem called *The Nameless One* as part of the original donation.

Today in that NY file there is a manuscript of *The Nameless One*, with the title mis-spelled, and on the reverse of the manuscript there is a handwritten inscription which gives the date and place of composition which seems to authenticate the manuscript as being written by Casement. The NLI microfilm does not contain a photograph of this reverse inscription. The text on the NLI microfilm corresponds to the manuscript held today in NYPL but neither corresponds to the text printed by Hyde: there are several differences although they do not alter the overall meaning of the poem. The reverse inscription was not published by Hyde and his line 18 differs from that line in both the NLI microfilm and the present manuscript in NYPL.

The text published by Hyde was sent to him by Russell of the *Sunday Times* who had received it as a typed A4 page from Frank MacDermot who by then was a retired journalist living in Paris. Much of the mystery about this poem and its elusive provenance arises from MacDermot's enigmatic role in its publication. It follows that MacDermot did not obtain his text from either the NLI microfilm or the manuscript now in NYPL. Where MacDermot obtained his text remains a matter of speculation.

MacDermot had long nourished an antipathy towards Casement; "I dislike and disapprove of Casement quite apart from his sex life". (Letter May 5, 1956 to Hyde.) In 1936 he had contacted Malcolm MacDonald, then UK Dominions Secretary, asking him to verify that the diaries were authentic and received "a written assurance (marked private and personal)...". This was reported in MacColl's 1956 book (page 290) without naming MacDermot who was described as "a former member of the Dáil. He has an unimpeachable record for disinterestedness and honesty". MacColl cited the un-named MacDermot; "But it enrages me that in Ireland and the U.S.A. the diary is now frequently referred to as an ignoble forgery".

Here are some of the anomalies in MacDermot's role.

Although MacDermot proposed the articles and poem to Russell, and although he was an experienced journalist known to *Sunday Times* readers, he was reluctant to write the articles and preferred Hyde as author.

He did not name the poem when promising to supply it and referred only to a "homosexual poem" which he allowed Russell to infer was a manuscript in NLI.

Although MacDermot already knew of the NLI microfilms of Casement documents he did not tell Russell about these when he sent the text.

He made it a condition of giving the poem typescript for publication that his name would not appear.

MacDermot knew there was no manuscript of the poem in NLI but he did not tell Hyde.

In his letter of May 5 in the *Sunday Times* he did not comment on the false claim about a manuscript source in NLI.

Only when asked on May 2 about provenance did MacDermot tell Russell about a microfilm.

It is clear from these verified points that MacDermot intended to conceal his source from both his former colleague and his 'old friend' Hyde.

That he did not name the poem when proposing the articles to Russell can only be explained by his not knowing the title. Since it is unthinkable that MacDermot had seen the poem he was proposing but had forgotten the title, this implies he had not seen the poem *at the time he promised it*. It follows that if he had not seen it he could not know that it was a "homosexual poem" unless someone had told him of its topic.

That unknown someone was almost certainly the person who gave the text to MacDermot. Unsurprisingly Russell was suspicious about its provenance but he managed to set aside his suspicion in order to obtain a 'scoop'.

Two further facts must be considered. Before April 1957 there is no evidence that anyone had ever heard of this poem in any form and MacDermot was the first to refer to it. Second, Russell claimed in his letter of 3 May, "Casement wrote two poems under the same title..."; the other poem is the Ottoman poem of 1898. But this is very unusual. Without Mackey's intervention, MacDermot would never have made the improbable claim about two poems of the same title and the microfilm. Even then only Mackey was

informed – privately – of the microfilm and no other researcher since 1957 has been aware of it. It requires to be explained why MacDermot intended to conceal his source.

There are strong reasons for thinking that when MacDermot first proposed the unknown poem to Russell in late March he was proposing a 'work in progress' - bait for a 'scoop'. The full-page article provoked dozens of readers' letters. Among them were two from MacDermot printed on 5 and 19 May. In neither letter did this man with the "unimpeachable record for disinterestedness and honesty" correct Hyde's false claim about a manuscript in NLI. Nor did he refer to a microfilm from NYPL as source of the poem. Instead he allowed the falsehood to deceive hundreds of thousands of readers worldwide.

At this point one question imposes itself; why did MacDermot not give as his source the manuscript entitled *The Namless One* now held in NYPL?

The published poem did not come from a manuscript in NLI as alleged. It did not come from a microfilm in NLI as alleged. It did not come from a manuscript in NYPL.

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It follows that the manuscript entitled *The Namless One* now in NYPL was not written by Casement.

The microfilm manuscripts are accompanied by anonymous handwritten notes which purport to authenticate the calligraphy as Casement's. This writer has inspected many hundreds of Casement manuscripts over several years and none of them bear any note purporting to authenticate the handwriting. Therefore, these side-notes on the NLI microfilm deserve the maximum suspicion because they are unique.

Some special circumstance attaching to these poems made it necessary to add the side-notes. Since the notes are intended to authenticate the manuscripts on the microfilm, that circumstance was the apprehension that some of the manuscripts might arouse suspicion that they were not genuine. The notes were intended to respond

to *anticipated* suspicion about the poems in the future. Therefore some circumstance was *known* to the writer of the notes when they were written. But since the notes are unsigned, the writer remains unidentified, therefore without authority to authenticate anything.

Indeed, not only are the notes worthless as authentication but their presence itself signals that at least one of the manuscripts will come under suspicion. The poem which did come under suspicion from 1957 onwards was *The Nameless One* and that suspicion arose from its publication in the *Sunday Times*. Before publication that poem was unknown. There is evidence in the side-notes that this poem deserved 'special attention'. The notes referring to the other poems simply claim the manuscript is in Casement's handwriting. But the note for *The Nameless One* gives the following: "The Nameless One. lines written in very great dejection at Genoa, Nov. 15, 1900 by Roger Casement in Casement's handwriting".

These twenty words about time, place and mood cannot be derived from the text of the poem. This side-note is almost twice the average length of the notes for the other manuscripts. This 'authenticating' detail did not appear with the *Sunday Times* version which demonstrates that MacDermot did not obtain his text from the NLI microfilm.

Since it is unthinkable that MacDermot would have concealed or ignored these 'authenticating' details, it can be deduced that he had not seen these details when he sent his text to Russell. Nonetheless, a version of this 'authenticating' side-note does appear on the reverse of the manuscript now held in NYPL. That version concludes with the words "before sailing on 'Sirio' for Barcelona" which are missing from the microfilm.

It can be reasonably concluded that the note-writer's apprehension of suspicion concerned *The Nameless One* rather than the other manuscripts. That apprehension can only be explained by the writer's awareness that a version of this poem was intended for publication as a prize exhibit in the *Sunday Times*. Thus it became necessary to 'authenticate' all the poems on the microfilm.

Staff in NYPL have verified that none of these 'authenticating' side-notes can be found today in NYPL. There is, therefore, no evidence today that the side-notes existed in 1946 when the microfilms were made. Library staff today have never seen them.

Readers must decide if they find it credible that curators of the Casement papers in NYPL were authorised to destroy documents which purport to authenticate manuscripts entrusted to their care. If a credible motive for this extraordinary destruction cannot be found, it tends to follow that the side-notes were not destroyed because there were no side-notes in NYPL.

This leaves only one explanation for their



**Roger Casement being escorted to the gallows at Pentonville Prison, London, having been found guilty of treason**

existence today on the NLI microfilm. In 1957 the microfilm was manipulated to include the forged side-notes and the forged version of *The Nameless One*.

Some readers will understandably find this exposition challenging and perhaps confusing. They might attribute this to carelessness by MacDermot whose behaviour is difficult to rationalise. But MacDermot was an Oxford-trained barrister, a banker, journalist and a politician who founded a very successful political party and whose Dáil and Seanad orations were considered models of lucidity and coherence, as were his journalistic writings. Carelessness does not dispel suspicion about his secretive role.

Whatever the motive for MacDermot's conduct, publication of the poem in a reputable newspaper reaching over a million readers in a single day clearly served to overwhelm the arguments in Noyes' book. This result would certainly have satisfied British intelligence.

It can be reasonably discounted that MacDermot acted entirely on his own initiative motivated by his hostility to Casement and his lifelong pro-British sentiment. Nor is there any evidence that MacDermot had the literary skills required to compose a well-made poem. Those who doubt that British intelligence was capable of producing the twenty-eight lines of poetic ventriloquism seriously underestimate their ingenuity, experi-

ence and modus operandi.

Certainly MacDermot was close to the British establishment and MI5 would not have felt awkward about approaching him. His undercover role in providing the poem and the critical timing of its publication strongly suggest that this was an intelligence services exercise.

The anomaly of two very different poems with the same title is resolved as follows. It was necessary to give the false poem the title of a manuscript already listed in the NY Casement file; thus it would appear to belong to the original Maloney donation. The Ottoman manuscript entitled *The Nameless One* seemed appropriate and this manuscript was removed and the forged *Nameless One* was inserted where it remains today.

Of the fifty Casement poems published in 1958 the Ottoman poem is the only one which has an endnote giving the place and date of composition; the forged manuscript in NYPL also gives the purported place and date of composition. Coincidences do happen but they cannot be made to happen.

Now at last the nameless one has a name – Frank MacDermot. No doubt he knew the names of other 'nameless ones'.

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