

The Beginnings of Irish Studies in Brazil — Recollections

O começo dos Estudos Irlandeses no Brasil — Memórias

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Abstract: *This text is about the beginnings and development of the area of Irish Studies in Brazil, as well as the fruitful partnership with the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs, and the foundation of the Brazilian Association of Irish Studies (ABEI). Through memories and photographs, it is possible to follow the research on Irish Studies, the creation of a series of international partnerships, the visits of renowned Irish researchers and writers, as well as important publications built from collaboration between researchers from Brazil, Ireland, and other countries.*

Keywords: *Irish literature. Irish Studies in Brazil. Memory. History.*

Resumo: *O presente artigo relata o início e desenvolvimento da área dos Estudos Irlandeses no Brasil, bem como a profícua parceria com o Departamento de Relações Exteriores da Irlanda, e a fundação da Associação Brasileira de Estudos Irlandeses (ABEI). Através da memória e das fotografias é possível acompanhar as pesquisas na área dos Estudos Irlandeses, a criação de diversas parcerias internacionais, as visitas de renomados pesquisadores e escritores irlandeses, bem como importantes publicações realizadas a partir de colaborações entre pesquisadores brasileiros, irlandeses e de outras nacionalidades.*

Palavras-chave: *Literatura irlandesa. Estudos Irlandeses no Brasil. Memória. História.*

In 1972, when I began my correspondence with Sean O'Faolain, the author chosen for my doctoral thesis at the University of São Paulo (USP), I was introduced to a new universe of knowledge: Irish literature, history, and culture. His letters and postcards were donated to the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, in 2008.

At that time, writers such as Joyce, Yeats, Beckett, Wilde, and Shaw were studied in English literature courses! After I offered elective courses, as well as outreach and postgraduate courses at USP, an Irish Literature programme was established. In addition, in 1982, an informal agreement for projects was shared with colleague and friend Maria Helena Kopschitz, from the Federal University of Niterói; in 1989, the Brazilian Association of Irish Studies (ABEI) was founded; these events contributed to the consolidation of knowledge of the Irish literary scene, resulting in the vigour it has in Brazil today.

Moreover, with the support of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs and the University of São Paulo, several renowned Irish critics have visited USP since 1986, events which have been essential to the development of the programme. Among the numerous visitors, it is worth mentioning Maurice Harmon, Maureen Murphy, Terence Brown, Declan Kiberd, Margaret Kelleher, Nicholas Grene, Christopher Murray, Fintan O'Toole, and Edna Longley, who taught courses and gave lectures to postgraduate students.



Maurice Harmon & Prof. Rosicler Diniz at the Univ. de Santos (2002)



Prof. Nicholas Grene with poet Haroldo de Campos and Prof. Leila Perrone Moisés on Bloomsday at São Paulo (1993)



Christopher Murray, IASIL President, with Munira Mutran and Laura Izarra (2002)

We have also welcomed several Irish writers who lectured on their work, such as John Banville, Michael Longley, Billy Roche, Paul Durcan, Colm Tóibín, and Patrick McCabe. Their visits opened new horizons for dissertations and theses. Some of them recorded their experiences in the country, such as the poems “Teaching Yeats in Brazil” by Maurice Harmon, “Wooden Hare” by Michael Longley, and Greetings to Our Friends in Brazil, by Paul Durcan. More recently, Moya Cannon’s “Hands” and Mary O’Donnell’s “Missing Brazil” portrayed Brazilian scenes.



Prof. Joe Lee with Ambassador Martin Greene and Prof. Munira Mutran (2004)



Prof. Margaret McCourtain with Laura Izarra and Munira Mutran (2011)

With the opening of the Irish Embassy in Brazil, the support for consolidating the main areas of research in Irish Studies was extended. I would highlight the visit of historians Joe Lee and Margaret McCourtain, who were important for the establishment of the ‘Literature and History’ field of research.

The programme’s research scope expanded with the supervision of M.A. and PhD students who have become lecturers at other Brazilian institutions. During their postgraduate courses, they had the opportunity to meet critics and professors from Irish universities sent by the DFA to USP. Graduates of the programme, which began in 1980, went on to multiply the study of Irish literature at their universities.

The publication of the Newsletter series, the first of which appeared in 1989 and was co-edited by Laura P. Z. Izarra, featured articles, reviews, bibliographies, and translations of Irish poems by various specialists. Issue 13, the last in the series that evolved to become the ABEI Journal, illustrates how intercultural relations were slowly established with researchers, not only Irish, but also with associations (IASIL, AEDEI) and Irish (UCD, Queen’s, TCD) and Brazilian (UFF, UFBA, UNESP, UFPR) universities: volume 13 contains my interview conducted at the University of New South Wales, Australia, with the translator of Joyce’s *Ulysses* into Chinese.

I started the journey alone, but not for long, as you can easily see. In all these years, the major milestone was the creation of the W.B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies in 2009, the result of the great efforts of Ambassador Michael Hoey, myself, and Laura P. Z. Izarra in the various administrative and academic sectors of USP, and of many people with whom we met at institutions such as the DFA.

It is important to remember that the previous visits of three presidents to USP – Mary Robinson (1995), Mary McAleese (2004), Michael D. Higgins (2012), and *Taoiseach* Bertie Ahern (2001) – in recognition of the importance of the Programme in promoting Irish culture in the country, were also significant factors in the creation of the Chair. <https://catedrawbyeats.fflch.usp.br/visitas-oficiais>



This account does not even begin to describe the journey undertaken by so many people. It is impossible to mention every colleague, every former student or institution, every friend. I would like to highlight the constant presence and support of Laura P. Z. Izarra, colleague, interlocutor, and friend, who represents the experience of the past and the future.

This outline of the initial period reveals, above all, that the spring flowed continuously, forming different rivulets that became rivers over the years, each following its own path, but all interconnected, flowing into the vast river of Irish Studies.

Translated by Michelle Alvarenga