

Remembering Ireland: A Few Stories by a Brazilian Ambassador to Dublin

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As ambassador, I arrived in Dublin during the glorious summer of 2003. The walls of the Residence, as the siege of an Embassy is called, needed some refreshment but the Irish painters who had started the job disappeared mysteriously for a few days. My wife was not happy with their modus operandi and asked why they had not come to finish the painting. Their excuse taught us a lesson about priorities in a rainy and cold climate: “Sorry, Madam, but such sunny days are rare here and we had to enjoy them in the park”.

Gradually I kept learning many other clever attitudes of this good humoured, resilient and hard working people, whose contribution to human wealth and culture is so valuable. Books on European history describe the migration of the Celts and their fusion with other races like the primitive Iberians and Irish. I imagine that through common ancient genes contemporary Brazilians and Irishmen share some similar traits of personality. For example, when I was introduced to an Irishman, the first exchanges were rather formal, but soon some chemistry surged between us and I felt that I had met a fellow who could be my compatriot.

The presentation of my Letter of Credence to the graceful President Mary McAleese was also an example of the Irish combination of formality and elegant simplicity. After the review of the Honour Guard in the splendid park which surrounds the State Residence, I was guided to the hall where I greeted the Head of State and exchanged views about the good relations between our countries. To my wonder, the ceremony was rendered still more congenial by the perfectionist Head of Protocol, Ambassador Joe Brennan, a gifted pianist who played for us a suave melody. During the interview with President McAleese I expressed, wishful thinking, that my mission would be successful if Brazil could receive her visit. I was lucky, because some months later I had the honour to accompany Her Excellency during her state visit to Brazil.

Another prestigious Irish President was also a woman, Mary Robinson, who became, after her presidential mandate, the Head of Human Rights Office. From such prestigious position, she started a campaign to implement a total ban of nuclear weapons. Her idea still survives in the United Nations, supported by a majority of peaceful countries like Brazil. I received in Dublin two colleagues, Ambassadors Denot Medeiros and Antonio Patriota, who represented Brazil in the meetings of the anti-nuclear group inspired by Mary Robinson.

In the beginning of this century Brazilian college students had started to prefer Dublin to London to learn English. It was found that the warm-heartedness of their Irish hosts was much more attractive than the Anglo-Saxon people they could meet in England. Their number grew hugely during the five years of my mission in Dublin. They were allowed to work in the hospitality sector, a bonus that not only helped them financially but also put them in contact with English speaking people in hotels and restaurants. Another contingent of Brazilians had come even earlier to Ireland, not to study but to work. Irish new generations, thanks to a clever education policy, were capable to fill the great number of high level jobs created by the investments made by multinational companies after the country joined the European Common Market. Agriculture, the island's traditional economy leader was losing its labour at a fast rate. When a meat packing company with contacts in Brazil decided to hire experienced Brazilian butchers who had lost their jobs in bankrupt abattoir in the state of Goiás, the initiative was so successful that the strong Irish cattle breeding sector could keep its position in the European market.

Many other Brazilian workers arrived in Ireland and took residence in the small towns near the slaughterhouses. I visited one of them, Gort, and was impressed by the friendly atmosphere prevailing there. I left Ireland seventeen years ago and hope that, in contrast with events in other European countries, this Irish Brazilian cultural fusion remains strong.

A source of immense pleasure was, when invited by Karina O'Leary, I attended a series of presentations of the Irish Chamber Choir, conducted by the Brazilian maestro Celso Antunes. As I write these lines, many events of high cultural value come to my mind: the commemoration of the 100th Bloomsday, when the itinerary of the Joycean hero was followed by hundreds of Irish and foreign people dressed as the characters of the literary masterpiece; the exhibition of two Brazilian exceptional

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Celso Antunes. As I write these lines, many events of high cultural value come to my mind: the commemoration of the 100th Bloomsday, when the itinerary of the Joycean hero was followed by hundreds of Irish and foreign people dressed as the characters of the literary masterpiece; the exhibition at the Irish Museum of Modern Art of works by Brazilians that I admire, like the Bispo do Rosario, a religious poor man who spent all his life in a madhouse, weaving a fabulous mantle for his encounter with God; a dinner with professors at the Trinity University; the plays by Irish authors and Tchekov at the Abbey Theatre; the parade on St. Patrick's day, when Brazilians living in Ireland, inclusive my secretary at the Embassy, Maria Fleming, marched proudly; my own public reading the Portuguese translation of the first lines a Ulysses chapter; the donation to the library of James Joyce House of the best translation into Portuguese of Ulysses, made by Bernardina da Silveira; the poetry session at the University College Dublin, when was read the poem "Alguns toureiros" wherein João Cabral compares bullfighters to flowers... And, in 2008, the donation of the archive reporting the Visit of Dom Pedro II to Ireland to the Fundação Biblioteca Nacional, Rio de Janeiro.

This list is already too long and I did not mention the visits to the museum of Irish Writers and the studio of Francis Bacon, and the visits to Dublin and Cork by the Brazilian training ship. However, I cannot end these remembrances without mentioning the work of two women, Professors of the University of São Paulo, Munira Mutran and Laura Izarra, who dedicate their lives to the diffusion of Irish culture to Brazilians.