

Round Table: 30 years of ABEI and 10 years of W.B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies¹

Abstract: *The round table commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the Brazilian Association of Irish Studies (ABEI) and tenth year of the W.B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies was part of the XIV ABEI and II AEIS Symposium of Irish Studies - “The State of the Art: Local and Global Contexts in Dialogue”, and was held on August 15, 2019. The session was comprised by Dr Munira H. Mutran, honorary president of ABEI and director of the W.B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies; Dr Laura P.Z. de Izarra, coordinator of the W.B. Yeats Chair and advisory member of ABEI; Dr Rosalie R. Haddad, advisory member of ABEI and researcher in the W.B. Yeats Chair, Alessandra Cristina Rigonato, PhD candidate at the University of São Paulo, and Eduardo Kumamoto, graduate from the University of São Paulo and Master in Literary Translation at Trinity College Dublin. The discussion, which revolved around the history of the founding of both ABEI and the Chair, and their current developments, was conducted by Dr Mariana Bolfarine, head of ABEI and researcher at the W.B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies.*

Resumo: *A mesa redonda que celebrou os trinta anos da ABEI e dez anos da Cátedra de Estudos Irlandeses W.B. Yeats fez parte do XIV ABEI and II AEIS Symposium on Irish Studies - “The State of the Art: Local and Global Contexts in Dialogue”, que teve lugar em 15 de agosto de 2019. A mesa esteve composta por Dra. Munira H. Mutran, presidente honorária da ABEI e diretora da Cátedra W.B. Yeats; Dra. Laura P.Z. de Izarra, coordenadora da Cátedra W.B. Yeats e membro Consultivo da ABEI; Dra. Rosalie R. Haddad, membro Consultivo da ABEI e pesquisadora da Cátedra W.B. Yeats, Alessandra Cristina Rigonato, doutoranda na Universidade de São Paulo e Eduardo Kumamoto, graduado em Letras pela Universidade de São Paulo e Mestre em Tradução Literária pela Trinity College Dublin. A discussão, que girou em torno da história de formação da ABEI e da Cátedra e de seus desdobramentos atuais, foi conduzida pela Dra. Mariana Bolfarine, presidente da ABEI e pesquisadora da Cátedra W.B. Yeats.*

Mariana Bolfarine: As head of the Brazilian Association of Irish Studies (ABEI), I thank you all for attending this round table, held at the *XIV ABEI and II AEIS Symposium of Irish Studies in South America*, in commemoration of the thirtieth anniversary of ABEI and ten years of the W.B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies, coordinated by Dr. Laura P.Z. Izarra. I am especially grateful for Munira H. Mutran, Laura P.Z. Izarra, Rosalie R. Haddad, Alessandra Cristina Rigonato and Eduardo Kumamoto for taking part in this session. The growth of the Association, which is evident by the increasing number of members, is an indicator of interest in Irish studies in Brazil. I open the floor to Dr Munira Mutran, one of the founders of ABEI, who has witnessed the transformations that the Association has undergone for over thirty years.

Munira: The title of my talk for this round table to commemorate the thirtieth anniversary of ABEI, and ten years of the W.B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies is “Memories of ABEI in a few minutes”. Once, during a conference in Bahia, the Ambassador Séan Hoy read Ulysses in one minute. Thus, I will remember ABEI in a few minutes. The Association came into being with a small group of dedicated students and professors, such as Maria Helena Kopschitz, my friend (Fluminense Federal University) who collaborated extensively; from this small group emerged an association of status and international connections never dreamed of. Going back to the faraway past of 1972, I started to correspond with Sean O’Faolain about my doctoral dissertation. After its conclusion, I devoted myself to teaching, research and postgraduate supervision in Irish literature. At that time, English courses in all Brazilian universities, including the University of São Paulo, were basically made up of English and North American literatures. I wondered: how would it be possible to force the presence of Ireland into this dominant scenario? Let me tell you my strategy: optional and postgraduate courses were offered, as well as MA and PhD degrees on Irish Studies. After concluding their research, former students would spread the knowledge acquired here at USP in their own institutions. For that purpose, I chose two moments, two cultural moments – integrated projects – so that all participants would interact in their work in progress. The first project was “Irish Theatre in the First Half of the twentieth Century”, and perhaps it is my opportunity to mention their names: Thomas van Dijk, from Paraíba, focused on Brian Friel; Rosane Beyer, from Paraná, on Dion Boucicault; Rosalie Haddad, from Rio de Janeiro, on George Bernard Shaw. Fernanda Sepa, from Guarulhos, on Yeats; Geraldo Ferreira de Lima, from Bahia, on Synge; Gisela Borges Manfio, from PUC-São Paulo, on Lennox Robinson; Peter Harris, from UNESP, on Séan O’Casey; Beatriz Kopschitz, from Niterói, on Denis Johnston; and Domingos Nunes, actor and director – a valuable addition to a group working on drama, who wrote about Stewart Parker. In fiction, in the second cultural moment, we started with Laura Izarra, from Santo Amaro College at that time, who developed her studies on James Stephens; Rosicler Diniz, from Santos, on Elizabeth Bowen; Heleno Godoy, from Goiás, on Flann O’Brien; Noélia Borges, from Bahia, on Kate O’Brien; and Rosalie Haddad with her PhD on Bernard Shaw’s novels, very little known in criticism. I have shared my memories with you because it was this small group which gave shape to ABEI in 1989. You can say, how daring! How bold these people were! We felt it was necessary to reach the general public as well as in the Bloomsday celebrations from 1988 to 2004, co-organized with Haroldo de Campos, leader of the movement of concrete poetry in Brazil. I imagine these celebrations, since 1988, have inspired Bloomsday celebrations that are now flourishing throughout Brazil. As to publications, we began with the *ABEI Newsletter* whose objective was to announce what was happening in terms of Irish Studies in the country; its main feature was a challenge to important Brazilian translators, namely, Benedito Ferri de Barros, Aíla de Oliveira Gomes, Paulo Vizioli, Solange Ribeiro de Oliveira, Viviana Bosi and José Paulo Paes to take the same poem, say, by Michael Longley, by Seamus Heaney, or by Yeats, and translate it into Portuguese. Their different approach to the difficulties offered, inspired translation courses in Brazil to further explore the solutions found by them. After thirteen successful volumes, the *Newsletter* became the *ABEI Journal, The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies*. At this point, a question was asked: how to feed the *ABEI Journal*? With the ongoing collaboration of visiting scholars, by means of an informal agreement – which today has become formal – with the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA). The DFA has continuously supported the influx of academics from abroad who still support us in terms of bibliographies, books, and co-supervision. Here, too, I would like to mention the names of the first visitors: Maurice Harmon, Terence Brown, Declan Kiberd, Nicholas

Greene, Christopher Murray, Margaret Kelleher, Joe Lee. Among these names, I highlight that of Maureen O'Rourke Murphy, who first came to Brazil in 1989 and has been with us for exactly thirty years. In all these years of teaching and researching Irish Studies, I felt very isolated at the Department of Modern Languages at the University São Paulo, because most of colleagues were in the fields of English and American literature. I had the support of the students, of course; however, they were only temporarily connected with my university. But the story had a happy end. In 1996, Laura Izarra, my former student, and my friend, became my colleague and together, with the support of undergraduates, and graduate students, of alumni and of colleagues from other universities in Brazil and South America, we have been working for ABEI and for the W.B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies, of which Laura will now to talk about.

Laura: No. I think you could continue talking, Munira; you recovered touching memories, not just because of the data you brought up, but especially the heart and the courage to carry on with Irish studies. In fact, it was because of Irish Literature that you became an inspiration to me, and that is why when I arrived in Brazil, and at USP, when I knocked on the door I already had the idea of working with Irish literature, but who could help me? Advise me? Professor Vizioli, who was Munira's advisor, said: "You have to wait for my student, who is returning from Ireland, so that you can start your studies in this area". It was quite providential to find Munira, and to share this bond with her, even as a student, strengthened by a common passion that was Irish literature. We have now arrived at the Chair. I will not repeat myself about the background of ABEI, but I was very happy to be placed, along with Rosicler and the group from the second cultural moment. I believe it is great because it makes me feel younger. It is thanks to these events that Munira has conveyed to us, along with the collaboration of visiting professors, that we reached 2009, when we felt the need to institutionalize Irish studies, given that we were already beginning to work with the intersection between history and literature. I remember that we were at a conference in Dublin when we decided to speak with the DFA, and I suggested: "should we propose a Chair?" Munira looked at me and said: "but a Chair?", I said we could propose the idea, and at most, we would get no as an answer. But this proposal was really understood and accepted, because an association linked to an institution does not, in fact, configure institutionalization. The Chair could become a centre for Irish studies as in other universities, such as the School of Irish Studies at Concordia University in Canada, whose director is Michael Keneally; or as the Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies at the University of Notre Dame in the United States, whose president, Patrick Griffin, will be speaking tomorrow at the Symposium; and as the Centre for Irish Studies run by Professor Hedwig Schwall, in Leuven, Belgium. These scholars were able to create institutes, schools or centres. This is a way to mark an institutional presence in Irish studies. The first step is the creation of a Chair; in Argentina there is a Chair at the Universidad del Salvador on the Irish History. The Association enables integration throughout the country, with colleagues from different Brazilian universities, as well as with institutions from abroad, such as AEDEI, for example, in Spain, whose member, Professor Maria Auxiliadora Peres Vides, will be giving a plenary lecture tomorrow. The network is opening up, I would say, and becoming more and more integrated. In 2009, with Ambassador Michael Hoy, an agreement was signed to create the W.B Yeats Chair of Irish Studies with the aim of strengthening and giving greater visibility to Irish studies; the first three years were challenging, but the agreement has been regularly renewed. The Chair is already in its tenth year of existence; we are still children, we need ABEI and its helping hand, which also takes us to new projects. What are the actions of the Chair? The Chair revolves around specific projects developed by invited researchers. These different

projects are branching out, and that is the strength of the Chair; each Brazilian or foreign academic submits his/her project and builds a network with researchers, who work collaboratively. The first collaborative project from which the idea of the importance of founding a Chair emerged was “From Ireland to Brazil: Critical Texts”, a thematic project supported by FAPESP,² which brought together several professors and colleagues who had been graduate students at USP, as well as researchers working at other universities, such as Professor Noélia Borges, from Salvador, who was part of the project, Professor Rosalie and Peter Harris, from UNESP. By way of these projects, we draw attention to the actions of the Chair, which offers extension courses taught by graduate students on Irish studies, and postgraduate courses by invited professors; for example, Professor Giovanna Tallone, who, in addition to participating in the Symposium, will teach a postgraduate course. Likewise, our actions must reach across the university walls. Sometimes, extension courses are not enough for people to come to us; therefore, we promote events in cultural centres with Irish film festivals and exhibitions. We are also involved with theatre, with Domingos Nunes, Rosalie Haddad and Beatriz Kopschitz, who formed Cia Ludens, a translation group of Irish plays that puts them on stage, here in São Paulo. Recently, Rosalie Haddad has produced plays by George Bernard Shaw independently. These are actions that have conferred visibility to the Chair outside the university. Within its walls, we have started to expand thanks to scholarships offered by the Chair, which are aimed at USP graduate students, and to the ABEI/Haddad Fellowship, offered throughout Brazil. These scholarships are geared towards the Humanities, and there are candidates from different courses, such as History, for example, which enables interdisciplinarity to take place. Besides exhibitions, such as the one that opened this Symposium, “Blazing a Trail. Lives and Legacies of Irish Diaspora Women”, curated by Angela Byrne, and music and film festivals, the Chair publishes the annual plenary talks in the *Lectures* series. The opening of the activities of the Chair, near St. Patrick’s Day, is attended by foreign and Brazilian specialists. Hence, from the outset we have decided that *Lectures* should be published in bilingual format, for it is a way of bringing Ireland to people here in Brazil who may not speak the English language. At the same time, it is a means of establishing a dialogue with Ireland, depending on the researcher who comes, promoting joint work. Thus, I close this brief account of ten years of activities by expressing that the Chair is open for projects, including from abroad, from Argentina, France, Ireland and many others. The distances today can be bridged by the use of technology. Joint work takes place, regardless of distance, and collaborates with the expansion of research and disclosure of discoveries. In addition to the *Lectures* series, we will launch the first and second volumes of research papers of the Chair. We cannot offer the researcher a maintenance grant, but we can publish and publicize his or her work. Rosalie did an unprecedented interview with Fintan O’Toole and this will be the first work-in-progress that we will launch later this year. So, I now call to the floor Rosalie, researcher of the Chair.

Rosalie: Regarding the Chair, I have made two types of efforts; I will not even mention work – work too. The first is academic; I was never part of the faculty of the University of São Paulo (USP), yet I have always been very present by way of publications, both here in Brazil and abroad. Since my master’s degree, I became attached to George Bernard Shaw and continued to research his work for my doctorate, due to the fact that I had discovered his novels – very little explored abroad, and completely unknown here in Brazil. There is a renowned Shaw specialist who has recently passed away, named Stanley Weintraub, from Penn State University. Weintraub had published the article “The Embryo Playwright in Bernard Shaw’s Early Novels”, with

which I came across in the New York Public Library, and as I had already been considering writing about Shaw's novels, I thought it would be a suitable topic for a doctoral project. When I devised with my thesis about Shaw's novels and their embryological connection with his plays, I took into account what he had once said: "my novels were not accepted by anyone". Shaw's first novel was written in 1879, but it was published only in 1930. So, you see that there was zero acceptance, and he added: "they may not have been good, but to a great extent, they helped my career as a playwright." Another idea that had already occurred to me, but for which I still did not feel academically prepared, was to tackle the reception of Bernard Shaw in Brazil. As a whole, my academic life had been difficult, but in order to approach the reception of Shaw, one must have reached academic maturity and have undergone certain stages; but finally, I felt prepared. My colleague Peter Harris and I, who was also supervised by Professor Munira Mutran, published his research as part of the project "From Ireland to Brazil", coordinated by Professor Laura Izarra. Peter's article was based on his postdoctoral thesis, *The Irish Play on The English Stage*, in which he summarized and inserted tables. It was a great coincidence that my book *Shaw, The Critic*, written in Portuguese and published by Humanitas in 2009, was translated into Spanish by Professors Maria Graciela Eliggi and Elena Pérez Bustillo, from the National University of La Pampa, who have presented an account of their translation process at this Symposium. I have compiled essays and articles by Bernard Shaw, which are included in the book. My master's thesis was published in Portuguese by Editora Olavo Brás in partnership with ABEI, in 1997, under the title *George Bernard Shaw e a renovação do teatro inglês*. This is my most well-known publication, perhaps because it was translated into Portuguese. To my surprise, when I started producing plays by Shaw in São Paulo, several actors were already acquainted with Shaw. Another publication which greatly pleased me was my doctoral thesis. Professor Heinz Kosok came to USP, by means of ABEI, to teach a course and he was selecting doctoral dissertations to be published in Germany. Kosok agreed to publish my research, *Bernard Shaw's Novels: His Drama of Ideas in Embryo*, by WVT Verlag Trier, Germany 2004. For my post-doctorate, with Peter Harris, a professor at UNESP in São José do Rio Preto, I wrote the thesis *Bernard Shaw in Brazil: The Reception of Theatrical Productions, 1927-2013*. This research covered practically one hundred years of studies on Bernard Shaw's plays in Brazil, and was published in 2016 by Peter Lang, with which I had contact both in Switzerland and in Oxford. Before this latest publication, I came to realize that the area of humanities in Brazil, which has been developing internationally, is the one that receives less funding and less grants. I have even heard very undesirable comments: "Ah, those who are engaged in humanities have nothing else to do with life", which in many cases is an unfair accusation. In conversation with my husband, Claudio Haddad, we decided to offer scholarships for Brazilian students to study at Trinity College Dublin, an initiative that turned into the ABEI/HADDAD Fellowship. This donation began five years ago, and Eduardo Kumamoto, who is also at this round table discussion, was a brilliant fellow awarded with the ABEI/HADDAD Fellowship. All the candidates we have supported were praised by Trinity, but Eduardo continues bearing fruit for ABEI here in São Paulo, in addition to Thalita Serra de Castro. These two, especially Eduardo, returned all the effort invested in this opportunity. So far, eight Brazilian students have studied at Trinity by means of this grant. For my part, I was recently at Trinity, at Laura's initiative, who suggested that I give a lecture on "Bernard Shaw in Brazil". The audience enjoyed it extensively, and as the lecture was filmed, Trinity asked for permission to record it in their annals. I am not saying this for self-promotion; the aim of this brief exchange was to show that ABEI is bearing fruit, both here in São Paulo, in Ireland and in several other South American countries. It is with great pleasure that I was part of the Association since 1995, as treasurer and later as Vice

-President.

Mariana: Thank you, Rosalie for this inspiring talk. At this point, Eduardo Kumamoto who spent a year at Trinity College Dublin will address his experience as recipient of the ABEI/HADDAD Fellowship.

Eduardo: I would like to go back to 2009, the year I entered the University of São Paulo to study Languages and Literature, and I attended the opening of the Chair. Back then, as I had little academic background, I hardly knew what a Chair was, though I knew a great deal about Ireland. What I didn't know was that that day I was sealing a relationship with Irish Studies in Brazil. Ultimately, I joined the Chair as an intern, and years later I was granted the ABEI/HADDAD Fellowship, which seems, as Professor Rosalie mentioned, extraordinary in many ways, because you are awarded funding to study Humanities at Trinity College, in Dublin. What makes this fellowship so special is that it is generous. In this regard, I would like to comment on Professor Rosalie's remark about my generosity, because there is also a great deal of intellectual generosity on the part of the Association, particularly Professors Laura, Munira and Rosalie. Whenever they send me a text, they ask for my opinion, and it strikes me how such renowned scholars ask for – and respect – the opinion of people who are just beginning, who act as a second violin in this beautiful orchestra that ABEI is. As regards the scholarship and my experience abroad, I think it couldn't have been better. Maybe it could, hadn't there been a hurricane coming from the West, or a blizzard from the East. Other than that, it was perfect. Ireland is a country that offers a warm welcome to academics. In Ireland, everyone is impressed by the generosity of the ABEI/HADDAD Fellowship, because as it is not common here, nor is it there. It should not go without saying that the infrastructure at Trinity College is impeccable. Yet, as much as the University of São Paulo benefits from this experience, so does Trinity. Hence, this exchange with foreign universities should never come to an end. I do not have much else to say, except to express my eternal gratitude to ABEI and to the Chair, which has opened so many doors for me.

Mariana: I would like to take this opportunity and give special thanks to Eduardo, who is responsible for communicating news from ABEI and the Chair on social media. I will now open the floor for Alessandra Cristina Rigonato to speak about her experience with ABEI and the Chair.

Alessandra: I am very grateful for having been invited to take part in this illustrious round table. As a postgraduate student, I was granted a one-month scholarship to attend summer school at University College Cork, in 2013. It is hard to find the right words to describe this experience, because, for instance, in the morning we would have a class on Brian Boru, and in the afternoon, we would visit the castles where he had been; it was fantastic. In addition to the exchange with the lecturers, my PhD project, which was on Irish literature, benefited from the subjects on Irish history as well. There, I realized very few people mentioned Northern Ireland. It was a great contribution to my research and my training. It was a very enlightening experience. There was also a scholarship for the W.B. Yeats Summer School. I was at the IASIL³ conference at the time, and some colleagues were attending the W.B. Yeats Summer School. I was able to take part in some lectures and was lucky enough meet the poet Seamus Heaney; I had the opportunity of speaking to him and listening to him reading his poetry. I remember that, at the time, I was pursuing my MA, so I asked about the relationship between his work and

the Greek tragedy, as my research was on the influence of Greek literature in Irish drama. In the following month, he passed away. I thank ABEI, immensely. I am grateful to Munira, and always will be, to Laura and Rosalie ... What you did, was beautiful. Thanks.

Mariana: Thank you all for this insightful session. It has brought to the fore the way in which ABEI began as a small group of people who had in common the love for Irish literature and culture. The Association has currently more than a hundred members, and these figures are increasing thanks to events, scholarships and publications, which are possible owing to grants regularly offered by ABEI and the Chair. Now, I will briefly recall my own experience. Altogether, I was a student at the University of São Paulo for 18 years. Following graduation, I pursued an MA, and soon after a PhD on Roger Casement and cultural trauma, supervised by Laura Izarra. I later became a researcher of the W.B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies, and my project dealt with Roger Casement's actions in the Belgian Congo. This research was benefited by my participation in the SPeCTReSS (Social Performance, Cultural Trauma and Re-establishing Solid Sovereignities) project, led by Trinity College Dublin, with the participation of universities based in nine different countries that had experienced some kind of cultural trauma. Thanks to SPeCTReSS, I spent a month as a fellow at the Ruhr Universität Bochum, in Germany, and I visited the Museum of Africa, in Belgium. The results of this mobility programme were presented at the event that celebrated the conclusion of SPeCTReSS (2014-2017) held in tandem with the *XII ABEI Symposium of Irish Studies in South America*, co-organized with Laura Izarra and the W.B. Yeats Chair of Irish Studies. I also underscore the importance of the *ABEI Journal*, which reflects the academic production carried out over these thirty years, and which is already in its twentieth issue. The *ABEI Journal* is of free access and is a way of sharing not only the work of Brazilian researchers about Brazil and Ireland, but also of researchers from Ireland and other European countries, South America among others. Thanks to all the networks that have been built, this is a very important year for ABEI. As Laura has just mentioned, the Chair is affiliated to the University of São Paulo and ABEI is an Association. The fact that ABEI has been granted the Emigrant Support Program Funding is very important, as it endows ABEI with financial independence, conferring it with national and international visibility. I invite you all to applaud the thirtieth anniversary of ABEI, which only exists thanks to the joint efforts of Munira, Laura and Rosalie, who are the founders of this Association.

Laura: I think it is important to recall that we are not people working individually, we are a group, and this group is formed by all of you, both from the Association and the Chair, although there is always a person who has to appear because of the administrative part of the work. However, I can say, from the bottom of my heart, that our students play an essential role in Irish Studies, because we are sharing the same passion, the same courage, facing similar challenges. These international projects require a solid, organized and intense participation of all members; it is not only a matter of standing out within the project, but it is precisely the steady work, at an international level, that counts. So, we must congratulate the whole group and celebrate together, to remain integrated and, at the same time, keep up with our own interests, respecting each other's works. The little work that each one undertakes adds up to a whole; the important thing is the sense of purpose which leads to action. Words said aloud are beautiful, but they will not lead to action, and I think that is very important. I just wanted to leave this message for everyone and say that these international projects, whether at the level of ABEI or the Chair, are open to everyone; it is not just for the people from the institution where

the Chair is based. For me, the Chair is the first step towards institutionalizing Irish Studies internationally. After a national international and international network is built, ABEI also gains strength and becomes itinerant, shifting from one university to another. This is very important, precisely, because a network is strong, and the most important thing is for us to remain united!

Notes

- 1 The “Round Table: 30 years of ABEI and 10 years of WB Yeats Chair of Irish Studies” took place on 15 August 2019, as part of the XIV ABEI and II AEIS Symposium of Irish Studies. It was transcribed by Deborah Vitoria Almeida Quadros (PIBIC/UFR) and Eduarda Dorne Hepp (VIC/UFR); It was edited and translated by Mariana Bolfarine.
- 2 São Paulo Research Foundation.
- 3 International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures.