

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS delivered by **PROFESSOR MARGARET KELLEHER**, National University of Ireland, Maynooth, on 12 June 2008, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Literature, *honoris causa*, on **PROFESSOR MUNIRA MUTRAN**

A Sheansailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle (Chancellor, members of the University and distinguished guests)

The National University of Ireland is proud to honour the distinguished career of Professor Munira Hamud Mutran in recognition for her outstanding work in the development of Irish studies in South America, for her contributions to scholarship and her pioneering teaching of Irish literature in an international arena.

In 1970, Munira Hamud had just finished her MA in American and English literature, a comparative study of John Steinbeck and Graciliano Ramos, when a visiting Professor of American Studies introduced her to the work of Irish novelist and short story master Sean Ó Faoláin. At that point, she recalls, 'nobody talked about Ireland and Irish studies; Joyce, Yeats, Shaw, Wilde were always taught in the canon of English studies'. Three years later, she began a correspondence with Sean Ó Faoláin that continued for 24 years and in 1976 she completed her PhD on Sean Ó Faoláin's short stories. Her post-doctoral thesis, awarded in 2000, was a study of the work of George Moore, Oscar Wilde and W. B. Yeats. In 1972 she joined the Faculty of Philosophy, Letters and Human Sciences at the University of São Paulo where in 2000 she became Professor of Literatures in English.

For twenty-five years Munira Hamud Mutran has been the informing spirit behind the development of Irish Studies firstly in Brazil and subsequently in Argentina and elsewhere in South America. She has inaugurated Irish Studies as an academic discipline in the Brazilian university system and has been a highly influential cultural ambassador for Ireland in South America. Professor Mutran has published 50 articles and book chapters, mostly in the field of Irish studies (fiction, drama and cultural history) and Irish-South American studies.

A hallmark of her scholarship is its opening out of comparative and international dimensions, work which has enriched and deepened the knowledge of so many of us who work in the field of Irish studies. She has authored or edited twelve books, including *Sean Ó Faoláin's Letters to Brazil* (2005), *Album de Retratos. George Moore, Oscar Wilde e William Butler Yeats* (2002), *Uma Antologia do Conto Irlandês* (1996), *Kaleidoscopic Views of Ireland* (2003) and *ABEI Journal. The Brazilian Journal of Irish Studies* (1999-).

The centre of Professor Mutran's work for Irish Studies in Brazil has been her inspirational leadership in introducing Irish literature to a generation of Brazilian undergraduate and post-graduate students. To date, she has supervised eleven doctoral dissertations on Irish literature and seven MA theses, and motivated and influenced countless others. She has been a true visionary in this regard.

From the outset, she sought with great care and deliberation to recruit teachers from universities throughout Brazil as students for her doctoral programme. The educational and cultural consequences of her work in this regard have been enormous, and graduates of her doctoral programme in Irish studies currently teach in many other Brazilian universities, including Federal University of Bahia, Federal University Pernambuco, University of Goiás, Sao Jose Rio Preto and the University of Joa Pessoa.

To complement her students' course work, and in a series of pioneering research initiatives, Professor Mutran has hosted numerous conferences, symposia, workshops and mini-courses that have brought many of Ireland's leading writers and scholars to São Paulo. These events have fostered the close cultural ties between Ireland and Brazil that we now celebrate as Professor Mutran's especial creation. She inaugurated the annual Bloomsday celebrations in Brazil in 1988 and worked with Brazilian poet Haroldo de Campos for 17 years on this festival of Irish culture.

In 2002 she hosted the annual International Association for the Study of Irish Literature conference in Brazil and has been an active member of that association, including Vice-President, over the past 25 years; she is also a key member of the Spanish Association for

Irish Studies. In 2006 working with her close colleague Professor Laura Izarra, she organized the first symposium of Irish Studies in South America, which continues on an annual basis. Currently she is the co-director of *Da Irlanda para o Brasil: Textos Criticos*, a multi-volume anthology of Irish cultural criticism to be published in Portuguese.

In attendance at this ceremony, I welcome Ambassador Stélio Marcos Amarante, Brazilian Ambassador to Ireland, Mr Joseph Lynch, Head of Cultural Affairs, Department of Foreign Affairs, Professor Maureen Murphy from Hofstra University, Dr Marisol Morales, Dr Luz Mar González and Professor Inez Praga from AEDEI (The Spanish Association for Irish Studies). Your presence here is testimony to the international significance of Professor Mutran's work.

I am pleased to say that many of the Irish colleagues and friends who have worked with her in Brazil are with us today, including Nicholas Grene, Maurice Harmon, John Banville, Edna and Michael Longley, Paul Durcan, Christopher Morash, Joseph Lee, Christopher Murray, Billy Roche, and Margaret MacCurtain

And a special welcome to Munira's daughter Ana Luísa and son Alexandre who join us today, and her close colleagues and friends including Professor Laura Izarra, Head of the Dept of Modern Letters, USP, Dr Beatriz Bastos and Marcelo Lima. We send our warm wishes to Marcelo, her husband.

On 9 December 1978, Sean Ó Faoláin wrote to Munira and Marcelo to thank them for their 'kind cablegram of congratulation' on his receipt of an honorary degree from the National University of Ireland. This is a detail of deep resonance today, and it is my pleasure to announce that Professor Mutran has generously donated her correspondence with Sean Ó Faoláin – rich conversations and meditations on art and life – to NUI Maynooth's library.

To summarise Professor Mutran's outstanding contribution to Irish studies and her role as cultural ambassador, teacher and scholar, I borrow the famous lines to Augusta Gregory from Yeats's 'Coole Park, 1929:

'They came like swallows and like swallows went,
And yet a woman's powerful character
Could keep a swallow to its first intent.....
The intellectual sweetness of those lines
That cut through time, or cross it withershins'.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis hanc meam filiam, quam scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneam esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in Litteris, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.