

WHAT, CHE?

**INTEGRATION, ADAPTATION AND ASSIMILATION
OF THE IRISH-ARGENTINE COMMUNITY
THROUGH ITS LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE**

Doctoral dissertation

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Buenos Aires, October 2015

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ABSTRACT

During the second half of the XIX century up to the 1920's, due to different reasons – political, economic (mainly the failures of the potato crop) and religious, plus reports from people who had previously left the Emerald Isle and were then wealthy in the Province of Buenos Aires, and the promotion of the Catholic Church and the Argentine Government as well–, Irish immigrants landed into a far-off country named Argentina. At that time the main destinations of the Irish Diaspora were England, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Argentina was the only non-English speaking destination; though a Catholic country, Spanish language was the main barrier for the adaptation and integration of the newcomers with the South American country. Additionally, the Irish community tried to protect their identity and unity by preserving the English language, which was not their original tongue.

What, che? Integration, adaptation and assimilation of the Irish-Argentine community through its language and literature argues that the slow incorporation of the Irish immigrants to the host society, its ups and downs, are revealed through their language and literature, that there is a correlation between the Irish Diaspora to Argentina and words, speeches, verbal communication. By examining newspapers, magazines, private documents, oral histories, interviews and emblematic literary works of the Irish-Porteños, this thesis gives an account of the process, stresses its ways or modes, reflects on the linguistic correspondence between life and language and interprets the development of Irish-Argentine discourses and literary expressions.

Never comprehensively and systematically assessed, the exploration of this matter might turn out to be a contribution to social and linguistic studies related to migration processes, a suitable document to unveil the somewhat elusive but strong power of words.

INTRODUCTION

In the same way as it took place in other countries –the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand–, migration processes in Argentina were central to its national conformation and development.

According to Fernando Devoto, between 1881 and 1914, nearly 4.200.000 people arrived in Buenos Aires (about 2.000.000 of whom were Italians, 1.400.000 Spaniards, 170.000 French, and 160.000 Russians).¹ Previous to these massive immigrations, successive waves of “extranjeros” (foreigners) or “inmigrantes” (immigrants) had been settling along the River Plate, Uruguay included.²

Members of other foreign communities such as the German, Dutch, Belgian, Jewish, Syrian-Lebanese, Armenian, Danish and Irish complete the picture of that rich period of our history. Compared to the Italian and Spanish migration waves, the latter groups were of a significant lesser importance.

The Argentine Republic was the only non-English speaking country where the Irish settled during the 19th and beginning of the 20th Century. Language, then, was the main obstacle for their integration, adaptation and assimilation. Perhaps because of its

¹ Devoto, Fernando: *Historia de la inmigración en la Argentina*, Buenos Aires, Sudamericana, 2009, p. 247.

² A semantic debate on the condition of being a “foreigner” or an “immigrant” arose at the time. The relatively poor and the peasants, including anybody willing to work in the countryside or in the promotion of industry, would be considered a “migrant”, while travelers, professionals, businessmen, churchmen, were addressed as “foreigners”. Rooted in Juan Baustista Alberdi and Domingo Faustino Sarmiento’s ideas on the civilizing role of the European migrants within the Argentine society, and in the 1853 Constitution, the 1876 law related to immigration and colonization, stated that it was understood that the migrant steamers mentioned in the legislation were both, those coming from Europe and from other places. In Chapter I there is a reference to Lawrence Casey, James Spencer Wilde and Doctors Thomas Falkner and Michael O’Gorman who came to the River Plate for business, professional or religious purposes, some of them through Spain.

minor significance, for many years this segment of the Irish Diaspora was ignored by academics and by Ireland herself. In 1919, an Irish-American, Thomas Murray, wrote *The Story of the Irish in Argentina*, an unsystematic, chaotic, awkward and amateur work, considered a classic for the simple reason that it was the only one committed to the topic as a whole. Although other books and articles were related to Irish-Porteño matters or personalities, it wasn't until the 1970's that regular studies on the subject began: Eduardo Coghlan, Juan Carlos Korol, Hilda Sabato, Patrick MacKenna, Laura Izarra and others (all of them included in the bibliography) started a serious research and a reflection on the anomalous existence of an Irish community in Argentina, its relevance and implications. As far as I know, mine is the first integrated project dealing with language as an original problem and (even with literature) as a revealing factor of the situation of the Irish immigrants and their descendants in Argentina. In this sense, my approach to the main Irish-Porteño texts, which I consider the most significant of the process –*Tales of the Pampas*, by William Bulfin, *You'll Never Go Back*, by Kathleen Nevin and the four “Irish” short stories by Rodolfo J. Walsh– is linguistic and, in terms of literary analysis, stylistic. It is thanks to the sensible, sharp, acute ears of narrators Bulfin and Nevin that we know how the old Irish-Porteños spoke. Their renditions are confirmed by *The Southern Cross*, and in letters and memoirs, while, in relation to the last generations, it is throughout interviews where we can listen to the old ancestors threading through contemporary speaking. We can learn about what is known as Irish *brogue*, the Irish way of speaking. Although written in Spanish, the stories by Walsh –«Los oficios terrestres», «Irlandeses detrás de un gato», «Un oscuro día de justicia» and «El 37»–, as we will see, show signs and resonances, of the original Irish language and of the imposed English tongue. At certain stage, my approach focuses more on *how* these three writers convey their worlds rather than *what* their stories

express in terms of ideas, plot or setting. When examining Bulfin and Nevin we discover Spanish language undermines English, which will be gradually displaced and replaced. The culmination of this occurrence can be seen in Walsh and in the written and oral speech of the Irish-Argentines.

In more than one sense, this is a project of ethnography, an approach aiming to learn about people, communities and institutions. The result is an interpretative narration of documents, letters and literature; it includes personal interaction with people. Since the objective of this essay is descriptive and interpretative and while it does not try to solve a “problem”, quoting LeCompte and Schensul, it should be considered a *basic* research. These authors state a series of conditions that are essential to the creation of a Theory of Culture. The following are those conditions I believe should be considered within this investigation:

1. It is rooted in the concept of culture, consisting in beliefs, patterns of behavior, rules, actions, social arrangements “and forms of expression that form a describable pattern in the lives of members of a community (,,)”.³
2. The product should be a story as it takes place in its natural setting.
3. The researcher should be intimately involved with the members of the community, even if he/she is an outsider.

According to Mauss, “the ethnographer must recover the deep phenomena, the ones which are almost unconscious, since they exist only in the collective tradition”.⁴

³ LeCompte, Margaret D. and Schensul Jean J., *Designing & Conducting Ethnographic Research*, Lanham, Altamira Press, 2010, p. 8.

⁴ Quoted from Marcel Mauss, «Méthode d'ethnographie, méthode sociologique», in M. Mauss, *Oeuvres*, (presented by V. Karady, Paris, 1969, vol. III, p. 369) by Steven Lukes in «Conclusion», *The category of the person. Anthropology, philosophy, history*, Edited by Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins and Steven Lukes, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 291.

Wisely, LeCompte and Schensul state that “all research is informed by particular worldviews or perspectives held by the researcher and scholars within his or her discipline”.⁵ These so-called paradigms are, then, an interpretation of world and existence. This researcher is no exception and sticks to the rule. Finally, these essayists stress that “critical theory calls for a focus on the ways in which gender, class, culture, race, ethnicity, and power intersect to shape inequities. Included in this focus is the requirement that researchers themselves be aware of *how* their own class status; racial, ethnic, and gender orientation; and power relationships vis-à-vis research participants affect *what* and *how* phenomena are studied and *how* data interpreted.”⁶ (Emphasis added.) Being conscious and knowledgeable of this requirement, my approach is supported by historical facts, cultural expressions and, mainly, by linguistic variations.

Within the context of different European communities being concentrated in a foreign country, identity appeared as a problem. At the beginning of the twentieth century the expression “*crisol de razas*” (melting pot), understood with a positive connotation, gave an idea of a country where immigrants belonging to different cultures were integrated. The concept of a “multicultural” society might clarify the idea of the phenomenon, a new reality in which different communities coexist peacefully preserving their identity and their traditions. This project shows that this concept is the one that governed the lives and patterns of behavior of the Irish community in Argentina from the beginning, and that, in a very sluggish process, coexistence or integration became adaptation and, finally, assimilation. “Integration”, “adaptation” and “assimilation” are, then, key words in my dissertation. Within this context, I understand “integration”, as the act of mixing people, “adaptation” as the process of trying to

⁵ LeCompte, Margaret D. and Schensul Jean J., *Op. cit.* p. 41.

⁶ *Op. cit.* pp. 46-47.

change behavior and customs to suit a new situation;⁷ and “assimilation” as the act of “becoming a part of a country or community rather than remaining in a different group” (Oxford Dictionary).

My argument is a description of a process in which different generations of Irish-Argentines witnessed how their (imposed) first language⁸ became a second one, while Spanish finally changed into their first tongue. Such irregular modification of positions implied a subtle alteration in the identity of both Irish immigrant’s and Irish-Argentines as well as a gradual transformation of attitude in relation to the host country. Press, diaries, memoirs, letters, interviews and literature shape up the course of this story.

On account of the nature of this essay, references to the Irish-Gaelic language and to bilingualism are frequent; still, Irish language and bilingualism are not subjects of this writing.

Because literature is always language, the significant words and speeches that can be found in the literary works selected represent the main stages of the process. Although chronologically published after William Bulfin’s collection of short stories, *You’ll Never Go Back*, by Kathleen Nevin, gives an account of what was supposed to be a temporary adaptation, a frustrated arrangement announced by the title of the novel

⁷ Etymologically, “to fit or join together”. (*Concise Dictionary of English Etymology*, by Walter W. Skeat, Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions, 1993, p. 15.)

⁸ Irish or Irish-Gaelic was the original language of the people of Ireland. The Gaels (or the Irish) went to Ireland around 333 BC. During their settlement, they were “visited” by different invaders: among others, the Vikings in 795, the Normans in 1169, and, in 1171, by Richard Pembroke, also known as Richard Strongbow; according to the *Columbia Encyclopedia* (Fifth Edition), «He went as an adventurer (1170) to Ireland at the request of the hard-pressed Dermot MacMurrough, king of Leinster. Strongbow subdued much of E. Ireland, including Dublin, in victories over Rory O’Connor, king of Connaught, and married Dermot’s daughter. Henry II of England, although he had given permission for the earl’s expedition, visited him in 1171 to claim the rich coastal cities and to receive Strongbow’s homage for the **fic** of the interior of Leinster». Dermot Mac Murrough, deposed king of Leinster, had asked Henry II for help to recover his titles and land. It must be remembered that Adrian IV, English Pope, authorized the invasion. (See The Bull of Pope Adrian IV Empowering Henry II to Conquer Ireland. A.D. 1155). Before and after these episodes (1188) several statutes were designed to promote the English language and the destruction of the Irish language and culture. (Also see, for example, Henry VIII’s Act for the English Order, Habit and Language, 1537).

itself; Bulfin's book, *Tales of the Pampas*, is an eloquent description of the Irish-Porteños and their determination to become part of the countryside scene, working together with *gauchos* and peasants as foremen in the wild *pampa*. Clearly embodying the assimilation with the host country, Rodolfo J. Walsh –his life and his work (mainly his four short stories set in an Irish-Porteño boarding school– represents the culmination of a hard and more than once contradictory long process, at the end of which Irish-Porteños undoubtedly became part of a conflicting and, sometimes, bizarre country.

To the always increasing bibliography on the subject of the Irish Diaspora in Argentina, and to the mentioned documents, I must add my own condition of Irish-Porteño and the experience of being a contributor to *The Southern Cross* for more than forty years, as sources and references of this work which, in the end, intends to be a reflection on life in its ineffable relationship with language.

Even though Irish and Irish descents can be found in practically every area and national activity, and some of them became noteworthy names, the Irish-Argentine community is not important as a block. Nobody knows how many Irish descents live in Argentina, but if going through newspapers, obituaries, ads and general news, a noteworthy number of Irish names will be found. As it has been said, Argentina did not receive a significant quantity of people, but the initial amount of more than 10.000 Irish immigrants was the seed of a huge but indefinite Irish-Argentine community of between 300.000 and 500.000 souls. What I call the *visible* Irish group is constituted by those who celebrate St. Patrick's Day, meet for religious, social, or sport events at Holy Cross or St. Patrick's churches, at the Fahy or the Hurling Clubs, and are subscribed to *The Southern Cross*, a paper with a monthly regular and meager circulation of not much more than 1000 copies (which gives an idea of the irrelevance of the segment). Most of the Irish-Argentines have been gradually absorbed by the greater mass of population,

thus becoming the *invisible* Irish-Argentine group, people who, together with all kinds of inhabitants, silently struggle for their own Argentine identity.

The first chapter of this work will offer an historical account of the Irish migration process in Argentina, in order to better understand in what context the process of Integration, Adaptation and Assimilation took place. A presentation and description of the Irish English Variation and the subsequent Hiberno Argentine case will precede the three central chapters referred to the main question of this work. Thus, by exploring newspapers, magazines, private documents, oral histories and the emblematic literary works mentioned, chapters III, IV and V become essential sections in the sense that they critically show, describe, analyze and reflect on the language of the migrants and their descendants as from the nineteenth-century Irish-English and twentieth-century Hiberno-Argentine variation to the present linguistic assimilation.

The slow expansion that goes from integration and adaptation to assimilation is expressed through language and literature (its aesthetical face), thus revealing ties between words and life. The fact is that the story of the Irish in Argentina shows that intimate connection and correlation between verbal communication and human existence.

Buenos Aires, January 28, 2015

The language in which we are speaking is his before it is mine. How different are the words *home, Christ, ale, master*, on his lips and on mine! I cannot speak or write these words without unrest of spirit. His language, so familiar and so foreign, will always be for me an acquired speech. I have not made or accepted its words. My voice holds them at bay. My soul frets in the shadow of his language.

(...)

The spell of arms and voices: the white arms of roads, their promise of close embraces and the black arms of tall ships that stand against the moon, their tale of distant nations. They are held out to say: We are alone... come. And the voices say with them: We are your kinsmen. And the air is thick with their company as they call to me, their kinsman, making ready to go, shaking the wings of their exultant and terrible youth.

James Joyce: *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

Maire: I'm talking about the Liberator, Master, as you well know. And what he said was this: 'The old language is a barrier to modern progress.' He said that last month. And he's right. I don't want Greek. I don't want Latin. I want English.

(...)

Yolland: (...) Even if I did speak Irish I'd always be an outsider here, wouldn't I? I may learn the password but the language of the tribe will always elude me, won't it? The private core will always be... hermetic, won't it?

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Brian Friel: *Translations*

CHAPTER I

The Irish in Argentina: Historical Context

«What do you think will happen, Father Tom?», said the doctor as they walked along.

(...) «I'm afraid that something is going to happen in Ireland that will make our race wanderers on the face of the earth like the ancient Jews. I dream of many things. And in my dreams I see woeful destruction coming. But I dream, too, of a resurrection and a homecoming. Remember that, son. Look round you. Listen to the wind».

Liam O'Flaherty: *Famine* (1937)

In a way, the story of the language and literature of the Irish in Argentina is the story of the Irish in Argentina.

A brief report on aspects related to Irish History will surely contribute to a better understanding of Ireland as a migration country, and her very special relation with language, a central problem in this work.

In 1541 Henry VIII reinforced the control of the Emerald Isle –previously invaded by Celts, Vikings, Normans and Anglo-Normans– and proclaimed himself King of Ireland. One of his principal objectives was the annihilation of the Irish language, intimately related to identity. The fact was that, gradually, the Irish language was reduced to the rural areas and, in the cities, to the domestic staff. But at the beginning of the XIX Century the countryside population had increased significantly together with the propagation of the Irish language. It is considered that by 1835 Irish speakers rounded about four millions.

From the late 18th century the population of Ireland began to increase substantially. This increase occurred primarily among the poorer rural classes and, since a large proportion of that sector was still Irish-speaking, there was a disproportionate increase in

the number of Irish speakers. There are no exact figures available, but in 1820 the number of Irish speakers was estimated at 3.500.000 and in 1835 it was estimated at 4.000.000. There had never before been so many Irish speakers and to friendly, disinterested and hostile observers alike it appeared that Irish was making a massive recovery. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see the reality in starker clarity: these Irish-speaking masses were without economic or political power, and had no means of determining their own destiny. They had, of course, leaders such as Daniel O’Connell or at a more local level the diarist Amhlaoibh Ó Súilleabháin, who fought for their civil and economic rights. Such leaders though they professed an unfeigned emotional attachment to Irish, were generally willing enough to adapt to the existing pattern in which English was the language of politics, public affairs, education, and social advancement. In these circumstances, ordinary Irish speakers sought competence in English as essential either for social mobility at home or for emigration to better conditions in Britain or the United States. Even the most underprivileged sections of the community acquired more secure access to an elementary education in English after the National School system had been set up in 1831. This made it possible for them to switch to English and, after the trauma of the Great Famine, they had little hesitation in doing so.¹

Prepared for an eventual Spanish attack, in 1595, Elizabeth I strengthened the English Army in Ireland and subjugated political forces. More than that, she designed a series of colonies which she assigned to loyal subjects of the crown, a plan which was deepened by James I. Curiously, the only one that subsisted was that of Ulster, a strong Celtic city and the last to surrender.

The famous Siege or Battle of Kinsale, in December 1601, marked an important milestone in Irish culture; in fact, it meant the beginning of the end of Gaelic Ireland. Within the context of Queen Elizabeth I reign and the Nine Years War, it was a consequence of a campaign of Irish clan leaders (Hugh O’Neill and Red Hugh O’Donnell) against English Rule. Since Spain was also involved, it is considered part of the Anglo-Spanish War (1585 – 1604). The battle was a complete catastrophe for the

¹ Mártín Ó Murchú, *The Irish Language*, Dublin, Government of Ireland, 1985, p. 26.

Irish and a remote cause of that rather mysterious episode of the Irish History called The Flight of The Earls (see note 2).

The seventeenth century is the most pivotal century of disaster for Gaelic culture. It did not “die” after the Battle of Kinsale (1601) but was severely clobbered.² The Irish fought three great wars (1593 – 1601; 1641 – 53; 1689 – 91) in the course of the seventeenth century against the English and got hammered in each of them. Although these are often seen in crudely political terms, they were also wars between Irish-speakers or bearers of Gaelic culture and those who were bent on their destruction. Traditional Gaelic society went into exile in September 1607, when the Ulster leaders decided that Spanish wine would give them more hope than Donegal poteen, although they may have mistaken. The War of the Confederation (1641 - 1653) between an alliance of regal Irish and more progressive off-with-their-heads nationalists against Cromwellian English-only republicans resulted in the deportation of the landed Irish leaders to the badland of Connacht, and the exile of intellectual and disaffected as slaves and chattels to the West Indies. Each war was a step down on the ladder for the normal Irish speaker.³

Forty years after, trying to force concessions for the Catholics living under the English rule, a new Irish rebellion took place. The imposition of the English language and culture, and large scale “Plantations” (i.e. confiscations of properties from the Irish landowners who had rebelled against the crown) were, probably, the principal causes of the revolt known as the Irish Rebellion of 1641. The insurrection was part of the Eleven Year’s War⁴, and, although the coup failed, the result was the founding of the Irish

² The 14th September 1607 was the day that the two remaining Northern Earls of Ireland (The Earl of Tyrone, Hugh O’Neill and the Earl of Tyrconnell, Rory O’Donnell) together with about nearly ninety families and followers fled Old Ireland off to Spain with, apparently, no clear or serious reasons. The Earls were descended from Gaelic clan dynasties that had ruled important areas of Ulster. In brief, what happened was that the Gaelic aristocracy of Ulster left definitely. Both leaders, financially assisted by the Pope, died in Rome. The result was the expansion of the Ulster Plantations and the beginning of a long story of departures from Ireland to the rest of the world.

³ Alan Titley, *A Pocket History of Gaelic Culture*, Dublin, The O’Brien Press, 2002, pp. 63 – 64.

⁴ The Eleven Years’ War (or Irish Confederate Wars) that took place in Ireland between 1641 and 1653 (eleven years and six months) was a religious and ethnic conflict. The consequences of this struggle were the English Parliamentary conquest of Ireland, defeat of Royalists and crushing of Irish Catholic power.

Catholic Confederation and beginning of the Confederate War, which continued till the 1650s when Oliver Cromwell cruelly defeated the Irish Catholics and Royalists, reconquering the country.

These events were followed by the Penal Laws that, according to Edmund Burke, were “a machine of wise and elaborate contrivance, as well fitted for the oppression, impoverishment and degradation of a people, and the debasement in them of human nature itself, as ever proceeded from the perverted ingenuity of man.”⁵ Some of the Penal Laws were: Ban to Catholics and Protestant Dissenters entering Trinity College Dublin; Ban on Catholics buying land under a lease of more than 31 years; Ban on Catholics inheriting Protestant land; Roman Catholic lay priests had to register to preach under the Registration Act 1704, but seminary priests and Bishops were not able to do so until 1778; “No person of the popish religion shall publicly or in private houses teach school, or instruct you in learning within this realm” upon pain of twenty pounds fine and three months in prison for every such offence, etc. Gradually, most of these regulations were repealed.

At the end of the XVII century, the Protestants (20% of the population) owned 86% of the Irish land. But it was a fact that at this same time the cultural division was weakening. Many English lords spoke the Irish language, promoted Irish poetry and music, and even intermarried. In a way they were “more Irish than the Irish” or, as they put it in latin *Hiberniores Hibernis ipsis*.

As time went on, the Anglo-Irish ruling class was able to put an end to most of the unjust anti-Irish laws, and the curious counterpart of this was the slow acquisition of the English language on behalf of the wealthy classes. The Irish language, then, appeared being associated with poverty.

⁵ Quoted from [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penal_Laws_\(Ireland\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penal_Laws_(Ireland)). (January 10, 2015.)

In 1801, through a document ironically called Act of Union, Ireland was annexed to the United Kingdom, which meant the end of the Irish Parliament; Daniel O'Connell became the first Irish Catholic parliamentarian in Westminster.

More than one attempt to revert this situation appeared weakened by the terrible famine, originated by several crop potato failures, known as the Great Famine (1845-1852). The potato was the central food in Ireland at that time, and more than a million people died as a consequence of the food crisis and many more migrated off to England, the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand and even to a far-off country named Argentina.

The Great Famine was a contribution to Irish Nationalism. Different parliamentary agreements, the action of terrorists groups and Charles Stewart Parnell leadership, promoted, in 1914 the *Home Rule*, the creation of an independent Irish Parliament, which, in fact was postponed on account of WWI.

Headed by Pádraic Pearse, poet, teacher and soldier, a political coalition proclaimed, in 1916, the creation of the Irish Republic. Known as Easter Rising, this short proclamation ended with the execution of the rebellion leaders.

However, military confrontations and intrigues continued and, in 1922, after an armistice the island was divided in the Free State of Ireland and, linked to United Kingdom, Northern Ireland (six counties most of whose population was Protestant).

With the election of the first President elected under the 1937 Constitution, Ireland became a Republic, officially recognized in 1949.

The same year, that fusion of Celts, Vikings, Normans and British, abandoned the Commonwealth to become the independent Republic of Ireland, called Èire in Irish-Gaelic.

Coming back to our story, the beginning should be traced not only within the insular Irish people who came along to America with the Spanish conquerors and missionaries⁶ but mainly in the two failed British invasions of Buenos Aires, in 1806 and 1807, commanded by William Carr Beresford and John Whitelocke. After been defeated, Irish mercenaries opted in staying in the land they had attacked. Spread all over the unknown territory, some of them “translated” their names into the Spanish language: Queenfaith became Reynafé, Campbell, Campana, Gowan, Gaona and so on. The decision is relevant since it reveals what would become a regular attitude of the Irish migrants towards the adopted land. Others stuck to the army, as Peter Campbell, who got to be the oriental leader José Gervasio de Artigas’ second hand. In relation to this, it is pertinent to mention an episode recalled by Bartolomé Mitre in his *Historia de Belgrano y de la independencia argentina*; it is referred to the Irish corporal Michael Skennon who deserted the British army and fought against the invaders. Executed by an English firing squad, Mitre states that the young soldier “combatía por su fe católica y contra los herejes ingleses al lado de los argentinos.”⁷

Other travelers and businessmen completed an initial Irish community in Argentina. James Spencer Wilde, came to Buenos Aires at the beginning of the XIX Century to found an Official Bank, married a native and, in 1818 was able to put on two of his comedies –*Las tocayas* and *La quincallería*–, was the father of José Antonio, author of the classic description *Buenos Aires desde setenta años atrás*, and uncle of Eduardo who wrote *Aguas abajo* and was a member of the so-called Generación del

⁶ The first Irishman registered by the official account was Father Thomas Field, a Jesuit from Limerick, although it is known that John and Thomas Farrell witnessed the foundation of Buenos Aires in 1536, and that Rita O’Doghan –great grandmother of José Hernández, author of the well-known narrative poem *Martín Fierro*–, belonged to an Irish family and had married Juan Martín de Pueyrredon), or in the individual adventures of accidental migrants who happened to appear in this land as doctor Thomas Falkner, who came to Buenos Aires in 1730 where he met the Jesuits, abandoned his profession and worked as a missionary in Patagonia.

⁷ “(...) he fought on the Argentine side for the sake of his Catholic religion and against the heretic English”. (See: Mitre, Bartolomé, *Historia de Belgrano y de la independencia argentina*, Volume I, Chapter 3, Eudeba, Buenos Aires, 1978.)

'80; mercenary William Brown (1777-1857), "el Viejo Bruno", according to Juan Manuel de Rosas, fought for the emancipation, founded the National Army and was, in 1826, governor of the province of Buenos Aires; John Thomond O'Brien (1786-1861) became José de San Martín's *aide-de-camp*. An amazing love story had three Irish names as central characters in 1848: the scandalous affair of a Catholic priest and a young girl of the top society of the time, who ran away together only to be threatened by an informer known as Fr. Michael Gannon. Advised by Jurist Dalmacio Vélez Sarsfield, dictator Rosas was responsible for the execution of the daring lovers, Ladislao Gutiérrez and Camila O'Gorman, who was pregnant.

The good relationship with Spain was functional for that country to become a bridge between Ireland and the River Plate. Cullen, Lynch, O'Donnell, among others, were names that stepped on Buenos Aires during the XVI, XVII and XVIII centuries through Spain. More than that, Spain became an academic center for the Irish to whom high education was forbidden by the British. It was in this context that Michael O'Gorman, educated in Spain and France, in 1799 founded the Escuela del Protomedicato, the anteroom of the local Faculty of Medicine.

By 1820 there was a sort of an Irish-porteño community concentrated in Buenos Aires, which means that the Great Famine (1845-1852), a consequence of potato crops that failed many times causing the death of about a million people and forcing nearly another million to leave the country, was not the only reason for Irish migration to Argentina as it is frequently repeated; it was not even the principal cause, since Longford, Westmeath and Wexford (counties from where the majority of the Irish-porteños originated) were not actually amongst the worst-affected counties by the potato crop failures. Fares to South America were expensive and migrants should be able to maintain themselves till they found a position.