

***MORE THAN A CHANGE OF STYLE, A
CHANGE IN ATTITUDES: A
FULBRIGHTER'S VIEW***



Salzburg Seminar

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The Salzburg Seminar

In 1977, I was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to attend Session 176 of the Salzburg Seminar on "Contemporary American Literature". I was then an assistant teacher engaged in American Literature and Culture at the English Department, University of Lisbon. As befitted that stage of professional life, I certainly was a little naive but bravely held to my convictions. Once in Salzburg, I enrolled in three groups of sessions, one on Theatre, the other on American Literature and a third one on Contemporary Literary Criticism. As a result, I co-authored with Uta Janssens-Knorsch, a colleague from The Netherlands, a play under the supervision of John Ehle, listened attentively to



John Gardener's readings from his book in progress *On Moral Fiction*, and enthusiastically participated in Winfried's Fluck's incursions in the at-the-time-hazy territory of Post-Modernist writing and theory. In the evening many of us would flock to the 'beer cellar' where, on and off, we would give in to the musical rhythms of the Seventies and the lively debates with colleagues from other parts of the world.

No longer exclusively mediated by the reading of books or the occasional watching of videos, American Literature and Culture were framed anew by shared living experience in the magic atmosphere of Schloss Leopoldskron. My own peculiarities as a Portuguese teacher engaged in those areas of study met with and were challenged by those views from other colleagues, and were shaped anew by the influential teachings of writers and scholars from different backgrounds. Along those three weeks in the Salzburg Seminar, I learnt about the value of discussion with my peers from other countries as well as that of listening to the 1976 Faculty engaged in a variety of approaches and methods. There were instances when I felt comfortable and knowledgeable, but there were other occasions when my shortages sort of confused me, as when I volunteered to make an analysis of a Postmodernist short story in one of Winfried Fluck's sessions, which I utterly misread.

Such was the spirit of the place: it allowed us to become students again, with all the virtues and insecurities inherent to that status; on the other hand, the natural surroundings in which the Seminar occurs fostered a unique atmosphere for the development of friendly ties among the participants. The years go by and whenever there has been an occasional meeting with Fulbrighters from Session 176, we mostly agree that the event had been a turning point in our lives. Besides, it allowed me to develop a life-long friendship with Winfried Fluck and his wife Brigitte, as well as with Uta Janssens-Knorsch, almost as close as a sister to this day. More relevantly, perhaps, in terms of my professional life, The Salzburg Seminar instilled a perception of American Studies, which was not only extremely useful when I returned to teach class in the Department of English Studies at



Lisbon University but also prepared me to make the most out of the second Fulbright scholarship I was awarded almost two decades later, in 1994.

Georgetown University, Washington DC

From August 1994 to July 1995 I was a Fulbright visiting scholar at the University of Georgetown in Washington DC. There, I was sponsored by the American Studies Program and hosted by Professor Ronald M Johnson, the Director of the Program. In a sense, the sojourn at that American University brought the Salzburg experience in full perspective. The faculty of the AS Program was composed of members from several other departments, among those with whom I developed closer ties were Lucy Maddox from the English Department, at the time, Editor of the *American Quarterly*, Diana L. Hayes from the Department of Theology, Alison Hilton from the Department of Art and Randy Bass, director of the Center for Electronic Projects in American Studies. Professor Johnson invited me to participate in all the Program Board meetings and very soon I realized that the participation in the classes held by my American peers would provide me with an invaluable understanding of their interdisciplinary methodology. I asked them leave to attend their classes in history, literature, American art and African American culture. In turn, I occasionally was invited to speak of my own experience as a teacher of the US literature and culture in Portugal.

In the classes held by Ronald M. Johnson, a historian deeply committed to the study of the relations among the several cultures of USA, I was given an overview of the United States as a metaphoric patchwork of cultures. Among my own contributions in class, I, particularly, recall a piece I wrote for Diana Haye's course on "Race, Class, Gender and Religion", in which I highlighted the indebtedness of American autobiography to Benjamin's Franklin own autobiography and traced a parallel with Luis J. Rodriguez's *Always Running. La Vida Loca: Gang Days in L.A.*, the book that the students had read for that session (November 1994); for Lucy Maddox's course on "Literature of the American West", I read another piece on Edward Abbey's *Solitaire. A Season in the*



Wilderness, drawing the comparison to Ralph Waldo Emerson's several writings on the American nature (March 1995).

I was also invited to talk outside the American Studies Program. Dr. Iêda Wuiarda from the Hispanic Division of the Library of Congress asked me to focus on my Ph. D. subject and invited my colleagues from Georgetown University to attend the session, in which I presented "Adding up: The Global Impact of Saul Bellow on the Art of Fiction" (May 1995). A challenging invitation came from Professor Eusebio Mujahl Leon to deliver a paper at one of the debate sessions of the Foreign Affairs Training Center in the GU University. I chose to read about "A Multicultural Angle on the Portuguese and American Experiences", in which, I drew out parallels between the Histories of both countries (June 1995).

My experience as a Fulbrighter, however, owes a good deal to the sponsorship of the Fulbright Visiting Scholar Enrichment Program in Washington DC, as this Program regularly promoted exchange among the Fulbrighters from the different countries by organizing events in which we were introduced one another and encouraged to socialize. We were also periodically invited to field excursions outside Washington, during which we were given the opportunity to understand that the traditional motto of the United States, *E Pluribus Unum* indeed made sense in a country shaped by such a variety of cultures. Among the organized visits, two of them stand out in my memory for the deep contrast they represented in ways of life and attitudes. One was to the Amish country in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. I was charmed by the landscape with its interspersing rural farmlands, but I was really surprised by a lifestyle that was so much at odds with that of the country at large. The way men and women were dressed, the buggies they rode, their demure yet gentle countenance and bearing, both in the streets or in the small-business shops we visited, all made me feel as if they had lost hold of the century in which we were living.

The other visit was to the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, and to Monticello. I had indeed been looking forward to it, probably because it allowed me the opportunity to have a close view of Thomas Jefferson's achievements. I had acquired some of his writings, when I visited the Jefferson Memorial in



Washington DC for the first time, in 1976 under the sponsorship of the Institute of International Education. I had then elected Jefferson as one of my American Heroes; the other was Abraham Lincoln. Almost two decades later, I was able to contemplate the Jeffersonian neoclassical style, which impressed me as being in harmony with his writings. We went to the University in the morning, to Monticello in the afternoon. None of these visits fell shorter of my expectations; they actually surpassed what I previously had read and learnt about the two places. Both the University, with its unique design, and the mansion, with its gardens and graveyard, struck me as the architectural materialization of two ideals, those of education and agrarian life. Jefferson's University pursued inclusiveness and tolerance; Monticello valued a mode of living that was imbued with the same ideals, slaveholding notwithstanding. As a Portuguese, I was particularly tickled to find out that the naturalist and plenipotentiary Minister to the USA, Abbé Correa da Serra, had been a regular visitor of Jefferson, to the point of having a room of his own in the mansion.

Another circumstance that eventuated from my Fulbright status was the invitations I received to go and speak in other Universities and Programs. In April 1995, I was invited by Professor Kathleen Ashley from the English Department, University of Southern Maine (Portland) to talk about "Multicultural Autobiography as Written by Women in the Seventies"; I was also invited by Professor Carol Farley Kessler from the American Studies Program, Penn State University (Delaware County Campus) to speak about storytelling in the works of M. H. Kingston, L. M. Silko and T. Morrison. It was a rich experience in as much as it provided an opportunity to further my research on the work of these women writers and to feel the pulse of the American classroom outside Washington DC.

Looking backwards on that eventful sabbatical year, I am aware that these rich and diversified opportunities were only available, on account of my status as a Fulbright scholar. While in Georgetown, I also learned about the usefulness of a good and updated library, the Lauinger Library in GU, in which I spent all the free time I had, making the most out of its academic resources and special collections. I then realized how important it was the chance to accede to so much



information and know-how. Actually, it was in the Lauinger Library that the project for an exchange of scholars between the English Department of the University of Lisbon and the English Department as well as the American Studies Program of the University of Georgetown was born. Professor Ronald M. Johnson encouraged and totally supported the project. Under the umbrella of such an exchange, faculty from each university was to teach and research on each other's campus, bringing about a meaningful share of department and program resources, and institutional expertise. In October 1995, the protocol was officially signed in Lisbon and its enforcement was secured by my colleague Teresa Cid on sabbatical leave at GU the following year. It flourished for the next decade into the new twenty-first century, causing a constant flow of scholars from both universities across the Atlantic.

The Fulbright Program reassessed

The impact of the 1994-95 Fulbright scholarship was far-reaching. At the institutional level, it is safe to claim that it offered the opportunity to consider new models of interactivity and interdisciplinary exercise. The rich flow of faculty exchange allowed for a more expansive development of American Studies in the University of Lisbon, enabling this area to fare side by side with English, French, German, Italian and Spanish Studies in the course of "Languages, Literatures and Cultures".

On a personal level, the gains were invaluable and endowed my life with a richness of experience and knowledge that reaches out to my own identity. Through the Fulbright Program, I have had the opportunity to get to know other American scholars, with whom I grew ties that are endearing to my heart. I take this opportunity to evoke the names of John Pratt, Kathleen Ashley and Juliet Antunes, three of my best friends throughout these many years, and to recall how much I learned from them in ways of life and attitudes towards others. It is an enormous privilege to be part of the Fulbright alumni, to belong in a vast group of people who shares such a unique experience and is able to value lasting connections.