



## ***MY FULBRIGHT EXPERIENCE***

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**F**rom August to December 2017 I had the opportunity, thanks to the Fulbright Program and to the English Department of the University of Georgetown, of living part of my adult life and exercising my professional activity abroad, providing an essential intercultural experience for one, like me, who thrives on the Humanities and Languages.

As a professor of American Studies, to live in Washington DC and to be able to breathe in the varied cultural heritage of the Smithsonian Museums, while at the same time doing my daily errands on top of a bike, down Mexico Avenue, up the National Mall, or along the Potomac, was a bonus in itself. As a literary translator, experiencing first-hand the oddity and the possibility of being in contact with the foreign culture(s) and language(s) with which we work is an important part of our confidence in understanding the other.

I believe, moreover, that the vocation of literary translation has to do with some people's mechanism in dealing with the perception of living outside, and of oscillating too often towards the Other inside. Such a mechanism carries with it the challenge – and, strangely, the relief – of not being under our own skin, a certain measure of discomfort, an expanse of eccentricity. This is an idea I caught a glimpse of when my family moved for eighteen months to Monterey, California, when I was twelve-thirteen – in many ways a terrifying transition into a reflexive consciousness, but also an exciting eye-opener. I had been longing for a chance to experience what it would be like to find oneself in a "mature" scenario. Because I have a daughter, who is for the most part under my care, I was kind of waiting until she, too, felt the curiosity and perhaps the assuredness to risk the discomfort of being away from friends, extended family, dad.



She was fourteen when she expressed the wish to see how it would be like to have a life abroad – and that’s when I thought of applying.

The Fulbright program was my first-choice, because of its consensual prestige, the sense of community I had heard it fostered among academics eager to expand their networks. It was also through Fulbright that my two mentors at the University of Lisbon, Teresa Alves and Teresa Cid, had initiated a relationship of collaboration in American Studies with Georgetown University, which later on helped to consolidate the program at the University of Lisbon. Being the current coordinator of the major in American Studies at the School of Arts and Humanities (FLUL), I had the ambition of rekindling the academic ties with a top East-coast university. Furthermore, I had hopes of being in a collegial environment that would benefit my own research on the reception of Edgar Allan Poe in different traditions of literary Modernism (Romance languages and Anglo-German), and I was also aware that in terms of print and digital material I would be well served in Georgetown and still have the opportunity to explore the resources of the Library of Congress.

My Fulbright grant was for Teaching and Research purposes, and I taught a course on the Short Story in the United States to 27 students who were bright and responsive. As the course implied a change in my Fulbright plans (initially I was going to teach US poetry and its transatlantic forces), I also had to learn a lot, and for that I used the resources of the University, which were great (the Lauinger Library delivers books to your office!), and relied on the good will of students.

Of course, not everything goes as smoothly as one tends to perceive, and retrospection lends a golden hue to experiences that entailed their fair amount of hardship when they were happening (on the other hand, if the golden hue is there, it must be because something shone through). The teaching-learning process was somewhat different — I learned I should be more attentive to sensibilities, to moderate the way I give feedback, and to draw more on the autonomy of students.

Adaptation was needed on both sides, but the outcome was very positive, and I am happy to say I still correspond with some of the students now that I am back. It was also exciting to know my colleagues in the English department, sharing office-threshold



conversations, stopping in the corridor to greet each other, or exchanging class notes over coffee in the kitchen. My dealings with the administration of Georgetown University were very easy and polite, even if the intended MOU with the University of Lisbon (which was drafted then) is still pending after eight months – but that is mostly due to bureaucracy and funding, hopefully to be overcome. Still, the first evidence of an interchange revival from with Georgetown has already happened, with Professor and poet David Gewanter, Director of the Creative Writing course in at Georgetown, traveling to Lisbon to offer training in a poetry writing workshop this summer.

My stay was also beneficial for my own research, not only for having been integrated in a great discussion group (the Americas Initiative at Georgetown), where I had the opportunity to present and get feedback, but also because I could access resources easily. In the Library of Congress, where I was warmly welcomed at the Hispanic Division, I was able to develop my investigation on Edgar Allan Poe and Latin American Modernisms.

Especially thrilling to me, as well, was the invitation by that same Hispanic Division to record some of my own poetry in the very studio where great poets like Neruda or Haroldo de Campos also contributed to the immense repository of that historic library.

I also profited from the Fulbright Outreach Lecturing Fund, visiting and lecturing at Loyola University, in New Orleans, and at UMass, Dartmouth, where I combined Translation, Poetry, and American and Portuguese-American heritage.

At a personal level, the great event was the adventure with my daughter, which had its own bumps and challenges, but overall was unforgettable and rewarding. We had the great luck of finding lodging with the kindest landlady ever – Donna Deaton – who not only shared her house with us, but also her bikes, and conveniently rented out the basement of the same house to a German scholar who had a daughter, Pha, about the same age as my daughter and going to the same school. In the Fall, we raked together the leaves in our communal home in at Chevy Chase, DC, and in the summer of this year we had the pleasure of having Pha stay with us in Lisbon, weaving one more chain of what may be a lifelong bond with my daughter, Alice.