

2.2. Anglo-American Studies in the University of Porto 1972-2011

Belinda Maia

'Germânicas' was in the 2nd year of its existence in the academic year 1973-4. Dr. Armando Morais, wellknown for his bilingual English-Portuguese dictionary and English language teaching work, was in charge of building up the new department. His objective, and that of his successors for many years to come, was to prepare good teachers for the secondary schools.

Later on, Germânicas became part of Línguas e Literaturas Modernas – or Modern Languages and Literatures, which in turn gradually split into separate departments including the Departamento de Estudos Anglo-Americanos and the Departamento de Estudos Germanísticos.

We also moved geographically from being the only language groups in Rua das Taipas, to installations for all areas of the Faculdade de Letras in Campo Alegre and finally to the present building in Via Panorâmica. Along the way, much has happened as the faculty moved from the traditional modes of the 20th century to the information age world of the 21st.

It has been my privilege to accompany all these changes and still be here to tell the tale. My contract came through in May 1974, but my second child was born in July and I was not asked to appear till the autumn. I therefore missed the first months of turmoil and 'saneamentos', and my first experience of university life that autumn was one of endless meetings, re-planning of curricula, and general discussions of university policy. There was no teaching till January 1975.

However, it was an exciting time and I still look back on those first years as some of the most educational and productive of my life. I certainly learnt a lot and I hope others did too, not necessarily in the areas expected of language departments. It was a time to be idealistic, whichever side of the political spectrum one came from. We experimented with new ideas, tried out new ways of teaching and learning, despite the large sizes of the classes, and the voices of both teachers and students being drowned out by the noise of the trams climbing the steep Rua das Taipas.

Teaching English language allowed us plenty of freedom and we made the most of it. We encouraged English style debates on every subject, trying, despite the prevailing politics of the time, to balance points of view. One Christmas was celebrated with carols and a recital of Dylan Thomas' *A Child's Christmas in Wales*, followed by a party to which everyone brought their versions of the Christmas cake recipe we had distributed, and we washed it down with spicy hot punch. Role play exercises led to acting and we put on Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, followed by several shorter plays. We even tried *Under Milk Wood*. I still have photographs of one summer day when we took the ferry across the river and

walked to Afurada where we picnicked, swam and sang to Paddy Kilcoyne's guitar. I taught the same group of students from their second to their fifth year, and some of them are still my friends today.

The English language teachers were also asked to teach English Culture and Civilization. Culture? Civilization? Words, we soon learnt, that can have a wide variety of interpretations. And the only book available when we were told to teach this subject to a couple of hundred students each three weeks before term started was Trevelyan's *Shortened History of England*. We did our best with the help of much background reading and probably learnt more about our history than our students. As students reached the 5th year, we were asked to teach English Language and Linguistics. Again, we had to rush to upgrade our notions on grammar to a more formal knowledge of Linguistics, and this was to become my own passion as time went by. No doubt many of our colleagues, who also did not have the benefit of more than their licenciaturas, also struggled to find their way to teach meaningfully in such complex times.

The move to Campo Alegre was more than a relocation of Germânicas. We were now part of a much bigger community, including not just our colleagues from Românicas but also from Geography, History, and Philosophy. There was only one bar in those days for both teachers and students, and this contributed to a feeling of identity as 'Letras', and an interchange of ideas that would lead gradually to the more interdisciplinary courses today.

Staff and students became more involved in the everyday organization of faculty life. Our move to Via Panorâmica marked a turning point in our lives as we adapted to our new modern building, with its excellent library, and installations and equipment not always found in language departments around the world. It is here that the ideals of the 'Bolonha' process have helped to develop even newer methods of teaching and learning.

Research became increasingly important as staff finished their doctoral theses and master's degrees were developed. The Faculty hosts international conferences and other events and our academic horizons are recognized internationally, helped by regular exchange of staff and students with universities around the world. Despite market forces that have affected us quantitatively, we have moved forward qualitatively. Time will tell what happens next.