

Saudade: a Portuguese feeling par excellence

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It is quite a common sense that the Portuguese *ethos* is somehow lyric, nostalgic and melancholic. Likewise, there is quite a consensus nowadays that any people can be lyric, nostalgic or melancholic, expressing it in their own way, and own terms. But I think that the Portuguese word “saudade” embodies a Lusitanic *ethos* in a much broader sense. By the way, I am aware that the topic is not new, since a sad feeling of loss and longing has been explored throughout history by many people in several connotations. ⇒

Figures: how artists portrayed melancholy:



Dürer (1514)



Hans Sebald Beham (1539)



Jacob de Gheyn (1597)

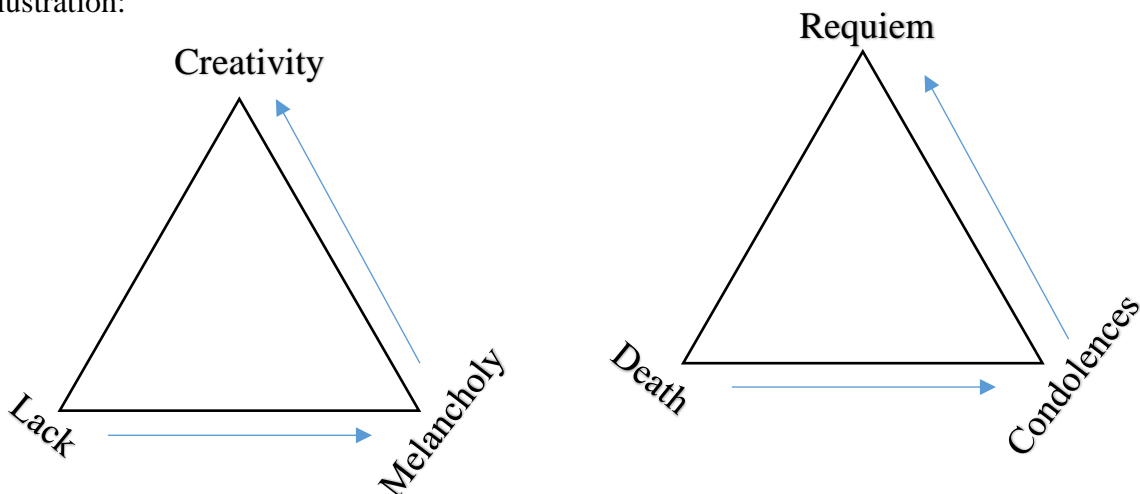


Domenico Fetti (1622)

The feeling itself is quite universal and it can be dated back to Aristotle and even to Hipocrates who had conceived it as a mood disorder that could drive a person into a frenzy state of mind and even insanity (Macedo, 2004). During the Middle Ages the feeling has been well known as *melanchóly* (or melancholia – from Greek: *melas* (black) and *chole* (bile), which is a pathologic state of mind to cry over something missing that could be confused with some kind of distress or depression – mostly nowadays during the times of excess positivity and tiredness (Byung-Chul Han).

Apart from the psychosomatic sense, the phenomenon has been taken, in some periods of our Western history, as something creative, cathartic and even divine (specially by the Romantic movement) – making a triangulation of **lack**, **melancholy** and **sensibility** (Lima, 2017). The funeral masterpiece Requiem is a good example. Mozart’s creativity explored the loss (the deceased) and the feeling of the loss (felt by friends and relatives). ⇒

Illustration:



On grieving scenarios the negative perspective overlaps the whole situation because it is linked to a sense of a tedious languidness, sadness and sometimes to the downfall of self-esteem, as Freud (2010) has pointed out. When the perspective is positive, or at least less grievous - like the home missing - the loss is filled up with good memories (family, house, community or nation). In this case, the proper word is *nostalgia*. The term comes also from the Greek: *nostos* (home return) and *algia* (longing) – which is precisely the feeling experienced by sailors, slaves and soldiers of every nation. According to Mircea Eliade (*La nostalgie des origines*), that is an eternal and spiritual search of the origins.

Nostalgia is, to Nietzsche (2007), a fatality of remembering the past so to keep it alive, in an eternal return. Despite the sorrow and suffering it may cause: driving a person into a languishing state of mind, the past is not fought off in this case, because it brings back the remembrance of the roots we have.

Then, from a sickness and a pathologic state of mind, nostalgia is viewed rather as an emotion, a wistful longing for a place, a time or any other thing in the past that cannot be deleted because it is meaningful. It may be fatal, tragic or deeply hurtful but this emotional comeback must not be erased from our memories. But by the contrary, it has to dwell in our hearts as a bond to the ones who experienced it.

As a universal feeling the nostalgic longing is present in all cultures, and it is well expressed by poets and storytellers. In the *Odyssey*, Ulysses craves for his family and land, as well as the Portuguese voyagers think about their home, even tasting nice moments in the *Isle of Love* (*The Lusíads*, by Camões, chant IX, X). In the Bible, the Jews, in Babylon, were asked to chant, while captives, but they could not, and they wept over their homeland. Even the Noragas, a native tribe of Guyana, have an oral tale about Couramé – a beautiful Indian hold captive by the English, who remained in a nostalgic behavior for a long time, until the day she could reunite with her brothers, go back home and get rid of that languidness. A malady, called *banzo*, was common among the African slaves brought to Brazil. All of them yearned feverishly their mother home.

⇒

Nevertheless, more than any other people on earth, the Portuguese have enriched their sense of nostalgia into a deeper and broader sense, almost reaching a level of untranslatability, so that even non-Portuguese speaking people prefer the use of the original vocable: *saudade* - a sweet longing, a sweet bitterness, and an eternal return for the Portuguese people to themselves, to their culture, to their past and to their sense of existence. Which has influenced claims in favor of a rooted Portuguese feeling par excellence. The great Brazilian diplomat Joaquim Nabuco (1849-1910) pointed out, during his conference *Camões - the lyric poet* – given at the Vassar College, NY, in 1909, that in order to express the word *saudade* to an Anglo-Saxon person, it would be

necessary to use four words: *remembrance*, *love*, *grief* and *longing*. And the combination of those words changes the aesthetics of melancholy. Talking about English language, Allan Bloom (1993, p. 14) states: “Ours is a language that reduces the longing to the need for individual”.

Portrayed by many artists, *saudade* is not a melancholic feeling in a ghoulish and desperate aspect. To express this state of mind they changed the lines of expression into a more blissful aspect, adding the sense of a sweet grief and of a sad but hopeful longing – which, according to Tobias (1997) cannot be understood by a foreigner, unless he or she learn the language and happen to feel it. ⇒



Saudade de Nápoles (Missing Napoles),
by Anna Abraham Clémance **Bertha**
Worms. São Paulo: 1895.

French artist who got married to a
Brazilian and moved to São Paulo.



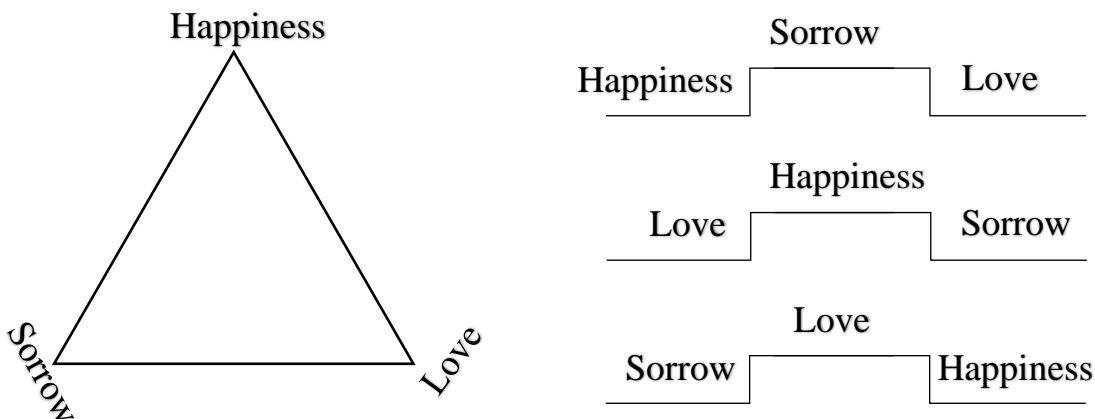
Saudade. by Almeida Junior. São Paulo:
1899.
One of the most famous Brazilian
painters

If Portuguese writers, like the philosopher Duarte Nunes Leão (*Origem da Língua Portuguesa*, Lisboa, 1606) and the other ones in the book: *Filosofia da Saudade*, edited by Botelho & Teixeira, 1986) are to be believed, the feeling is proper to the Portuguese people. Yet as a perpetual melancholic longing, this sentiment can be felt inside or outside Portugal. It is not related only to the country, but to everything that has been lost, been away or of a far reach. There is always this kind of emptiness in the Portuguese soul: something always missing to trigger the meaning of absence, of incompleteness or desire for something that does not and probably cannot exist. From the lines of great Portuguese writers, like Camões and Fernando Pessoa to a more recent literature and art expressions in Portugal, in Brazil, as well as in the other former Portuguese colonies, the word has been used to express a unique element that can be understood as one of the biggest “expressions of Lusofonia”. Chanted by Amália Rodrigues (Portuguese), Tom

Jobim (Brazilian), Julio Iglesias (Spanish) and even by American singers and writers, the word *saudade* is preferred over its variations and possible translations. In a quick search at Amazon.com we have: ⇒

Book title	Author
Saudade	Traci Brimhal
Saudade	Mirian Winthrop
Saudade	Keith Wilson
Saudade	Husna Mohammed
Saudade	Donovan James
Saudade	Elouise May
Saudade	Anik See
Saudade	Evan Hall

I have no intentions of going deeper into etymological discussion, if the word *saudade* comes from the Arabic (*saudah*) or from the Latin (*solidad*); neither have I plans of conducting comparative studies. Yet the words used in other languages are much less expressive: In Romanian, “*dor*” is used: “*Mi-e dor de patria mea*”; in Spanish different words can be used: “*añoranzas*”, “*soledad*”, “*anhelo*”, “*nostalgia*” or the closest “ *echar de menos*” – “*siento nostalgia de mi madre*” (I miss my mother), “*echo de menos las tierras de mi padre*” etc.; in French, “*manque*”, “*nostalgie*” and “*mélancolie*”; and in English “*longing*”, “*yearning*”, “*craving*” and “*miss*”. What I am not sure is if those vocables (*võ'kə-bəls*) can effectively translate what is by definition (Tobias, 1997) “a feeling”, instead of an idea. According to Tobias (1997, p. 28), *saudade* is “a delicious bitter feeling related to an absent love” (free translation from: *o sentimento amargosamente gostoso de um amor ausente*). As much as the translated words come close, they do not have this combination of sorrow, happiness and love. Which brings us to another triangulation (below). What is interesting is that, depending on the time, the local culture or the writer, one or another word can be stressed over the others: ⇒



In 1438 El Rei D. Duarte The First, edited the book *Leal Conselheiro* (Loyal Counselor) in order to tell about his fight against melancholia, in which the word *saudade* appears for the first time. Or maybe before, when the king D. Dinis (1261-1325) chanted about “soidade”. But both with a different meaning of melancholia, *saudade* has been described by D. Duarte as an affliction of the soul, ranging from sorrow, nausea and pleasure (Apud: Lourenço, 1999, p. 26). By stressing the sense of “sorrow”, the king adds up that it does not come from our reason, but from our sensuality and makes us feel the sense of sorrow and disgust for the absence of somebody or something (Botelho & Teixeira, 1986).

Influenced by the platonic world of forms and the works of the renaissance poets, Camões (1524-1580) used it in a less somber sense, stressing “love” over “sorrow”. Almost reaching an spiritual level, in Camões *saudade* has an ontological perspective directly linked to the existential anguish of being the “son of time” (Lourenço, 1999). Ex. In *Canções e Elegias* (Songs and elegies): ⇒

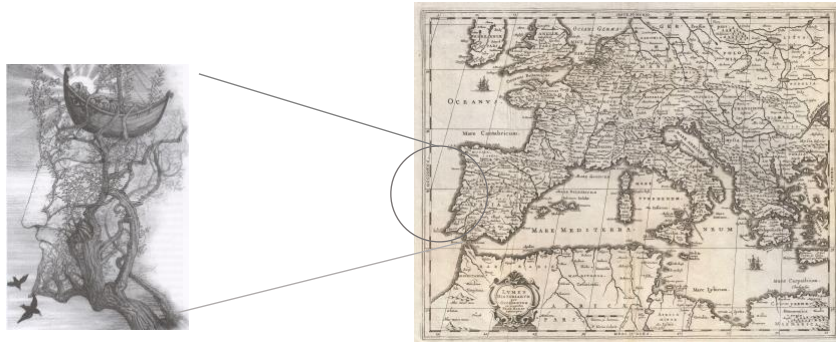
Original (Portuguese)	Free translation (English)
<i>Se quero em tanto mal desesperar-me, Não posso, porque Amor e Saudade,; Nem licença me dão para matar-me.</i>	<i>If in such great evil I want to despair I can not, because love and saudade Will never allow me to kill myself.</i>
<i>Continuamente vemos novidades diferentes, em tudo da eperança: do mal ficam as mágoas na lembrança, e do bem (se algum houve), as saudades</i>	<i>We always see different new things In every aspect of hope From bad things we keep the sorrows From good things (if there is one), the saudade.</i>

As the son of a glorious past, chanted in the epic poem *Os Lusíadas*, and of a conquering nation, as configured by Pessoa, the Portuguese people cannot avoid feeling a hollow in the soul. See: *Prece* (Prayer) by Fernando Pessoa): ⇒

Original (Portuguese)	Free translation (English)
<i>Senhor, a noite veio e a alma é vil. Tanta foi a tormenta e a vontade! Restam-nos hoje, no silêncio hostil, O mar universal e a saudade.</i>	<i>Lord, one night and one sould is vile. So much has been the storm and the will! There remain us today, in the hostile silence, The universal sea and the saudade.</i>

Inside or outside Portugal, the Lusitanian people fell themselves unknown and decayed from an ancient splendor – real or imaginary (Lourenço, 1999). Good reason for been discreet among other cultures and apparently ready to mingle. But they never despise completely their cultural background, because their longing soul shall be always trying to fill the void space, by a heartfelt memory. In his trying-to-be epic poem *Mensagem* (Message) ⇒, Pessoa describes Portugal as a looking face, a sphinx staring the West, to the future of past. And we, Luso-Africans,

Luso-Brazilians, Luso-Americans or Luso-Canadians look back to it - as we are doing now by discussing this topic. Then, in Camões, in Pessoa and Pascoaes (Teixeira de Pascoaes) we can find the roots of the “saudosismo” - a movement that tried to promote *saudade* into a national spiritual value that could have transformative power, or into a philosophy to translate the lusitanic spirit. Pacoaes states: “When I say Saudade, I mean the Portuguese soul” (BOTELHO & TEIXEIRA, 1986, p. 25) ⇒



Original (Portuguese)	Translation (by Richard Zenith)
<p><u>O Dos Castelos</u> Fita, com olhar esfíngico e fatal, O Ocidente, future do passado. O rosto com que fita é Portugal</p>	<p>The field of the Castles Enigmatic and fateful she stares, Out West, to the future of the past. The staring face is Portugal.</p>

By definition, *saudade* is, according to Teixeira de Pascoaes, “*o desejo da cousa ou criatura amada, tornado dolorido pela ausência*” – “The longing for the loved one, become bitter by the absence” (Botelho & Texeira, 1986, p. 25). All the definitions are more or less comprised within this meaning. Amongst 3.000 popular sayings, gathered by the Portuguese writer Antônio Borges de Castro, there is a curious one: *Saudade, eternidade do amor, memória do coração* (*Saudade, eternity of love, memory of the heart*), although there are some particularities when we discuss the differences of understanding in Portugal and in Brazil.

In terms of general use, in Portugal *saudade* is bitter and sadder than it is in Brazil. The Portuguese people talk about dying of *saudade*, and also links it to tears, suffering, loss, death and bygones. In our country, the feeling has a less somber background or tone because it is more used to express a happier state of mind, despite the loss: We have *saudade* of our childhood, of the good moments we had in a certain place, or with a certain person, and so on. The events or people we miss are closer in time and space than their representation for a Portuguese fellow. When the

Brazilian composer and singer Tom Jobim explored the term in his song “Samba do avião” (the airplane samba), the expression: “My soul sings / I see Rio de Janeiro / I am dying of *saudade*” is not in a negative sense, or in a morbid meaning, but in a way of great happiness or a deep love.

Even among the romantic poets of the Nineteenth Century, when they literally died for love, the sense in Casimiro de Abreu (1839-1860), one of the most distinguished Brazilian romantic poets, is sweeter, as we can see: ⇒ (optinal)

Original (Portuguese)	Translation (free)
<p>MEUS OITO ANOS</p> <p>Oh que saudades que tenho Da aurora da minha vida, Da minha infância querida Que os anos não trazem mais! Que amor, que sonho, que flores, Naquelas tardes fagueiras À sombra das bananeiras Debaixo dos laranjais! (...)</p>	<p>MY EIGHT YEAR OLD TIMES</p> <p>Oh, how much saudade I have Of the dawn of my life, Of my dear childhood That the years bring no more! What love, what a dream, what flowers, Those tender afternoons In the shade of banana trees Under the orange groves!</p>

Optional paragraph (depending on the time):

In terms of a sociological (or geographical) understanding, the term is more used in the inner parts of the country. In the states, such as Minas Gerais, Goiás and mostly in all the states of the Northeast region, the sense is deeper and the word more commonly used. According to Tobias (1997, p. 52), “the poetry produced by the people of the *Sertão* (wilderness) comes out of the same atmosphere they breathe: *saudade*”. Their traditional music tells us about much this day-to-day poetry transformed in popular songs and rhythms chanted by everyone in a longing and melancholic way. Asa Branca (White wing), by Luis Gonzaga is a good example of that. While the songs of Fado, especially in the voice of Amália Rodrigues, long for a romantic love, the *sertanejo*'s songs mourn over a suffering in an existential sense.

Coming to an end, Teixeira de Pascoaes, Joaquim de Carvalho and Ramón Piñero (the Galician), among others, tried to stablish an existentialist philosophy of the feeling, creating a movement, called *saudosismo* (loging), as an ontological way of being. *Saudade*, like a goddess, was supposed to be a new way of transcendence, of religion and of existence. In order to support such an understanding. they quote Camões (apud Botelho & Teixeira, 1986, p. 36): ⇒

Original (Portuguese)	Translation (free)
Não é logo a saudade	It is not like the <i>saudade</i>

Das terras onde nasceu A carne – mas é do céu, Daquela santa cidade Donde est'alma descendeu.	Of the land where was born The flesh - but it is of heaven, Of that holy city From where the soul descended.
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By this perspective, more than a feeling, *saudade* has been transformed into an idea, in the sense of *eidos*, in order to reinforce the nostalgic *ethos* as the Portuguese character *par excellence*. A universe of meaning has been constructed around the term, despite the existence of similar words in other tongues. Attached to the Portuguese soul by poets along history, the word became popular, and specific.

Apart of the religious fervor, what we see is an attempt to establish a concept, proper to our culture. If we use the word *paideia* as an old Greek concept of education, and also the German term *bildung* to talk about a specific type of human formation, we can as well conceptualize *saudade* as a specific type of feeling to express the state of mind we develop when we feel deeply a sweet-bitter remembrance which loss is hard to forget and which memory is hard to forsake. Even in foreign nations, like the Portuguese living here. Dodman (2016) in her book *Andarilha, viagens de um hífen*, points out that most people from Azores living abroad do live only to have the opportunity to return, not driven only by the wish to show off and be seen by the relatives, but because a big *saudade* drives them back.

Anyways, what I am really afraid of is that, as it is happening in Brazil, this nostalgic feeling can be overthrown by the cultural liquidity (Bauman) we are living in nowadays. My questioning is: Will young people be able to understand a feeling that can draw them backways while living in a fluid society pushing them always forwards? I wonder if even in the Lusophonic world *saudade* might end up as a lexical idiosyncrasy used in the past and existent only within academic spaces.

In conclusion, there is a book published in Brazil: A thousand trovas of Love and Saudade, in which we can find a sensitive one: “A Saudade? Quem se atreve, / neste mundo, a define-la? / Quando muito o que se deve / É mesmo poder senti-la...”. (Saudade? Who dares to define it in this world? At most we have to feel it). And, according to the popular Portuguese saying: “quem parte leva saudades, quem fica saudades tem” (who goes away *saudades* takes, who stays back *saudades* keeps), I will certainly have *saudades* of this meeting, and I hope you can catch the sense and taste it someday. Thank you all.

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