By titling his collection of essays *There's No Word for Saudade: Perspectives on the Literature and Culture of Portuguese America*, George Monteiro challenges the reader to follow his inquiry into the culture of his ancestors and into the fortunes of its transplantation to North America. *Saudade*, we learn, almost close to the end, in chapter 20, is the beguiling word for those who deal with Portuguese language. It is a powerful resonance that from the title to the near conclusion of the book envelopes the fundamental condition of the emigrant. When borrowed by poets, playwrights and fiction writers, it lends their work the mysterious aura of spiritual and emotional states that rarely translate by a single word into languages other than the Portuguese. The book is a testimonial of a brilliant critical mind and analyst going through the riddle of words, images, metaphors as symbolic conveyors of literary experience in the New World.

George Monteiro is well placed to do such an inquiry for he moves at ease between the culture of his country and the native culture of his ancestors. Born in the USA and growing up in the Portuguese community of Valley Falls (Cumberland, RI), Monteiro was a regular customer of Clube Juventude Lusitana at the same time he was getting an American education in primary school and high school, from where he went to the Universities of Brown and Columbia. His Master’s and PhD degrees allowed him to pursue an academic career, in which he became a distinguished professor at Brown University in the fields of American and Portuguese Literatures. His familiarity with these two areas of study places him in a privileged position to establish analogies and differences, to stress influences and singularities, when it comes to evaluate the literary scene in both fields. *There's No Word for Saudade* brings the two cultures inevitably face to face throughout the volume, most visibly in chapters that focus on the fortune of Portuguese characters in the works of American and English writers. Chapter 3 is such an instance, with a reference, among others, to Twain’s hilarious record of the pseudonymous Pedro Carolino’s attempt to provide a conversation guide in Portuguese and English.

Roughly grouped into two sections, the first in the volume is mainly directed at the analysis of what may be described as the literary output of Portuguese writers
who emigrated to the USA and of American writers of Portuguese descent who are carving a niche in a scene otherwise dominated by a well-established canon, in which Portuguese-American visibility has been scarce. The second section drives Monteiro’s inquiry into the field of emigrant culture and Portuguese cultural production of different kinds as it reaches the United States and is appropriated by those who, like him, respond and, often, place it in the wider frame of the USA reception.

Within the first grouping, the chapters on John Dos Passos and John Philip Sousa offer the reader an overview of a writer and a composer who also authored novels, both were born in the USA and were totally assimilated to the culture of their native country. The following chapters, however, provide a survey of the contemporary Portuguese-American writing, which has emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. Particularly interesting is the compilation of poems that show the quality attained by Portuguese-American verse in this age of sophisticated language awareness and emotional disclosure. Monteiro’s expertise as a critical reader – he is also an acclaimed poet and translator – comes forth in the remaining chapters. Focused on individual writers, either on authors who were born in the United States or Portuguese writers who emigrated there, the specific role of each writer is highlighted as well as their distinctive contribution to American literature.

From chapters 5 to 9, the reader is appraised of Charles Reis Felix’s talent at turning “the recollections of experience into imaginative art”; or of Julian Silva’s very ‘American’ creation of a representative Portuguese family who settled in a territory of the imagination, called San Oriel; or of Frank Gaspar’s commitment to “the value of art” and his responsibility as a poet and a novelist in Leaving Pico. Finally, George Monteiro assigns chapter 9 to the analysis of poetry by Thomas J. Braga and Olivio A. Lopes. He points out the “unifying note of loving nostalgic festivity,” together with the Emersonian love for the commonplace and the occasional mock heroic vein. In contrast to Braga’s acknowledgement of his Portuguese ancestry, Olivio A. Lopes writes poems that are best described from his lines, “a two-hundred-year exile/ from the mother tongue,” barely acknowledging a progeny that is absent from his creative endeavor.

George Monteiro’s empathy with his fellow writers surfaces all along the different critical appraisals, none more visibly than when he analogizes a father’s trial in face of his son’s cancer-endangered life to the perilous quest of the medieval tradition in “Hostage to Fortune,” considering the book to be sublime “in the poetry of its form and texture”; or when, writing about Laura Bulger’s immigration stories, he deems them to be “impressive fictional accomplishments in their own right” in the chapter titled “Canadian ‘Gees.’” It is in this chapter that Monteiro memorably speaks of the emigrant/immigrant venture as that “non place occupied by those who physically, if not always spiritually or psychologically, leave one place to take up residence in another.” Chapters on José Rodrigues Miguéis and Onésimo Teotónio Almeida explore such a condition and how it is handled in their respective works. Together with the
detailed attention to everyday life in Manhattan, where Miguéis lived for nearly forty years, Monteiro elects storytelling and the autobiographical penchant as main features of this writer’s fiction as well as of his memoir of an illness, *Um Homem Sorri à Morte—Com Meia Cara*. The plight of the Azorean emigrant and his unmistakable lingo are the matter chosen by Onésimo for his short fiction volume titled (*Sapateia Americana*). Set on the imaginary Tenth Island named (LUSA)lândia, whose real octopus-like tentacles reach into Hawaii, stretch across the United States and go up into Canada, Onésimo’s characters are, in Monteiro’s opinion, fleshed out by the author’s unique ability to reproduce “the energetic crudities of emigrant speech” and, simultaneously encase them “in his own educated though clear diction and supple literary style”.

George Monteiro’s analysis of journalist and correspondent Vamberto Freitas introduces a different emigrant figure in the volume, whose concern for “quotidian ironies and the larger issues” made the pieces collected in his *Jornal da Emigração—a L(USA)lândia Reinventada* an important link among the transatlantic Portuguese communities. This chapter bridges the passage into the last grouping of essays which, like a glove, fit into the author’s admission that the volume reflects his “personal mindset of interests, attitudes and issues.” Monteiro’s range of interests is wide and in pursuit of cultural marks: a movie called *Mystic Pizza*, after the town where the action is set and in which three teenage girls of Portuguese descent are featured, is a pre-text for a flashback to “the Summer People,” a poem by James Merrill about Stonington, where Azoreans had been whalers and are now part of the town’s permanent residents; a literary spoof titled *Manuelo’s Narrative* might have been the first Portuguese work of fiction, were it not authored by an American called Cornelius Cole; the account of the good fortune enjoyed by John Francis, the son of an Azorean emigrant, who was befriended by Eugene O’Neill and the Provincetown theatre group. In this last section of the volume, George Monteiro’s inquiry is often directed at the footprints left by the experiences of Azorean emigrants, their dreams and nightmares in the New World, as they are caught by Onésimo Teotónio Almeida in *Ab! Mônim dum Corisco!* Azorean emigration is very much at the heart of this section, and the closing chapter, titled “The Shiftless Azoreans,” focuses on their role as characters in canonical American literature.

There are also chapters about Portuguese culture in general and its impact abroad. The reappraisal of “Old-Country” movies watched in childhood, fifty years later, entails the exposure of the satiric blows that escaped the censorship of Salazar’s regime. The longest chapter in the book deals with the translation and reception in the United States of two classic novels, Eça de Queiros’ *O Primo Basílio* and Júlio Dinis’ *Os Fidalgos da Casa Mourisca*. It is a rigorous charter of the inquiring critical mind at work. The word *saudade* is also subject to a similar inquiry in chapter 20. George Monteiro’s forays in such a diversity of matters draws the reader beyond established categories and confined expectations in *There’s No Word for Saudade*. He claims that “in these essays written over a period of three decades” it was never his intention “to cover the range and scope of
Portuguese-American culture.” From my point of view, he does something more useful and more difficult to achieve – he allows the reader to have a glimpse of the soul behind a given culture and does it in such a lively discourse that, at the end, we are left with the feeling that this is a long overdue piece of scholarship and creative writing.


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