

quiet interlude,  
Amêndoa Amarga\*

Alex Macedo

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\*Licor de Amêndoa Amarga (Bitter almond liqueur) is a sweet alcoholic beverage, particularly hailing from the Algarve region. It has a clear, light yellow color. This liqueur is widely known in Portugal and is crafted from bitter almond seeds.

The bitter almond is abundantly found in the Algarve region, but it was not commonly harvested or consumed due to its intensely bitter taste and high cyanide concentration in its fruits. However, through the process of crushing, maceration, and distillation, both the bitter flavor and cyanide traces are entirely eliminated. The result is a smooth and sweet liqueur that bears no resemblance to the negative attributes of its raw material.

\*\* In Portuguese, the term “bitter” (amargo) carries a distinct connotation when used to describe a feeling. While it shares the same meaning as in English or German regarding taste, in Portuguese it is more closely associated with emotions such as sadness, anguish, and heartbreak, rather than anger and disappointment.

20. – 30. June 2023  
11am – 9pm

Oskar-Kokoschka-Platz 2,  
1010 Vienna

Schwanzer-Trakt, 6th floor,  
Studios of the  
Painting Department

The first rays of morning sunshine hit my knees as I sip on a coffee and a glass of orange juice at the local pastry shop. Usually, I don't eat in the morning, and I should work on changing that habit at some point, but I'll give it a try tomorrow. My father is settling the bill while another person approaches him and asks how long he's been back in town. What initially sounded like a brief conversation turned into a heartfelt chat about the old days and how fewer people are frequenting the cafe, causing old school friends to grow distant. In moments like these, I often find myself craving a cigarette, but my parents still haven't come to terms with the fact that I smoke, so I refrain from indulging. I miss my usual morning routines at times like these.

As usual, we try to go to the beach as early as possible, but it never really works out, and it's already past 11. According to everyone, the morning sun is more pleasant, and the weather tends to change in the afternoon. Weather conditions on the coast are always a mystery. My parents say that when it's cloudy in town, it looks like a good day at the beach, but it's usually the opposite when the sun is shining. In my experience, it's frequently cloudy and windy. The salt breeze is, in fact, a mixture of sand and dried-out algae that whips you more or less gently on the body. The ocean is quite agitated and cold. The Atlantic Ocean is always rough, so I often wonder why bother to get close to it? While there are many rivers around us with calm, warm water and no strong currents to swim against, everyone is drawn to the sea. It's a curious gamble. "It might be one of those days," I would hear, and occasionally it was. And if not, the sky might be clearer the next day.

As I enter the car and get comfortable on the backseat for the short 15-minute drive to the coast, I put on my earphones to seek a bit of quietness before going to the seaside. After scrolling through my playlist, I realize that I downloaded an album<sup>1</sup>, which is a recording of an evening at Amália Rodrigues<sup>2</sup>' house where she invited Vinicius de Moraes<sup>3</sup> and some other guests for a private event. They would read poems to guitar sounds and sing samba<sup>4</sup> and fado<sup>5</sup>. He says in a humorous way that it was his biggest audacity to write a Brazilian fado for her before starting to sing.



*“O sal das minhas lágrimas de amor,  
criou o mar que existe entre nós dois, para nos unir e separar, pudesse eu te  
dizer, a dor que dói dentro de mim  
que mói meu coração nesta paixão, que não tem fim.”<sup>6</sup>*

*“The salt of my tears of love created the sea,  
That exists between the two of us to unite and separate, Could I tell you the  
pain that hurts inside me,  
That grinds my heart in this passion that has no end.”*

Listening to this, I think it’s funny how I seem to understand every word, but at the same time, none at all. This sense of saudade, a deep emotional state of nostalgia or melancholy, seems to have had an impact on him. The second verse was as melancholic and sad as the first one.

*“Meu bem, sempre que ouvires um lamento,  
Crescer desolador na voz do vento,  
Sou eu em solidão pensando em ti,  
Chorando todo o tempo que perdi.”<sup>7</sup>*

*“My dear, whenever you hear a cry  
Grow, heartbreaking, in the voice of the wind,  
It’s me in solitude thinking about you,  
Crying for all the time I wasted.”*

I think about the special relationship that fado singers seem to have with the ocean, and I can understand why it is so romanticized. The vastness, unpredictability, and beauty of the ocean have always been a source of inspiration for many. The ever-changing moods and colors, from the serene blue of a calm day to the raging grey of a storm, evoke a range of emotions. The ocean’s vastness, with the unknown, the mysterious, and the unexplored, has always been intriguing to people, despite its conflicted historical meanings, that what is left unsaid in idealisation. However, I have always had a distant relationship with it, as I only knew it during the summer, and the rest of the year it felt far away. It would feel hypocritical to claim that I feel the same way about it as others because it would leave me with a sense of unease.

As Amália Rodrigues starts singing her interpretation of the same song, I drift away and become almost hypnotized by her voice and presence. A quick glance out of the car window reveals that we have left the freeway, and I can see the eucalyptus trees<sup>8</sup> swaying slowly in the distance.



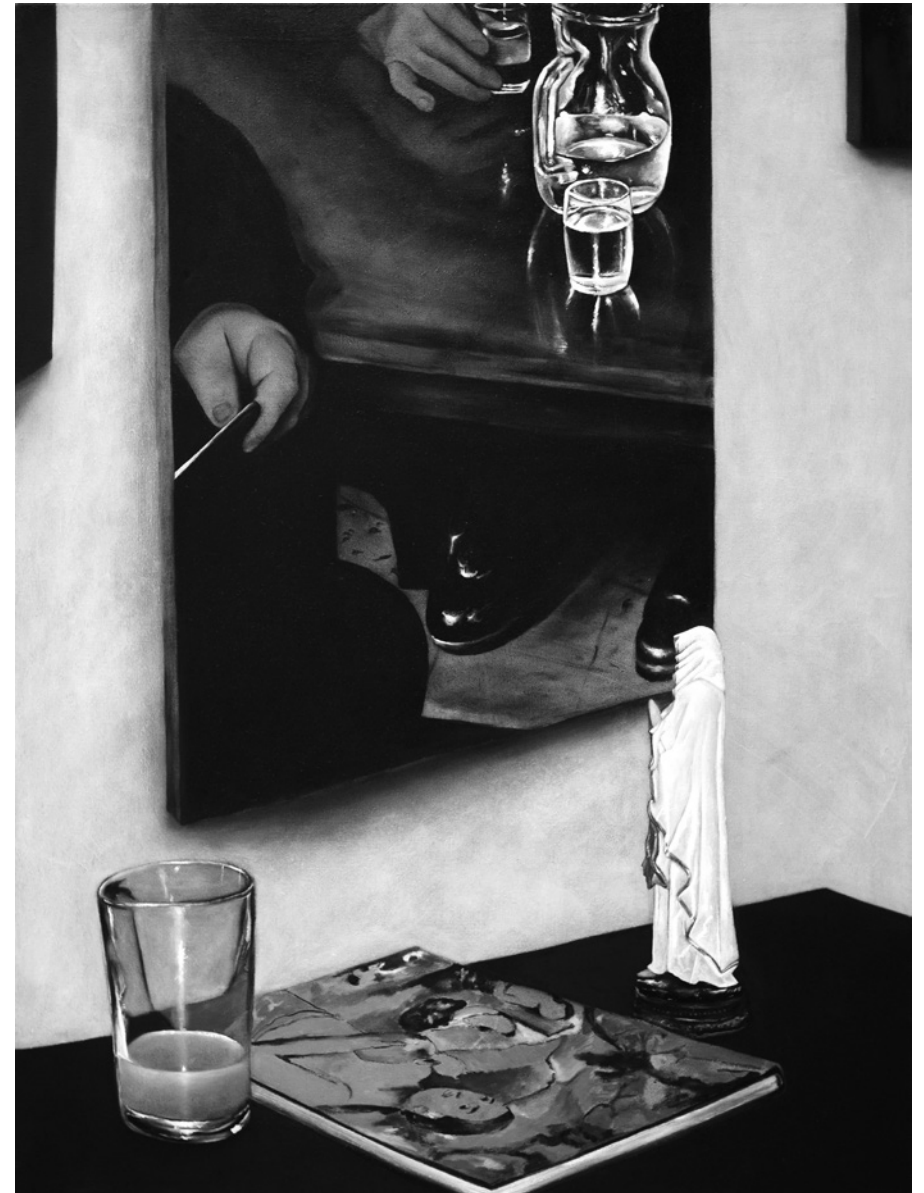
b

As we enter the small town, I realize that it is the end of August and the yearly Catholic festival is in full swing. The streets are adorned with colorful and inexpensive decorations that will light up at night. Today, the procession will pass through town, and the doors of the church are wide open. Men dressed as seaweed farmers will carry heavily arranged flower bouquets and patron saints on their shoulders. Local women are already dressed in traditional clothing and are putting on the last of their many inherited gold chains. The large, improvised stage for the concert later that evening in the old town square is almost complete.

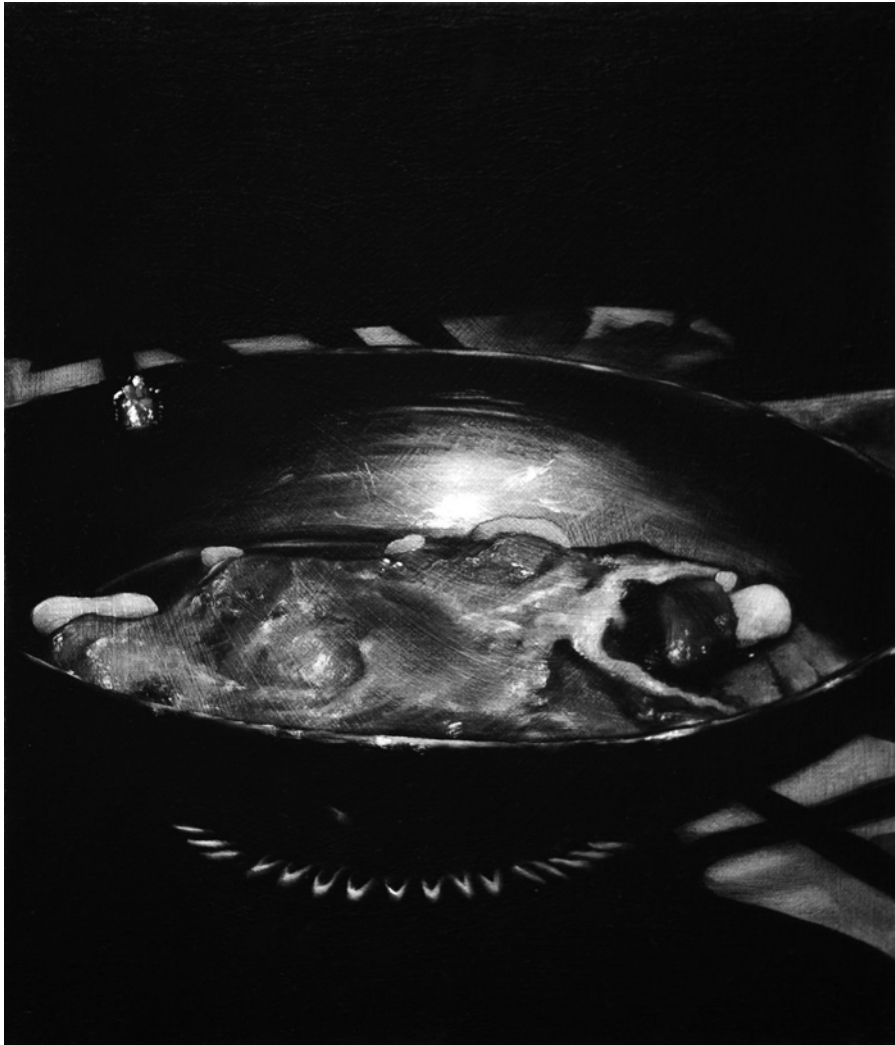
After installing the windscreen and laying the last towels on the sand I start to perceive strange noises. The speakers installed throughout the town blast a mix of Holy Mary prayers, radio or popular music, and the ads for car garages. The sound of the speakers is so distorted that you can almost hear how badly they have been sabotaged by the salty environment over the years. This is quite annoying to me, at least. Most people around me wouldn't care, and some even enjoy it. The sound of jolly music will even bring a smile to some of the grey faces and sometimes incite people to start the yearly comedy performance that breaks the monotony of the afternoons. I usually find comfort in Portuguese 80s radio songs or when the voice of Amália Rodrigues makes a rare appearance. It would feel right to read one of the books I brought with me now. These moments seem appropriate for this. I might have found what I had been longing for. However, they only last for a few moments. The "Arraial triste"<sup>9</sup> or "the sad camp fest" is not happening that day, or any day, for that matter.

At some point, I would turn my attention to the magazines about TV reality shows and football journals lying around. I might grab one of these before they disappear under the sand. Or I might go for a short expedition to test the water.

The outcome is usually the same: the temperature drops quickly while getting near the water. The first stones and mussel shells start to stick into my feet, and the moment I come into contact with the water, I feel the coldness in my bones. Apparently, a lot of people left some tears in the sand if you listen to fado, but for me, it seems like an odd place to do that. A quick dip seems appropriate now, but the red flag is waving, so I guess I'll stand there for a bit longer, watching the horizon and how blurry it gets the longer I look at it.







d

Sitting on the towel afterwards, my feet are still cold, and the water is running slowly down from my knees while the sand sticks to my legs and feet. The horizon looks different from here, but maybe it's just my head playing tricks on me. A quick look at the watch makes me wonder if it is already time to go or if I will do this same routine again.

Before leaving, my mother makes the usual quick detour to the fish market. I never bothered to go with her, never really liked fish in the first place. I always just hoped it wouldn't be the tiny sardines<sup>10</sup>. It seemed so cruel to eat them. With a pretty full plastic bag, she would come back, and I wouldn't know what's inside. Actually, I never really cared. I was ready for the drive back home and a short nap from an exhausting day at the beach.

Back at home, it was always warmer, and the wind wouldn't blow. The air is dryer, and the stone soil would give a comforting feeling while the sun would start to settle. Here I sit, trying to listen to the sea and write before leaving it be to get the bread for dinner. The sardines are ready to be put on the grill.

1. Rodrigues, A., De Moraes, V. (1970). *Amália/Vinicius*. EMI- Valentim de Carvalho.
2. Amália Rodrigues (1920-1999) was a Portuguese fado singer and actress, known as the “Queen of Fado.” Her soulful voice and captivating performances popularized fado music both in Portugal and internationally. Amália Rodrigues remains an iconic figure in Portuguese culture, leaving a lasting impact on the genre. Her apolitical stance during the dictatorship of Salazar from 1932 to 1968 was often criticized, although she did indeed collaborate with regime opponents.
3. Vinicius de Moraes (1913-1980) was a prominent Brazilian poet, lyricist, and musician. He played a significant role in the development of bossa nova, a popular musical genre that emerged in Brazil in the late 1950s. Vinicius de Moraes is best known for his collaborations with renowned musicians, such as Tom Jobim and João Gilberto, which produced timeless songs like “Garota de Ipanema” (The Girl from Ipanema). His poetic and romantic lyrics, coupled with his melodic compositions, have made him a revered figure in Brazilian music and literature.
4. Samba is a lively music and dance style originating in Brazil, known for its energetic rhythms and vibrant performances. Rooted in Afro-Brazilian culture, samba has become a symbol of Brazil's dynamic spirit and rich heritage, gaining international recognition and influencing music genres worldwide.
5. Fado is a traditional Portuguese music genre originating in the early 19th century, primarily associated with the working-class neighborhoods of Lisbon and Coimbra. Known for its soulful and melancholic melodies that explore themes of love, longing, and fate, fado features heartfelt vocals accompanied by a Portuguese guitar and classical guitar. The performances of fado create an intimate and emotive atmosphere, immersing listeners in the realm of saudade, a Portuguese word encompassing a profound sense of longing and nostalgia.
6. De Moraes, V. (1970). *Saudades do Brasil em Portugal*. On Amália/Vinicius. Portugal: EMI- Valentim de Carvalho.

7. Rodrigues, A. (1970). *Saudades do Brasil em Portugal*. On Amália/Vinicius. Portugal: EMI- Valentim de Carvalho.

8. The proliferation of eucalyptus trees in Portugal has generated significant concerns and sparked ongoing debates due to multiple reasons. Originally introduced from Australia in the mid-20th century for its rapid growth and economic advantages, particularly in the pulp and paper industry, the extensive cultivation of eucalyptus has resulted in various environmental and social issues. Notably, the high water consumption of eucalyptus trees has contributed to the depletion of local water sources and has exacerbated drought conditions. Furthermore, the flammable nature of eucalyptus poses a significant risk during wildfires, which have become increasingly devastating in recent years. Additionally, the dense monoculture of eucalyptus trees has adverse effects on biodiversity, displacing native plant species and reducing habitat diversity. The expansion of eucalyptus plantations has also raised concerns regarding land-use conflicts and the displacement of traditional agricultural practices.

9. Moura, A. (2022). *Arraial Triste*. On Casa Guilhermina. Portugal: Independant Label- Ana Moura, Pedro da Linha, Pedro Mafama, Conan Osíris and Joao Bessa

10. The issue surrounding sardine fishing in Portugal is a complex matter that centers on the pressing concerns of overfishing, diminishing sardine stocks, and the socio-economic impact on coastal communities. The combined factors of unregulated fishing practices and the influence of climate change have significantly contributed to the decline in sardine populations. Consequently, this has led to ecological ramifications and has posed significant challenges to the livelihoods of those dependent on sardine fishing. In response to these pressing issues, concerted efforts are being made to implement sustainable fishing practices and conservation measures that aim to safeguard the long-term viability of sardine stocks.

Footnotes generated by ChatGPT, May 30, 2023, OpenAI

a

s.t. 2023

Oil on linen

70 x 35 cm

2023

b

s.t. 2023

Oil on linen

75 x 124 cm

2023

c

s.t. 2023

Oil on linen

120 x 90 cm

2023

d

s.t. 2023 (Film still from *Vitalina Varela* by Pedro Costa)

Oil on linen

40 x 32 cm

2023

*Um obrigado especial para:*

Henning Bohl

Ulla Rossek

Sergei Tcherepnin

Hannes Loichinger

Kamen Stoyanov

Sarah Scholtes

Quirin Babl

Takeshi Yoshida

Ani Gurashvili

Vika Prokopaviciute

Vanessa Schmidt

Richard Klippfeld

Marei Buhmann

Marcia Schmidt

Rodrigo Pereira Macedo

Maria Celeste Gonçalves Pereira

Sofia Pereira Macedo

Liliana Pereira Macedo

*A saudade perdura, mas levar-te-ei sempre comigo,  
no meu coração.*

