ANTÓNIO LOBO ANTUNES

(1942-)



Portuguese writer, born in 1942, in Lisbon. Graduated in Psychiatric Medicine, he practiced clinical activity during the Colonial War in Angola and, subsequently, in Lisbon, at Miguel Bombarda Hospital. After the publication of *Os Cus de Judas* (1979) [*The Land at the End of the World*], he became one of the most translated and internationally renowned Portuguese contemporary novelists; since that novel which completes an auto-biographic-inspired trilogy, which includes *Conhecimento do Inferno* [*Knowledge of Hell*] and *Memória de Elefante* [*Elephant's Memory*], describing a descent to the infernos, from the experience of the Colonial War to the loss of love and the return to a world of crazy people, Lobo Antunes, in the 1980's, gradually perfected his aplomb in the subversion of conventional narratives both from the thematic and the formal points of view, which would culminate in the dazzling success of *Auto dos Danados* [*Act of the Damned*] (1985). The constant crossing of voices and the multiplication of points of view, the free sequencing of the time substrates, the disarticulation of the narrative syntaxis, the peculiar and frequently eroticised metaphorisation of the descriptions, the self-referenciality and intertextuality, the articulation versatility of several language registries and the use of an uncensored lexicon, frequently aggressive and insulting, or the individualisation of anti-heroes through whom one views an abject reality, socially, historically and morally degraded, are some of the features that have substantiated, since then, the novelty brought by António Lobo Antunes' novelistic.

Europe is quoted, **geographically**, through the mentioning of countries and cities, at three levels:

– as a venue for an evasion, both economic and physical, from the families linked to the *statu quo* of the Salazar regime, for example, the family of the lieutenant's in-laws in *Fado Alexandrino*, the family of Sofia (João's wife), in *Manual dos Inquisidores*, [*The Inquisitors' Manual*], or the family of patriarch Diogo, in *Auto dos Danados*.

In this context, several places are referred: Spain (Madrid), Switzerland (Zurich, Geneva and Lausanne), Luxembourg, Paris and London – the latter four as *offshores*, for capital transfers, derived from the patrimony of these land-owning families;

– Spain is also regarded as an escape destination for the "terrorist groups", either radical left ones (*Tratado das Paixões da Alma*) [Treatise on the Passions of the Soul], or radical right ones (*Exortação aos Crocodilos*) [*Warning to the Crocodiles*] – Corunna –; in the latter novel, there is a tacit agreement between Franco's regime and this organisation in order to, from this territory, sow the seeds of a counterrevolution (led by it).

This country can also be used as an oneiric counterpoint to the experienced reality, namely in *Exortação aos Crocodilos*, when Mimi recalls her grandmother, Mummy Alicia, who asserted that "in Galicia, it rains the whole time and roses arise from the sea"; on the other hand, Carlos and the other travesties in *Que Farei Quando Tudo Arde?* [*What Can I Do When Everything's on Fire?*], go to Spain aiming at improving their economic condition, but return equally poor.

At the political-civilizational level, one finds **politically** frequent references to communism, metonymically associated to the "Russians", the "Bolsheviks" and the "Cossacks", who, with "balalaikas", would invade Portugal (it should be underlined that, this ideology is often referred to in a *carnivalesque way* – such as in the case of Sofia, in *Manual dos Inquisidores* – , to display the caricaturised point of view of the dominant classes of the former regime in relation to that political tendency, during April's revolutionary events).

The set of countries previously designated as *East Bloc are* regarded as a "horde of malefactors" (*Fado Alexandrino*).

The **European Union**, or its origin (the former E.E.C.), is viewed negatively, since, for a far-left terrorist group (namely, one of its members, the Man), it would promote the free movement of people and goods, which would enable the extradition of "putative fugitives" (*Tratado das Paixões da Alma*).

In another perspective, even if in a very timid way, it alludes to the *nepotism* that the European institutions would allegedly favour, when, in the same work, the Investigating Judge perceives that "Brussels" is a bad faith alluring of the Secretary of State, in exchange for the resolution of the proceedings involving the aforementioned group.

In civilizational terms, there is occasionally a satirical view of Europeans, as tourists in Portugal, as "androgynous English women" (*Memória de Elefante*) and "Germans, solitary as washed out poplars, planted in the roots of the gigantic slippers of Roman gladiators" (*Auto dos Danados*).

It is also appropriate to refer the presence of Judaism, even if very much circumscribed to the characters of a Jewish man and his sister, escapees from Nazism, in the novel *Caminho como uma Casa em Chamas* [Walking as a House on Fire]. Finally, **at the cultural level**, there is a fertile occurrence of intellectual references to writers, philosophers, painters, sculptors, filmmakers, among others – such as, Marx, Cimabue, Vermeer, Velazquez, Chopin, Debussy, Godard, Fellini, Barthes, Michelet, Engels, Lenin, Giacometti, São Luiz Gonzaga, Agatha Christie, Jean Ferrat, Truffaut, Cézanne, Marcus Aurelius, Claudel, Matisse, Van Gogh, Mozart, Marlene Dietrich, Visconti, Toynbee, Dreyer, Marguerite Duras, Schubert, Stendhal, Delvaux, Freud, Tchekov, Corin Tellado, Hitchcock, Dylan Thomas, Rafael Alberti, Melanie Klein, inter alia. The listing would be endless and fastidious, an exhaustive cast; it should be stressed that this profusion happens mostly in the early works, such as, *Memória de Elefante* or *Explicação dos Pássaros* [*An Explanation of the Birds*]. These references operate on three levels: use of a comparative nature within the diegetic universe as, for example, in "afternoons […] perfect in colour and light, like a painting by Matisse […]" (*Memória de Elefante*); transfiguration of reality (for example, Leslie Caron and sets from the film *Gigi* as a

magical escape, in contrast with Nuno's practice, in *Auto dos Danados*) and the parodic sense with and alternative vision of the official History as is the case of the characters of the poet Frederico Garcia Lorca and the filmmaker Luis Buñuel deemed as gipsy traffickers (*As Naus*) [*The Return of the Caravels*].

In a final note, one should highlight the contingency of quoting from other works, although the analysis of the *aforementioned* topics was made taking that into account; thus, one proceeded to its indexation in the "Selected Active Bibliography" item.

Selected active bibliography

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— (2007a) *Fado Alexandrino*, Lisboa, Publicações Dom Quixote, [1983].

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— (2010), *Sôbolos Rios que vão*, Lisboa, Publicações Dom Quixote.

— (2011), *Comissão das Lágrimas*, Lisboa, Publicações Dom Quixote.

— (2012), *Não É Meia Noite Quem Quer, Lisboa*, Publicações Dom Quixote.

— (2014), *Caminho Como Uma Casa Em Chamas*, Lisboa, Publicações Dom Quixote.

— (2015), *Da Natureza Dos Deuses, Lisboa*, Publicações Dom Quixote.

— (2016), *Para Aquela Que Está Sentada No Escuro À Minha Espera, Lisboa*, Publicações Dom Quixote.

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