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A Silent Scream:  
Trauma and Madness  
in the Early Works of  
António Lobo  
Antunes

Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

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*in memory of my grandmother, Mariana Inácia dos Santos Rato*

## Acknowledgements

This has been a labour of love, pain and sacrifice. I could not have made it without every single one of you.

First and foremost, to my supervisors, Professor Bernard McGuirk (mentor and guide against contrarian tides) and Dr. Adam Sharman (reassuring reader and most valuable adviser). To both of you, my sincere thanks for the patience and for the intellectual and personal guidance.

To Prof. Ana Gabriela Macedo, who opened my eyes to academic passion.

To my family:

My grandfather, Sebastião Rato, whose belief in my capabilities has kept me going, through darkness and light. My mother, Luísa, to whom I owe my life and the sense of humour that kept me afloat in the worst of times. My brother Carlos, the real body behind the words of this thesis, your suffering will never be forgotten. To my sisters Natasha and Laura, love, unconditional. To my lovely niece Mariana, ray of hope and source of joy.

To my father, who instilled in me the love for literature. To Ana, António and Rui, for the support and the laughter.

To my dear friends:

Yves Gilonne, for being there, for listening and keeping my spirits up. I owe you more than words can tell. And of course to Kate Gilonne, Éliot Gilonne and Bolt.

Rui Miranda, for the friendship, the timely reminders to keep going, for the belief in my work and the enlightening conversations. To Alexandra Campos, thank you.

David Smith, who taught me the inside of the earth, fellow traveller on this path.

Henrique and Mónica, we're always be together, together in electric dreams.

Onur, brother in arms.

Rúben, Manu, Erica, Professor Jeremy Lawrance, Gareth Stockey and the entire Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies Department.

Tasabeeh, for assuaging the torments of my heart, Apoorva, Carlos, Licheng and Ling, Jeena, Alia and everyone else at Lincoln. You're really my second family.

To everyone in the office: Ben, Izzy, Margarita and Mel (thanks for everything, fags and all), and everyone else, too many to mention. You all know who you are!

To the Reds (Chris, Ashot, Steve, Christie, Callum and all those who proudly have worn the colours over the years).

Finally, to Zoë, thank you for sharing your life with me, and Cintia, to whom I owe my love and gratitude. You know you'll always live within me.

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## Introduction

This thesis aims to invite the reader into a journey, guided by António Lobo Antunes texts, in particular his three initial novels; *Memória de Elefante* (1979), *Os Cus de Judas* (1979) and *Conhecimento do Inferno* (1980).

Throughout the journey, which is in reality a downwards journey, the reader will be invited to reflect upon the different dimensions, existing in tension, in the author's work, namely those of Writer/Soldier/Doctor. The *biographical* quality of his writing will permit a successful articulation of such dimensions, never losing from sight the wider context of the Lusophone world.

The tensions resulting from the points of contact between these dimension originate in that *locus horrendous* that was the so-called Portuguese Colonial War and its aftermath, a war in which the author directly participated and whose scars still run deep in Portuguese (and not only) society.

Thus, there will be a long two-part meditation on the context by way of illustrating the issues raised via textual analysis of the novels; with the further, deeper and particular perspective of Lobo Antunes. Furthermore, this thesis will engage with the problematics and debates of trauma and madness, contributing to the discussion of how literature can tackle these issues effectively and in a cathartic way.

The author's autobiography placed him in this interstitial place in between such traumatic realities as war and mental institution. In return, it is through his literature that he will raise those pertinent questions that interest us all.

It is a silent scream, but one that attacks the master-narratives of oppression and authority, be it in its antipsychiatric or antimilitaristic mode. The result will invariably be a call for a more empathetic, compassionate and just society, one that does not forget its role in the traumatic realities of its past.

The thesis is divided in two distinct parts. Part 1 (chapters 1, 2 and 3) will engage with the broader questions elicited by the triangular relationship between writer/soldier/doctor, exploring the questions of autobiography and the historical and cultural contexts relevant for Lobo Antunes. Part 2 will proceed to a close reading of the three novels, again in the same engaging manner and without ever forgetting the issues of trauma, madness and conflict.

## **Part 1**

Lobo Antunes:  
as Writer,  
as Soldier,  
as Psychiatrist.

## CHAPTER 1

### Lobo Antunes, as writer

The opening salvo in António Lobo Antunes' literary production consists of three novels: *Memória de Elefante*<sup>1</sup> (1979); *Os Cus de Judas*<sup>2</sup> (1979); and *Conhecimento do Inferno* (1980)<sup>3</sup>. These novels constitute a trilogy which we shall, for the purposes of this thesis, identify as pertaining to the 'Biographical<sup>4</sup> Cycle'.

The reasons behind considering them as 'biographical' rather than simply 'autobiographical' will be explored in detail further on. It has also been classified as the 'Ciclo da Aprendizagem': 'Lobo Antunes reconhece haver pelo menos quatro ciclos em sua obra. O primeiro considera ser o de sua aprendizagem como escritor e é composto pelos títulos: *Memória de elefante* (1979), *Os Cus de Judas* (1979) e *Conhecimento do inferno* (1980).'<sup>5</sup> However, it seems that the concept of 'aprendizagem' (learning) transcends the mere classificatory role when applied to the author's work, developing into a legitimate trope of his own, articulated with 'knowledge', in constant dialogue with other themes in the

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<sup>1</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, (Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Os Cus de Judas* (Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno* (Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> This is my term and it is intimately related with Barthes' notion of *Biographème*.

<sup>5</sup> Luís Fernando Prado Telles, 'Nas trilhas do lobo', *Novos estudos – CEBRAP*, n.83 (March 2009) São Paulo

<[http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S0101-33002009000100014&script=sci\\_arttext](http://www.scielo.br/scielo.php?pid=S0101-33002009000100014&script=sci_arttext)>

[accessed 12 December 2014].

novels. Therefore, applying what in reality is a working concept in the author's oeuvre to a fixed category of classification would seem inappropriate as it would limit the full impact of such a term in the interpretation and analysis of his work. Moreover, classifying this cycle in such a way would exclude the concept of 'knowledge' (which goes hand in hand with that of 'learning'). It is certainly, for the author, the cycle in which he learned how to be a writer and how to find his artistic voice (no wonder such classification is made by the author himself) but it is not the cycle in which the reader will cease to learn from his novels, as all of them as a whole, no matter the cycle they are ascribed to, work in that direction. Finally, a further reason for dismissing such a classification is that, the cycle includes another novel, *Sôbolos Rios que Vão*<sup>6</sup>, published in 2010, when it is fair to assume that the period of 'learning his trade' is over for the author. This later novel, despite its stylistic difference, also coincides with biographical events that happened to the author (in particular the diagnosis of his cancer) thus justifying its presence in the cycle. Also pertaining to the cycle are some of his more autobiographical chronicles, which emerge intermittently, but without fail.

The nature of these novels makes it a tricky task to classify and frame them by the standards of contemporary literary criticism. Part 'confessional novel'<sup>7</sup>, part inverted odyssey, part stream-of consciousness narrative of self-deprecation and loathing, the novels are a complex network of layers of multidimensional

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<sup>6</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Sôbolos rios que vão* (Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> 'A rather misleading and flexible term which suggests an "autobiographical" type of fiction, written in the first person, and which, on the face of it, is a self-revelation. On the other hand it may not be, though it looks like it. [...]' in *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, ed. by J.A. Cuddon (London: Penguin Books, 2013) p.151.

readings. Simultaneously anti-psychiatric, absurd, existentialist, picaresque and abject, the novels flee and dodge any feeble attempt to pin them down and categorise them. That is, however, their greatest strength as it embodies the author's *ethos*, their epistemological rebellion being in literary taxonomy an extension of what their contents are for the reader.

Another reason why the novels are difficult to classify is the contrarian attitude of these novels within the tradition of Portuguese literature. If Portuguese literary tradition, from *Os Lusíadas*<sup>8</sup> to *A Jangada de Pedra*<sup>9</sup>, is made of *departures*, Lobo Antunes' fictional production swims against that current as it concerns not just departures, but mainly *returns*. He is obviously not the only Portuguese writer to tackle this issue<sup>10</sup>, but no one else does it with such intensity and obsessiveness as Lobo Antunes, as returning is a recurrent trope in many of his books. In all three of the novels that constitute the trilogy, as we shall see in the next chapter, the narrators have all returned from Angola and in subsequent novels, such as *As Naus*<sup>11</sup> (where historical figures from Portugal's past return to their homeland as rejected post-imperial subjects), there is a constant circular journey back to the starting point. For the chosen corpus, return is indeed a fundamental concept. As Maria Calafate Ribeiro points out when considering the literature of the post-war:

Narrativas de guerra mas também narrativas de regresso, o *corpus*  
das obras literárias da Guerra Colonial, nas suas diferentes vertentes

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<sup>8</sup> Luís de Camões, *Os Lusíadas* (Porto, Porto Editora, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> José Saramago, *A Jangada de Pedra* (Porto, Porto Editora, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Margarida Calafate Ribeiro's book *Uma História de Regressos* does precisely that with great success.

<sup>11</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *As Naus* (Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 2007).

de textos-testemunhos e textos-consequência sobre uma experiência pessoal e colectiva através da qual todos aprendemos uma outra verdade, reveste-se na ficção portuguesa de um valor duplo intrinsecamente cúmplice: são importantes elementos de reflexão sobre o modo europeu/português de estar em África (particularmente no crepúsculo do império) e, simultaneamente, peças indispensáveis para entender o modo de estar hoje em Portugal.<sup>12</sup>

Therefore, Lobo Antunes' narratives are perhaps the most important literary achievement of this period as the diversity of 'textos-testemunhos' and 'textos-consequência' concatenated in them is multifaceted (soldier, doctor, writer), covering both the individual and collective experiences and seeking another kind of truth that can only emerge from the plurality of points of contact of his work. However, it seems to me that Calafate Ribeiro does not go quite far enough when considering the importance of the author's work. Yes, the novels are indispensable for the 'reflexão sobre o modo europeu/português de estar em África' and also 'peças indispensáveis para entender o modo de estar hoje em Portugal', but they are also indispensable for understanding the trauma to which an entire generation has been submitted, the personal consequences of that same trauma and all its impact upon social, political and cultural dimensions of post-war societies. They are fundamental for the understanding of phenomena such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, depression, and other mental health afflictions, the knowledge and experience that can be transposed to other periods and countries. After all, violent conflicts everywhere in the world are far from over and their aftermaths affected and are still affecting millions of people.

Moreover, there is another dimension which to Lobo Antunes's work opens doors – the medical dimension. This is an important fact for the outreach

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<sup>12</sup> Margarida Calafate Ribeiro, *Uma História de Regressos: Império, Guerra Colonial e Pós-Colonialismo*, (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 2004), p. 256.

of the author's work and its literary significance. It is not simply the fact that he was a doctor that is interesting (many writers were doctors, Chekhov, Céline, etc.) but rather his specialisation, psychiatry, and the fact that in an initial moment of the writer's career, the coexistence of that reality with his military experience seems to be at the forefront of his early literary preoccupations. He juggles the experiences of simultaneously performing the roles of perpetrator and victim, doctor and patient, which give his writing completeness, density and wholeness. His writing is the embodiment of all sides, without complacency and always with a provocative and subversive attitude that permits the challenging of master-narratives, thus generating a constant dialogue between a multiplicity of interlocutors.

It is the conjunction of these roles that comes under scrutiny in this thesis, namely the way they articulate with each other and how they are presented under their novelistic guise. They form a triangle<sup>13</sup> in which each of the vertices plays a part, equally important, for Lobo Antunes' ethos as a writer. For the purposes of this academic exercise, the focus will be predominantly on the psychiatric dimension of the texts, where they relate and articulate issues such as trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (among others), in order to establish how powerful the work of this novelist can be in both the national and the individual experiences of 'madness'.

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<sup>13</sup> The concept of triangle has a particular significance for the current analysis and I will return to it later. As a way of foreshadowing what it is to come, the reader must bear in mind the traditional 'medical triangle' of doctor-disease-patient and the Antunesian triangle (who somewhat replaces the former in his literary dimension) of doctor-soldier-writer.

As we shall see through the course of this chapter, the biographical facts in the history of the empirical author and how they are transferred and articulated in his literature are precisely what makes the early novels of Lobo Antunes so urgent and so worth (re)visiting.

### **1.1. Biography/ Autobiography**

The biography of writers is normally not a factor to consider in the urgency and importance of their work. Nevertheless, sometimes biographical considerations need to be taken into account as they shed light on a particular aspect of the writer's aesthetics, helping to situate the writer in the broader context of reality or, as we shall see with Lobo Antunes, are necessary to create a deeper bond of empathy with the reader through the construction of a text that emerges between the author and the reader; each one holding a key to its unlocking and emergence. This form of 'participatory writing' is what distinguishes his novels from his contemporary counterparts and what gives them their power. This 'experience', very much resembles a psychotherapeutic session, where the reader (the patient) is given multiple keys with which he needs to unlock the text being presented to him or her<sup>14</sup>. The result, which might permit catharsis, will move the reader to an understanding broader than that afforded by the mainstream cultural, socio-economic, political and (crucially) medical apparatuses.

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<sup>14</sup> 'According to Freud, when people enter therapy, the way they see and respond to the therapist and the reactions they set out to provoke are influenced by two tendencies: they will see the relationship in the light of their earliest ones, and they will try to engender replays of early difficult situations.' Michael Kahn, *Between Therapist and Client: The New Relationship* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1997) p.27.

It is also sometimes relevant to reflect upon the historical context in which a writer is producing his works and in fact this is the case of Lobo Antunes. Unpublished before the fall of the Portuguese dictatorship of the Estado Novo, the novelist's first literary works mark a departure from what had been published under the close scrutiny of censorship, whether by its openness and honesty to tackle previously untouchable topics in Portuguese literature, or whether by presenting a much darker and cynical vision of Portuguese history, a distancing from a previously embellished narrative of the country's past achievements. In a transitional period between two regimes and two mentalities, his first novels address, like his precursors in the Portuguese literary period of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the decadence and moral failure inherited from the previous regime. It is no surprise, then, that the themes of madness, trauma (collective and personal), the scrutiny of institutions that are but the rotten branches of the regime (the medical and the military) and their paranoid and deluded narratives, constitute the main interests and themes of early Lobo Antunes.

The Portuguese novelist was born in Lisbon, in September 1942. The eldest of six brothers, his father was the prominent neurologist and professor João Alfredo de Figueiredo Lobo Antunes, close collaborator of Egas Moniz, the controversial Portuguese neurologist who invented leucotomy (in other words, lobotomy) and who was awarded a Nobel Prize for such a discovery<sup>15</sup>. Following the family tradition, he studied Medicine and later specialised in Psychiatry. In 1970, along with nearly a million other men, he is called to serve in the Colonial

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<sup>15</sup> The Nobel prize was attributed "for his discovery of the therapeutic value of leucotomy in certain psychoses", as quoted in the prize's official website: [http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/medicine/laureates/1949/moniz-facts.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/medicine/laureates/1949/moniz-facts.html) [Accessed 13 February 2014].

War (1968-1974)<sup>16</sup>, more specifically in Angola, where he stayed until 1973. His experiences in Angola have heavily informed his writings and are a recurring theme in his novels and chronicles, appearing simultaneously as both pleasant and traumatic. In more recent years, Lobo Antunes has left the practice of medicine and lives completely from his writing.

War and psychiatry appear as two constant themes in Lobo Antunes' literature, especially in the first novels. The two roles, of doctor and soldier, allied with his role as a writer, serve as fundamental coordinates in the understanding of Lobo Antunes as a writer committed to his literature and place him in a prominent position in both national and international<sup>17</sup> literary spheres. Further on, we shall explore these themes in detail, reflecting upon their importance in the writer's work and how it is precisely because of their concatenation that Lobo Antunes' work resists the passage of time. We shall also explore how these themes manifest themselves not only in content but also stylistically, for Lobo Antunes assumedly seeks the renewal of the art of the novel.

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<sup>16</sup>The word reinforces an imperialistic view that cannot be applied to the work of Lobo Antunes and to the ideas conceptualised in this thesis. In fact, they both challenge such conception. However, because of the length that a questioning of this term would occupy and the constraints of this thesis, this limited term will have to be permitted with a caveat. Furthermore, it is by this designation that the war is referred to in the majority of media in Portuguese society, thus resulting in the identification of the conflict as 'Colonial War' by society at large.

<sup>17</sup> Not only has he been awarded the Camões Prize in 2007, the most important Portuguese literary prize, but he has also been awarded several international prizes (Latin Union International Prize in 2003, the Jerusalem Prize in 2005, France Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in 2008, among others). These prizes have raised a substantial international profile, resulting in several translations of his work.

In a first moment it is, however, inescapable to consider the autobiographical (or not) dimension of his work. To what extent are then Lobo Antunes' novels autobiographical? The question of autobiography has been addressed by many scholars over the years and the debate is still a relevant one. Philippe Lejeune, in his comprehensive book about autobiography, defines it thus: 'Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality.'<sup>18</sup>

As it is easy to perceive, classifying Lobo Antunes' work as autobiography, in the light of this definition, would not be far from an accurate assessment. However, this is not entirely the case. Yes, some of his novels are retrospective prose narratives. Yes, they were written by a real person and they do concern his own individual story of his own personality. Nonetheless, as I shall argue later, the author's novelistic production cannot be *entirely* perceived as autobiographical and despite the fact that some of his novels are influenced by his personal life and circumstances, they are, nevertheless, still works of fiction.

Using one of Lejeune's elements that constitute the autobiographical text (the situation of the author, in which the author's and the narrator's name not only coincide but refer to the same person), one could identify them as personal novels. Even so, this classification seems limited and, ironically, not broad enough to include the autobiographical aspects of the novels. Therefore, and because Lobo Antunes' novels are not straightforward autobiography, I identify, as stated, them as pertaining to the realm of *biographical* novels.

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<sup>18</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *On Autobiography* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) p.4.

These occupy the space between autobiography and fiction. They arise from the author's biographical existence to be fictionalised (to a larger or lesser degree) with the help of the reader.

It is precisely this 'space between' that Jacques Derrida recalls when writing on the issue of autobiography. His reflection is about Nietzsche's biography and philosophy, but it can be applied to the realm of literary studies.

He starts by addressing the limits of a certain type of approach:

We no longer consider the biography of a 'philosopher'<sup>19</sup> as a corpus of empirical accidents that leaves both a name and a signature outside a system which would itself be offered up to an immanent philosophical reading - the only kind of reading held to be philosophically legitimate. This academic notion utterly ignores the demands of a text which it tries to control with the most traditional determinations of what constitutes the limits of the written, or even of 'publication'.<sup>20</sup>

The attempted control of the demands offered by a text inevitably fails, partly because of the employment of traditional determinations that are in themselves limited and also because of the passive acceptance of the irreducibility of those very limits.<sup>21</sup> Thus, 'biographical novels or psychobiographies claim that, by following empirical procedures of the

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<sup>19</sup> Note that Derrida uses the word philosopher in quotation marks, which perhaps suggests the ambiguity of the classification, also permitting an expansion of the term to other meanings. Therefore, it would not be abusive to understand Derrida's quote as referring to an 'author' in the general sense of the word.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, (Lincoln and London: The University of Nebraska Press, 1985), p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> 'In return for having accepted these limits, one can then on the other hand proceed to write "lives of philosophers", those biographical novels [...] to which great historians of philosophy occasionally resign themselves.' Ibid., p.5.

psychologicistic – at times even psychoanalytic – historicist, or sociologicistic type, one can give an account of the genesis of the philosophical system.’<sup>22</sup>

In similar manner, the same logic would be applied when a reading of the type would be applied to an author – by attending to his/her biographical input on a text via an empiricist lens, one could decipher motivations, motifs, ethics, ways of seeing and feeling and points of view, in other words, a well-defined static *meaning* that would encompass the whole text. Indeed, Derrida sees beyond that:

We say no to this because a new problematic of the biographical in general [...] must mobilize other resources, including, at the very least, a new analysis of the proper name and the signature. Neither ‘immanent’ readings of philosophical systems [...] nor external, empirical-genetic readings have ever in themselves questioned the *dynamis* of that borderline between the ‘work’ and the ‘life’ [...].<sup>23</sup>

It is precisely a *dynamic* dimension that Lobo Antunes’ writing possesses. By encapsulating several worlds in the same text, never quite establishing itself in one or the other, his writings are a constant movement through those borderlines between different realities.

This borderline – I call it *dynamis* because of its force, its power, as well as its virtual and mobile potency – is neither active nor passive, neither outside nor inside. It is most especially not a thin line, an invisible or *indivisible* trait lying between the enclosure of philosophemes, on the one hand, and the life of an author already identifiable behind the name, on the other.<sup>24</sup>

Neither inside nor outside, *simultaneously* in both, Lobo Antunes’ writing exists in the borderline, its mobile potency notorious in the facility with which it

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

resonates in other cultural, historical and individual contexts. Autobiography (especially when it deals with such issues as *madness* and *trauma*) can never, paradoxically, be considered as a separate, stand-alone category despite the historical tendency to do so.

The paradoxical *autobiography of madness* becomes a critical genre in its own right [...]. The genre takes effect either rhetorically, satirically, as an ironic mirror to the madness of the world and as a critique of normative behaviours, or tragically, poetically, and philosophically, as an experience and a life itinerary of initiation: an initiation not just into suffering, but into a heightened poetical perception (Nerval) and into the assumption of a fate, an insight and a message deriving from a human practice of the limits (Artaud).<sup>25</sup>

Inheritor of this tradition, Lobo Antunes incorporates in his writing all of the characteristic dimensions mentioned by Felman, but at the same time he breaks with this somewhat Romantic tradition quite definitively. Not, unlike the authors Felman is referring to (Nerval, Artaud, etc.), writing his own *autobiography of madness*, he nevertheless writes from *within* a place and a space of madness. The intersections of his biographical existence permit a *graphical* existence that is not compromised exclusively with one role. Listening to madness from the voices of the mad is one thing. Listening to madness from a clinician, whose voice incorporates the manner of the mad is an entirely different experience, much more subversive and decidedly less Romantic, thus breaking away from a dangerous romanticisation of the mad, at the same time not betraying them by taking the side of the medical establishment. This allows the impact of the author's writing to overcome the paradoxical self-exclusion that an autobiographical account solely situated in the perspective of a discursive mad

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<sup>25</sup> Shoshana Felman, *Writing and Madness (Literature/Philosophy/Psychoanalysis)*. (Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 4.

would provoke. His text traverses the enclosure of literary limits, an insidious tide flooding onto other realities, bringing back elements which then also become text, in an all-encompassing movement of inclusion.

[T]he so-called living subject of biological discourse is a part – an interested party or a partial interest – of the whole field of investment that includes the enormous philosophical, ideological, and political tradition, with all the forces that are at work in that tradition as well as everything that has its potential in the subjectivity of a biologist or a community of biologists. All these evaluations leave their mark on the scholarly signature and inscribe the bio-graphical within the bio-logical.<sup>26</sup>

Crucially, in Lobo Antunes, Derrida's formula can be inverted:

The bio-logical is not only inscribed within the bio-graphical, the bio-logical also *becomes* the bio-graphical.

The particular issue of autobiography in Lobo Antunes has been addressed by Maria Alzira Seixo. In her view, 'autobiografia é o que se pretende dar (comunicar, partilhar) da vida que se escreve, e é duvidoso que dela outra possa restar.'<sup>27</sup> It is the life that is written, in other words, the life confined in the text (or better, the text itself), that constitutes the concept of autobiography. This is where I do not agree with Alzira Seixo, albeit acknowledging the importance and authority of her work. Rhetorically, her assertion that autobiography is 'vida que se escreve, e é duvidoso que dela outra possa restar' seems very close to my inversion of Derrida's maxim, but it is, in fact, quite different. Alzira Seixo implies that the bio-graphic aspect of his work prevails alone, that the author's autobiography is exhausted within the text. This, in my view, would surely be

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<sup>26</sup> Derrida, p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> Maria Alzira Seixo, *Os Romances de António Lobo Antunes* (Lisboa:Dom Quixote, 2002) p.497.

the case if the biographical circumstances of the author did not play such a decisive role in his production.

It is not being argued that his novels are entirely or straightforwardly autobiographical in the conventional (and Lejeunian) sense of the word. At the same time, the opposite is also not being claimed. In Lobo Antunes, autobiography is a dynamic, manipulated concept, which nevertheless plays a central role in his early writing, rescuing his authorial literary existence from the vacuum and abstraction that Alzira Seixo is suggesting by positing the dominance of the *text alone* over any empirical dimension in which that text exists.

Even if indeed it is normally ‘abusivo encadear formulações conceptuais, que foram elaboradas a partir da materialidade da escrita, com dados projectados de situações ou comportamentos empíricos, sobretudo quando assumidos (ou assumíveis) por uma pessoa que coincide [...] com a entidade autoral [...]’<sup>28</sup>, and even if it is true that these conceptual formulations are an ‘abuse’ when applied to the majority of his novels, an exception must be made in the case of the inaugural trilogy.

The points of contact between narrator and author, highlighted above, cannot be overlooked and ignored as they form the background context of the *experiences* both for the author and the narrator, and these points of contact are repeated, and insisted upon in all the three novels, always under the narrative of a single narrator, with no shifts in perspective. On the one hand:

[o] efeito de plausibilidade [...] numa escrita autobiográfica de António Lobo Antunes decorre fundamentalmente da possibilidade de os seus romances serem lidos como sociotextos, isto é, textos cuja

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p.473.

significação é simultaneamente trabalhada de uma perspectiva ficcional e de uma perspectiva que integra as dimensões socioculturais, neste caso, e as político-sociais, como será o caso dos passos sobre a guerra, ou sócio-histórica, no caso de o objecto ficcional em foco ser a psiquiatria.<sup>29</sup>

On the other hand, the reader is pre-emptively aware (because of metatextual information that the author himself has provided in interviews and particularly in the chronicles he has been publishing in parallel with his novels) that these sociotexts arise from personal *experiences* the most relevant of them being his experiences as a psychiatrist and his experiences in war. The biographical element is important here not because of the access it gives to the author's own life, but because of the biographical circumstances of the author in its different perspectives, namely as a doctor and as a soldier, which come to the fore and become the central themes of the novels and, when articulated with the metatextual information given by Lobo Antunes, charge the novels with a narrative authority that seems to attest the autobiographical (or *biographemical*) dimension of the texts.

In addition, another different point of view comes with Alzira Seixo's assertion that 'os romances narrados numa primeira pessoa factualmente muito próxima da personalidade do autor António Lobo Antunes não estão mais próximos da autobiografia (nem menos) do que os que lhe seguem'<sup>30</sup>. As seen above, the novels comprised in the cycle have certain elements that correspond to the biography of the writer. For a writer like Lobo Antunes, always preoccupied with the stylistics of his novels, carefully considering what to

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid. pp.480-481.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. p.485.

include in his novels and constantly crafting a text pregnant with subversion, the inclusion of biographical elements in his fiction cannot be seen as a coincidence. He is, *consciously*, attempting to blur the limits that separate reality and fiction, either by fictionalizing biographical elements or by ascribing biographical elements to a fictionalized text<sup>31</sup>. This arises from his artistic attitude with regard to literary production, which is one of total commitment with the act of writing, that is

o compromisso incondicional com a literatura, o ideal do livro total, a despersonalização no acto da escrita e a conseqüente noção de inspiração nela implícita. A figura do autor resultará, pois, indissociável do estabelecimento de uma arte romanesca [...] em que o pendor autobiográfico ocupa um lugar tão importante.<sup>32</sup>

Similar analysis of the issue of autobiography has been made by Isabel Moutinho, who considers the novels as creating an ‘illusion of autobiography’. However, she paradoxically also points out the numerous points of contact between autobiography and the novels. She writes:

The illusion of autobiographical writing [...] is created first of all by the alternating of third- and first-person narrative in the first and in the third novels, and by the almost overbearing presence of the narrative I in the second, as well as in all the three cases by the strong internal focalisation (*sic*) on the thoughts and fears of the protagonist(s).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> ‘O nome António e eu somos coisas autónomas? Somos e não somos. [...] O que sei é que o autor entra no livro, o livro entra no autor e vou conseguir ir mais longe nesse caminho.’ José Céu e Silva, *Uma Longa Viagem com António Lobo Antunes* (Porto: Porto Editora, 2009) p.221.

<sup>32</sup> *António Lobo Antunes: Arte do Romance*, ed. by Filipe Cammaert (Lisboa: Texto Editores, 2011) p.16.

<sup>33</sup> Isabel Moutinho, ‘Writing the War and the Man in the First Novels of António Lobo Antunes’ in *Facts and Fictions of António Lobo Antunes*, ed. by Victor K. Mendes (Dartmouth: Tagus Press, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, 2011), pp.71-87 (p.72).

Apparently, the image of author that emerges from the text is one that results from that complete dilution of Lobo Antunes' own self, his autobiography and personality, in his fictional creation. In his fiction, he annuls the possibility of autobiography by writing himself in his books. The text, ultimately, is what informs any concept of author and reader – a total text, a simultaneous omnipresence of author, reader and fiction that, despite its ambiguity, surpasses any attempt to delimit his novels to any fixed framing such as autobiography or pure fiction. Still, in the trilogy, there *is* an image of an author emerging, if not the empirical author, an author whose voice narrates the biographical circumstances that coincide with that of the empirical author, creating a text that includes the historical, cultural and sociological contexts which also coincide with the empirical author's. It is *that* author, the one who emerges between empirical author, text and reader that carries with him the autobiographical power of the text. To this emerging authorial figure, I have attributed the name of *biographemical author*<sup>34</sup>.

The difficulty in assessing Lobo Antunes' novels in terms of autobiography is highlighted thus by Catarina Vaz Warrot:

Os leitores de António Lobo Antunes têm tendência a identificar o narrador com o autor, nomeadamente nas primeiras criações romanescas do escritor. [...] António Lobo Antunes fala da inevitabilidade da biografia de todo e qualquer escritor quando escreve, tornando-se visível principalmente nas suas primeiras obras. Parece-nos que a fronteira entre o que pertence à ficção e o que pertence à biografia de Lobo Antunes não é facilmente identificável e ainda menos passível de definição.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> This notion will be elaborated in detail in the next section of this chapter.

<sup>35</sup> Catarina Vaz Warrot, *Chaves de Escrita e Chaves de Leitura nos Romances de António Lobo Antunes* (Lisboa: Texto Editores, 2013) p.92.

This view emphasizes the impossibility of considering his novels as purely autobiographical but rather as possessing some autobiographical elements. Because of the impossibility of complete discernment between fiction and biography, born out of the writer's authorial aesthetics of subversion, it is fair to assume that all of his novels are, to a certain degree, autobiographical and this, in fact, is not what is being challenged here. However, the statement above also considers that such autobiographical elements are more visible in his first novels ('tornando-se visível *principalmente* nas suas primeiras obras'), which supports my view that some novels are *more* autobiographical than others. Moreover, to further support my analysis, there is a later return to a single narrator first-person narrative in the novel *Sôbolos Rios Que Vão*, where the narrator (again) shares several biographical elements with the author (name, etc.). This novel has the particularity of being about the struggle with cancer, its repercussions and the close contact with death. A quick glance at metatextual information will inform the reader that the author himself was diagnosed with cancer and was submitted to a surgical procedure in the year 2007, which is also the year in which the narration of the novel takes place. The clear impact that this event had in the author was, undoubtedly, the catalyzer for the writing of such a novel. In the author's own words, the autobiographical aspect of this novel is a reality (despite the clear fictionalization of certain aspects present in the novel) and the writing process was personal and painful: 'Estar a escrever o livro fez-me reviver aquilo que passei'<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup>José Céu e Silva, 'Lobo Antunes: De repente, percebi que sou mortal', *Diário de Notícias*, 28 October 2010  
<[http://www.dn.pt/inicio/artes/interior.aspx?content\\_id=1697043&seccao=Livros](http://www.dn.pt/inicio/artes/interior.aspx?content_id=1697043&seccao=Livros)>  
[Accessed 12th July 2015].

The novel ‘*Sóbolos Rios Que Vão*’ is nevertheless not part of the main corpus of this thesis, and despite its importance from a ‘cathartic’ point of view, the catharsis it facilitates is of a different nature as it has to do with a different diseased reality – that of cancer. Its mention here is simply to highlight the author’s return to a specific style of narration when personal circumstances have had a pervading influence on him. Therefore, ‘*Sóbolos Rios Que Vão*’ can indeed be included in the Biographical Cycle and is another novel in the oeuvre of the writer that bears deeper autobiographical readings (in conjunction with the three initial novels).

The complexity of this issue has also to do with the way in which Lobo Antunes regards his own literary productions. For him, autobiography has nothing to do with the empirical life, but rather with the *inner* life of the author, which is invariably present in every one of his novels.

Uma vez um escritor qualquer [...] dizia que todos os livros são autobiográficos [...]. Eu não me referia sequer a partes precisas, estava a referir-me em geral [...] à biografia interior. [...] Não é à sua vida, mesmo que seja à sua vida, mas é antes às suas emoções e acidentes interiores<sup>37</sup>.

In a sense, his literary teleology is to present the *qualia* of experiences, hence the gradual ‘purification’ of his novels, the stripping away of more baroque and peripheral elements of his writing, in a movement of a seemingly paradoxical *codification* of his own literature, simultaneously more inaccessible but closer to the subjective realities of experiences themselves. However, in the initial trilogy, the inaccessibility and codification is not yet so visible, maybe because of the rawness of the experiences explored in them, their proximity (both

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<sup>37</sup> José Céu e Silva, *Uma Longa Viagem com António Lobo Antunes*, p.219.

temporally and biographically) with the moment in which they were produced and the urgency in which they need to be addressed by the author in order to ‘purge’ himself and achieve the necessary catharsis that will free his literary progression and depuration.

The importance of this autobiographical aspect in Lobo Antunes for the purpose of this thesis has to do, amongst other aspects, with its relationship with the role of the reader when approaching the author’s work and the dimension of *catharsis* it provides. This cathartic experience seems to be the epicentre of Lobo Antunes’ writing, especially in the first novels<sup>38</sup>. One has merely to be attentive to the author’s own words in his extensive interview with João Céu e Silva, where he highlights all these dimensions: ‘Quem ler com atenção estes livros vê que os três primeiros são claramente autobiográficos, é toda aquela catarse de quem está a começar’<sup>39</sup>.

When looking at the trajectory and the passage from these earlier novels to the later fiction it will be useful to trace the (apparent) diminishing of the so called autobiographical element as the conditions for Lejeune’s ‘contract’ have changed or even disappeared. Nevertheless, the significance of the concatenation of the so called ‘communal’ aspects (the empirical life of the author and his narrators) in these early novels and the tensions they provoke requires a broader consideration of the biographical conditions in which they were produced, given the relations between them and their permeability. Indeed, this permeability,

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<sup>38</sup> ‘Os primeiros romances são, de uma certa forma, uma catarse para o escritor, que, com frequência, se projecta no seu narrador.’ Catarina Vaz Warrot, *Chaves de Escrita e Chaves de Leitura nos Romances de António Lobo Antunes*, p.93.

<sup>39</sup> José Céu e Silva, *Uma Longa Viagem com António Lobo Antunes*, p.91.

more visible in the first novels and more diaphanous in the later, is a fascinating problematic in the fabric of the text. The communitarian implications of his writings at this stage, because of what they signify in both the context of the time and the contemporary state of affairs, cannot therefore be underplayed.

Um estudo da autobiografia de ALA<sup>40</sup>, nos seus aspectos vivenciais e anedóticos, interessa de uma perspectiva literária apenas no que se refere às fases da sua vida que têm implicação comunitária (a infância em família conservadora e culta; o sofrimento na guerra colonial; a experiência clínica em psiquiatria; a condição fundamental e contínua de escritor) [...]<sup>41</sup>.

Crucially, it is the ‘condição fundamental e contínua de escritor’ that takes over in later works (pushing out obvious autobiographical references) as it simultaneously takes over later moments of the author’s biography, an author whose experience of war is long gone and who has decided to retire from medicine, leaving the experience as a writer as the only autobiographical reference for his novels. In this sense, it is fair to assess that the absence of autobiographical points of contact stems from the fact that the author’s existence seems to be dedicated solely to his literature, making his fictional production the only dynamic force for his autobiography. Author and work are, in the case of later Lobo Antunes, inseparable as they are one and the same thing. This reflection cannot, however, be applied in retrospect and the work of an early Lobo Antunes is permeated by his communitarian dimensions, which from the critical point of view of this thesis, has added value when analysing their

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<sup>40</sup> António Lobo Antunes.

<sup>41</sup> *Dicionário da Obra de António Lobo Antunes (Vol.I)*, ed. by Maria Alzira Seixo, *et al* (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional-Casa Da Moeda, 2008) p.58.

significance for concepts such as trauma and madness and their social, historical and cultural significance.

Therefore, there are still several significant points to be made about the relevance of autobiography in early Lobo Antunes. The first one ‘tem a ver com a experiência de vida, visível e decisiva na sua obra, mais do que com intenção autobiográfica. Isso verifica-se logo no facto de designar por romances os seus primeiros textos publicados’<sup>42</sup>. Thus, it is clear from the beginning that these are not straightforward autobiographical novels, but rather a fictional account heavily imbued with autobiographical elements. The author’s rich autobiography constitutes a fecund seed from where his first novels emerge and understandably so. After all, and this brings us to the second important point, from the sociological point of view, ‘as vertentes autobiográficas que mais correntemente se detectam nos seus romances são afinal coincidentes com as grandes questões políticas, culturais e sociais, das últimas décadas do século XX português’<sup>43</sup>. These aspects alone would be enough to justify Lobo Antunes’ literary pertinence<sup>44</sup>, but his preoccupations are not exhausted by these sociological and cultural ‘localities’. More obvious universal (or at least Western) contemporary anxieties are also present: ‘a incomunicabilidade, o malogro nas ligações afectivas, a mutação na concepção da família, a corrosão nas profissões tradicionais, o mal-estar na civilização segundo Freud, a crise do

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid. p.56.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. p.57.

<sup>44</sup> If the scope of this thesis permitted, we could have articulated Lobo Antunes’ locality with Joycean concept of the ‘universality of the particular’.

marxismo, etc'<sup>45</sup>. In fact, *anxiety* is indeed another of the key words for the understanding of Lobo Antunes in the perspective this study seeks to engage with. Not only relevant here is the definition of anxiety as a collective aspect within a society, normally against deep changes in its very nature and fabric manifested in these multiple personal *anxieties* mentioned above. This type of civilizational anxiety has been explored amply in other works of literature, philosophy and other areas. It does remain as one of the principal goals of literature to express, explore and be witness to the anxious manifestations of its time.

Etymologically, the word *anxiety* has its origins in the ancient Greek word *angh*.<sup>46</sup>

'Ancient though the word 'anxiety' may be, it was rarely employed as a psychological or psychiatric concept before the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and only became widespread over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century'.<sup>47</sup> However, literary descriptions and renditions of anxiety and its manifestations have been abundant. 'Feelings of panic and fear, and the physical changes that often accompany them such as trembling, palpitations, and faster breathing, are regularly described in literary, religious, and medical writings throughout the centuries'.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *Dicionário da Obra de António Lobo Antunes (Vol.I)*, ed. by Maria Alzira Seixo, *et al*, p.57.

<sup>46</sup> '[...] in the ancient Greek meaning 'to press tight', 'to strangle', 'to be weighed down with grief', and 'load', 'burden', and 'trouble'. Daniel Freeman and Jason Freeman, *Anxiety: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) p.2.

<sup>47</sup> Freeman and Freeman, p.3.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*.

The influential writings of Freud (now contested and controversial but still undeniably influential) reflected these preoccupations considering human beings and their nature:

[T]hey strive for happiness, they want to become happy and remain so. This striving has two goals, one negative and one positive: on the one hand it aims at the absence of pain, on the other at strong feelings of pleasure. 'Happiness', in the strict sense of the word, relates only to the latter [...]

As we see, it is simply the programme of the pleasure principle that determines the purpose of life. This principle governs the functioning of our mental apparatus from the start [...] and yet its programme is at odds with the whole world – with the macrocosm as much as with the microcosm. It is quite incapable of being realized: all the institutions of the universe are opposed to it; one is inclined to say that the intention that man should be 'happy' has no part in the plan of 'creation'. What we call happiness [...] arises from the fairly sudden satisfaction of pent-up needs.<sup>49</sup>

For Freud, the source for unhappiness lies in the blockage of the continuously demanding pleasure principle. Natural and social constrictions, despite their inevitability, are the main reasons that cause unhappiness and sufferings. Whether one agrees with the Austrian psychoanalyst's postulation or not, it is worth reflecting on how these 'institutions of the universe' contribute to human suffering and how Lobo Antunes articulates them in his literature.

In line with the pessimistic thought of Schopenhauer<sup>50</sup>, Freud also considers suffering as a common and indeed abundant phenomenon amidst human beings. Despite not possessing the benefit of hindsight like Lobo

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<sup>49</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (London: Penguin Books, 2004) p.16.

<sup>50</sup> 'If the immediate and direct purpose of our life is not suffering then our existence is the most ill-adapted to its purpose in the world: for it is absurd to suppose that the endless affliction of which the world is everywhere full [...] should be purposeless and purely accidental.' Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Suffering of the World* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p. 4.

Antunes, he is on to something that will prove to be fundamental in the novelist's work.

Unhappiness is much less difficult to experience. Suffering threatens us from three sides: from our own body, which, being doomed to decay and dissolution, cannot dispense with pain and anxiety as warning signals; from the external world which can unleash overwhelming, implacable, destructive forces against us; and finally from our relations with others.<sup>51</sup>

Indeed, the three sides mentioned by Freud are simultaneously present in Lobo Antunes' novels and form the thematic basis for the understanding of his literature. The bodily dimension of anxiety, or its extremes (trauma, madness, etc.), the more individual, in other words, anxiety understood as *disorder*, is thoroughly explored as will become apparent when analysing the novels in more detail. Moreover, one cannot ignore the fact that the empirical author of such novels has trained as a doctor and will naturally be more attentive to these bodily manifestations, a clear example of why the issue of biography is so important in his literature. The impact of the second side mentioned by Freud, the external world, is easily understood if, once again, we register the fact that Lobo Antunes belongs to a generation of Portuguese men who experienced the most brutal military conflict in Portugal recent history.

Finally, but most importantly, the third side that threatens human's happiness – the relation with others. This aspect is one where the author's writings shine brighter than those of his contemporaries as he is able to incorporate it in relation to the other two sides, thus offering one of the, perhaps, more complete accounts of suffering and trauma in literature. The breakdown and erosion of human relations (the author's divorce, separation and avoidance

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<sup>51</sup> Schopenhauer, p.17.

of his family being the biographical references for this aspect) that Lobo Antunes obsessively describes in perhaps all of his novels are themes that, in conjunction with the other two mentioned before, highlight the importance and urgency of his novelistic output, that propel him to the forefront of novelists writing today. This particular aspect of human relations and their degradation as both a source and a consequence of trauma and suffering are fundamental to foundations of an *ethos* in Lobo Antunes's writing. In his effort to give voice to hidden, neglected aspects of human life, he is fulfilling his role as a writer who writes against the grain, a writer whose counter-narrative preoccupations lead him to challenge what is normally seen as unimportant or superfluous. In fact, the relevance of this element was recognised by Freud himself: 'The suffering that arises from this [...] source perhaps causes more pain than any other; we are inclined to regard it as a somewhat superfluous extra, though it is probably no less ineluctable than suffering that originates elsewhere'.<sup>52</sup>

Broken, eroded relationships are central to his first novels. The protagonist's divorce from his wife, the failure to connect with his daughters, the absurdity of his role as a psychiatrist in which the relationships he forms with patients are always felt as painful and insufficient, all configure the basis for the novels pertaining to the trilogy. It is not hard to see them as the traumatic manifestations from which Lobo Antunes' writing, both stylistically and in content, stems. In a way, Lobo Antunes is a writer of *anxiety*.

However, regardless of the abundance of references coming from a myriad of sources towards an understanding of anxiety, they seem not to be

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

sufficient for the ‘proper’ medical definition of anxiety. According to Daniel and Jason Freeman: ‘[T]hese sensations were seldom referred to as “anxiety”. Moreover, they were usually explained as the product of moral or religious failings, or of organic physical defects or illness’.<sup>53</sup>

On the one hand, for twenty-first century standards it would be inadmissible to rob sufferers of anxiety of a more defined understanding of their condition and a scientific framing of their experiences. Therefore, the medical endeavour to better understand the nature of such ailment in order to achieve a better quality of life for patients, and therefore the author’s reservations against previous explanations, are naturally justified. Indeed, the second reservation posed by the Freemans when they criticise the explaining of anxiety as a ‘product of organic physical defects’ seems particularly relevant to debates within the field of mental health, where strictly biological views (such as the genetic argument) have come under attack and subsequently lost ground.<sup>54</sup>

On the other hand, they seem to dismiss the importance of the ‘moral failings’ of our civilization and the role they play in the production of anxiety. It is here where the literature of Lobo Antunes becomes fundamental and is crucially important to the revival of a certain resistance to the ‘medicalized discourses’ that have tended to absolve our civilization precisely from its moral failings. The autobiographical elements that make up his *actual* existence and the ones he chooses to write about (albeit fictionalising some of it) reflect the

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<sup>53</sup> Freeman and Freeman, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> This issue will be explored further on in this thesis, where the current scientific debate around it will be clarified. As always, this will be critically articulated with the literature of Lobo Antunes.

anxiety<sup>55</sup> that historical, cultural, geographical and political circumstances have forced upon many Portuguese citizens. In other words, his novels voice the ‘moral failings’ of a society.

O jovem com uma educação convencional política e religiosa, que cresce numa família que vive segundo preceitos tradicionais, que quer ser escritor que é uma profissão rejeitada pelo pai [...] e lhe exige que siga medicina, esse jovem lá vai fazendo o curso [...] mas é atirado para a guerra em Angola, casa-se como tantos outros antes de embarcar, e mergulha numa experiência a que se a sua sensibilidade e inteligência dão foros de descoberta de um horror inesperado e total.<sup>56</sup>

It is off this horror that his work feeds itself, in particular the first novels: ‘dele se alimentam, em negrume e rejeição, os primeiros romances deste escritor (que por isso dão conta do sentimento do absurdo e da abjeção), e nunca se esbate por completo na sua obra, inclusive nos crimes e suicídios dos últimos romances’.<sup>57</sup>

A regular young man from a traditional but educated family is, like many others, caught by a tumultuous political environment, a civilizational mistake in the history of Portugal, and has his life disrupted by the failures of an authoritarian and deluded regime. It is not surprising that the outlook of Lobo Antunes’ novels is pessimistic and dark, filled with abjection (which will be a trademark of his early writing). After all, the disruption is all encompassing and the anxieties that result from it engulf not just the collective but also the

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<sup>55</sup> The term anxiety is here used to encompass several understandings of the word, both in medical and philosophical terms. The description of a physical, or bodily, dimension of anxiety will be evident when analysing his novels in more detail in the chapters dedicated to that effect. For now, attending to Lobo Antunes’ biography will suffice to perceive anxiety as *fear*.

<sup>56</sup> *Dicionário da Obra de António Lobo Antunes (Vol.I)*, ed. by Maria Alziro Seixo, *et al.*, p.57.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

particular and Lobo Antunes is no exception. The traumatic forces and their consequences that set in motion his life as a man also, in parallel, set the motion of his writing, fragmenting and simultaneously intertwining the different spheres of his existence, making it hard to separate them into distinct frames. It is, then, inevitable for the reader, when tackling the initial trilogy, not to consider the biographical circumstances that led to their production, even if accepting that they are ultimately a product of fictional creation.

The obvious tensions resulting from the juggling of all of these spheres are indeed what shapes and perhaps defines the trilogy, sharpening the prose with the friction generated by these points of contact. It is the autobiographical dimension that holds everything together, binding them into one literary product. Thus, the simultaneous presence of all dimensions in Lobo Antunes' early writing, including reflections on his literary activity, can be traced to his biography. Maria Alzira Seixo puts it splendidly in the following analysis. I would note her use of 'clivagem depressiva', a very apt and suggestive term to describe the frictions I have mentioned above.

Vêm depois as ressacas: afectiva (a separação conjugal, a má consciência em relação às filhas, as relações ambivalentes com a família), profissional (a profissão de médico em clivagem depressiva com a de escritor, emergindo em rompantes de revolta e de sucesso), psicológica (a memória de tudo, que se cristaliza na escrita mas ao mesmo tempo permanece em carne viva – e por isso é de algum modo carne viva a sua escrita, com aquele misto indestrinçável de ternura e pesadelo que caracteriza os seus textos, os embates profissionais de um exercício clínico que se reduz ao mínimo mas se mantém sempre por cautelas de auto-segurança materiais, e a dedicação ao exercício literário regularíssimo e exigente [...]. [É] sobretudo o conhecimento do quotidiano de várias classes que passa para a obra [...]. E muita doença, de todos os tipos, e seus efeitos na deterioração do corpo, extraordinariamente visível a cada passo da obra, assim como as debilidades mentais; e o deceptivo acolhimento que lhes fazem médicos, hospitais,

instituições de saúde, e o conseqüente desânimo clínico e humano que nele provoca.<sup>58</sup>

Moreover, the understanding of the role of autobiography in Lobo Antunes' novels is fundamental for its literary power, as it positions his first novels in a privileged place of critical tension(s) and thus permitting a dialectical *ethos*. The three *autobiographical roles* Lobo Antunes writes about develop in a threefold way, much like the ones suggested by Dori Laub, concerning witnessing and his experience of the Holocaust. The Portuguese writer's novels are, alas, also an act of witnessing. 'I recognise three separate, distinct levels of witnessing [...]: the level of being a witness to oneself within the experience, the level of being a witness to the testimonies of others, and the level of being a witness to the process of witnessing itself'.<sup>59</sup>

As an empirical subject, the author was indeed *witness* to several traumatic realities. When transposing these traumatic realities to the literature he creates, he is, therefore performing an act of testimony. However, when writing, he incorporates (real or purely fictitious) experiences of others, or in other words, their testimonies. Thus, two levels are fulfilled. The one left is, logically, the level of the *process* of witnessing. This process takes, in Lobo Antunes, the shape of writing. By becoming the scribbler of these different types of witnessing, he is himself reflecting the process of how to articulate them and what to do with them. It is only by retreating, by isolating himself in the solitary role of writer, that the possibility of narrating trauma becomes feasible:

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid. pp.57-58.

<sup>59</sup> Dori Laub, 'Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle' in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) pp.61-75 (p.61).

The traumatic experience has normally long been submerged and has become distorted in its submersion. The horror of the historical experience is maintained in the testimony only as an elusive memory that feels as if it no longer resembles any reality. The horror is, indeed, compelling not only in its reality but even more so, in its flagrant distortion and subversion of reality. Realizing its dimension becomes a process that demands retreat.<sup>60</sup>

It then becomes a question of survival. The possibility of a literary existence is thus paramount to the articulation of trauma and to the survival of the testimony, of the story, of history, themselves. The narrative act of retelling and recalling trauma becomes an existential affirmation, a counter-narrative against the master-narrative par excellence, death. The disappearance of a traumatic narrative would signify the identitary death of the survivor, a place of epistemological absence.

The survivors did not only need to survive so they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive. There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to *tell* and thus to come to *know* one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself.<sup>61</sup>

The space where Lobo Antunes exists as a writer, that troubled locus of trauma into which he invites his readers to follow him, in the convoluted world of his mental perambulations, is the space within writing itself, where all of the concatenated dimensions of his writing can coexist with both themselves and the reader. Thus, Lobo Antunes, by placing himself entirely in a literary existence, avoids the difficulties of inhabiting the exclusivity of a single role, whether that

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.p.62.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p.63.

is of doctor, soldier or the man himself. ‘Actor or martyr? Neither one nor the other, or both at the same time, like a true writer who believes in his wiles’.<sup>62</sup>

## 1.2 The ‘Biographical Cycle’

The identification of these novels as a part of a ‘cycle’ takes into consideration the similarities between the novels in terms of subject, narrative person, themes and also the contrast with subsequent novels, evidenced in *Explicação dos Pássaros*<sup>63</sup> (his fourth novel and first published in 1981), which represents a departure, a shift in narrative voice – whilst in two of the novels that constitute the trilogy the narrative voice is the first person singular (with the exception of *Memória de Elefante*, an occurrence that will be addressed further on), in *Explicação dos Pássaros* there is a shift towards third person narration. As we shall see, this is a significant shift.

The definition of ‘biographème’ is a Barthesian concept that I have unashamedly adapted as, I shall argue, it best describes Lobo Antunes’ literature and it is essential to understand his artistic contribution towards the renewal of the art of the novel. In his book *La chambre claire: note sur la photographie*, which has as main object of analysis photography, Barthes reflects upon the biographical details expressed in a photo:

Comme la Photographie est contingence pure et ne peut être que cela (c’est toujours *quelque chose* qui est représenté) contrairement au texte qui, par l’action soudaine d’un seul mot, peut faire passer une

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<sup>62</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror, An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) p.134.

<sup>63</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Explicação dos Pássaros* (Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 2007).

phrase de la description à la réflexion, elle livre tout de suite ces “détails” qui font le matériau même du savoir ethnologique [...] Elle me permet d’accéder à un infra-savoir, elle me fournit une collection d’objets partiels et peut flatter en moi un certain fétichisme: car il y a un “moi” qui aime le savoir, qui éprouve à son égard comme un goût amoureux. De la même façon, j’aime certains traits biographiques qui, dans la vie d’un écrivain, m’enchangent à l’égal de certaines photographies; j’ai appelé ces traits des “biographèmes”.<sup>64</sup>

The notion of *biographème* is in this way cristalized in Barthes’ thinking. Those traits that Barthes claims to be so fond of in ‘la vie d’un écrivain’ are precisely what constitutes the ground of Lobo Antunes’ literature, since he, acting as the authorial filter, decides what autobiographical, empirical traits to disclose and those *infra-savoirs* to which he attaches different degrees of fetishism. Thus, some of his autobiographical data is filtered and other makes its appearance in the fabric of the text, *becoming* the text, according to, perhaps not that enchantment or *jouissance* they elicit, but rather their necessity, their relevance to the initial catharsis intended in these texts, according to their suitability to the ethos of Antunesian writing.

Why, then, inscribe certain novels and chronicles within a cycle?

*Cycle* is motion, movement. Not necessarily circular, but recurrent. The autobiographical aspect comes and goes sometimes more prominent and sometimes more subtle in his writing, whether it is in his novels or chronicles. It is a perpetual movement that emerges every now and again, like an old tape bleed that creates that dissonant ghost music in those jazz musicians Lobo

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<sup>64</sup> Roland Barthes, *La Chambre Claire: Note Sur La Photographie*, (Paris: Gallimard, Le Seuil, 1980), pp. 52-54.

Antunes is so fond of. In the chronicle *De Deus como apreciador de jazz*, he writes about the influence of jazz:

Cresci com um enorme retrato de Charlie Parker no quarto. Julgo que para um miúdo que resumia toda a sua ambição em tornar-se escritor Charlie Parker era de facto a companhia ideal. Esse pobre, sublime, miserável, genial drogado que passou a vida a matar-se e morreu de juventude como outros de velhice continua a encarnar para mim aquela frase da Arte Poética de Horácio que resume o que deve ser qualquer livro ou pintura ou sinfonia ou o que seja: uma bela desordem precedida do furor poético [...]. Sempre que me falam de palavras e influências rio-me um pouco por dentro: quem ajudou de fato a amadurecer o meu trabalho foram os músicos.<sup>65</sup>

Although it may seem contradictory to identify cycles within Lobo Antunes' novels when his work is normally ascribed an aesthetic continuum (again the idea of cycle comes to mind), this dual nature has already been addressed by other scholars, such as Filipe Cammaert: 'embora seja possível estabelecer uma periodização, a obra deve ser igualmente considerada em termos de um *continuum* materializado nas "intertextualidades homoautorais".<sup>66</sup> These 'intertextualidades homoautorais' are not only visible between novels but also flow out into the chronicles, giving his body of work a sense of wholeness, of overall intertextuality. They permit a substantial array of themes that form the literary landscape that prevails throughout his novels, nevertheless allowing for different cycles being formed.

'As obras romanescas de António Lobo Antunes funcionam [...] como um *continuum*, em que escolhas de escrita se prolongam e desenvolvem'.<sup>67</sup> This

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<sup>65</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Segundo Livro de Crónicas* (Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 2002) p.137.

<sup>66</sup> António Lobo Antunes: *Arte do Romance*, ed. by Filipe Cammaert, pp.19-20.

<sup>67</sup> Catarina Vaz Warrot, *Chaves de Escrita e Chaves de Leitura nos Romances de António Lobo Antunes*, p.209.

continuum, albeit evident in the trilogy, only manifests itself in its totality in *Explicação dos Pássaros* and the novels that follow it. From this work onwards, each of the novels is different; they have different narrative voices, in the majority of cases multiple, pertaining to different characters and different points of view, they grow in complexity and diversity and it becomes increasingly more difficult to discern who the narrator is.<sup>68</sup> In a way, they represent successive attempts to address what was left unwritten in previous novels. The narrator of the biographical trilogy, however, does not follow this polyphonic pattern. Due to the numerous points of contact between the three novels it is fair to consider that all novels are narrated by/about the same character and that they form a single narrative unity. In all three of the novels the narrator/character is a divorced man, a doctor with the specialization of psychiatry who had served in the Portuguese colonial wars (particularly evident in *Os Cus de Judas*), concretely in Angola. These are not only points of contact between the three novels but also, and more importantly, they coincide with elements of the author's biography: Lobo Antunes is also a psychiatrist, divorced from his first wife and a veteran from the Colonial War where, like the narrator(s) of the three novels, he served as a doctor. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, they constantly manifest a desire and a frustration to write<sup>69</sup>, preoccupations on

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<sup>68</sup> With the exception of 'Sôbolos rios que vão', which also has the characteristics which permit it to be included in the 'biographical cycle'.

<sup>69</sup> 'And the "man" the reader discovers in each of the three successive protagonists is a psychiatrist/doctor who has returned from the colonial war in Angola, the memory of which clearly haunts him in his return to his medical career in Lisbon. Each of the three protagonists is also struggling to become a writer.' Isabel Moutinho, 'Writing the War and the Man in the First Novels of António Lobo Antunes' in *Facts and Fictions of António Lobo Antunes*, ed. by Victor K. Mendes, p.72.

becoming a writer – a torment that, seemingly accessory, holds the key to the full impact of the Antunesian experience.

### **1.3. Style, content and the renewal of the art of the novel**

#### **1.3.1. The Language of Madness and Trauma**

Not only are the contents of his novels worthy of analysis, Lobo Antunes' characteristic style is also worth addressing as it is relevant to the full understanding of his contribution to literature. His now trademark style was, at the time of the appearance of his first novels, quite innovative in the context of Portuguese literature. Its strangeness meant that the critical framing of his novels became (and it still is) quite an arduous task for literary critics and scholars.

At first he is still stylistically imbued with the hysterics and histrionics of Céline, at the same time already developing a Faulknerian stream-of-consciousness that would become more and more evident in subsequent novels. Faulkner's influence in the stylistic construction of his novels has been noted by critic Inès Cazalas: 'Este princípio de justaposição dos monólogos provém evidentemente de Faulkner (*The Sound and the Fury, As I Lay Dying*).'<sup>70</sup> Albeit more visible in later novels, the importance of this stylistic influence of modernist literature also represents a deliberate attempt to create something new, to consolidate his artistic ethos, simultaneously innovating the form of the novel in Portuguese literature and by tackling the issues analysed in this academic endeavour.

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<sup>70</sup> Inès Cazalas, 'O Romanesco na Obra de António Lobo Antunes: Herança, Desconstrução, Reinvenção', in *António Lobo Antunes: A Arte do Romance*, ed. by Felipe Cammaert, pp.49-70 (p.57).

O romance modernista aparece assim como uma mediação que se reapropria desta herança literária, como um modelo que pode subverter o romance realista: se uma comédia humana consegue desenvolver-se, é no labirinto da memória que isso acontece. O estilçamento da instância narratorial implica uma reconfiguração da matéria romanesca que não está organizada de acordo com uma relação de causalidade lógico-temporal, mas segundo uma relação de contiguidade sensorial e poética. É precisamente esta passagem de uma lógica narrativa a uma lógica associativa que oferece a possibilidade de o romance [...] se fortalecer e despojar de todo o pesado maquinismo da intriga. Este é abandonado em prol de microacontecimentos cuja lembrança surge na memória das personagens: é, portanto, neste espaço de microperipécia que o romanesco continua a existir.<sup>71</sup>

‘Microacontecimentos’ and ‘Microperipécias’. This is the space of the Antunesian novel. It is within these ‘micro-spaces’ that Lobo Antunes articulates, always in relation with a certain affected memory, the preoccupations of his writing, by permitting a fragmentation of the narrative process and the relativization of narratives anchored in a clearly defined space-time. The modernist style he inherits is the way in which he found it possible to convey the mainly post-modern themes he wishes to address. The narratives existing on the margins of great historical and social narratives breach their surface, pouring into existence through the cracks of the fragments Lobo Antunes opens up with his writing.

### **1.3.2. Master Narratives versus Counter-Narratives**

In Lobo Antunes, as in Céline, another of his early literary influences, a specific feature of his writing is ‘the drowning of narrative in a style, which [...] is gradually decanted; more and more incisive, precise’<sup>72</sup> and yet ‘[...] haunted by

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid. pp.57-58.

<sup>72</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror, An Essay on Abjection*, p.137.

the same concern – to touch the intimate nerve, to grab hold of emotions by means of speech, to make writing oral, in other words, contemporaneous, swift, obscene'.<sup>73</sup>

This making 'writing oral' has a powerful stylistic significance. Recalling Kristeva's words on the language of madness and depression, one has to consider the fact that the fragmented, interrupted sentences and the repetitive rhythms found in Lobo Antunes' writing do have a symbolic significance themselves:

Let us keep in mind the speech of the depressed – repetitive and monotonous. Faced with the impossibility of concatenating, they utter sentences that interrupted, exhausted, come to a standstill. Even phrases they cannot formulate. A repetitive rhythm, a monotonous melody emerges and dominates the broken logical sequences, changing them into recurring, obsessive litanies.<sup>74</sup>

This metaphorical employment of the language of depression is paramount to illustrate the mad and traumatic dimension of the central themes of his writing, the fragmentation of the self/selves resulting from war, marginalisation, oppression and exclusion. This stylistic appropriation, nonetheless, demands critical engagement as it could be problematic and counterproductive for his artistic *ethos*. Susan Sontag, in her book *Illness as Metaphor*, has pointed out the failures of the tendency to romanticize illness. 'The romanticising of madness reflects in the most vehement way the contemporary prestige of irrational or rude (spontaneous) behaviour (acting-out)',<sup>75</sup> she writes. Thus, by stylistically

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun, Depression and Melancholia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989) p.33.

<sup>75</sup> Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor & Aids and its Metaphors* (London: Penguin Books, 1991) p. 37.

appropriating the language of madness, Lobo Antunes places his writing in dangerous territory. Throughout the centuries, madness has been used in many different ways, one of them being admittedly a romanticisation of the critical power of madness as a satirical and challenging tool to undermine master-narratives. This has, of course, been done in a certain way, normally by presenting 'the mad' as special, almost prophetic. Therefore, literary appropriations have permitted that in 'the images that collected around the disease one can see emerging a modern idea of individuality that has taken in the twentieth century a more aggressive, if no less narcissistic, form. Sickness was a way of making people "interesting"'.<sup>76</sup>

Much like another illness, tuberculosis, madness seems to have been ascribed a 'special status'. Sontag reflects on this when addressing tuberculosis:

Sadness made one 'interesting'. It was a mark of refinement, of sensibility, to be sad. That is, to be powerless. [I]t takes a sensitive person to feel such sadness; or by implication, to contract tuberculosis. The myth of TB constitutes the next-to-last episode in the long career of the ancient idea of melancholy – which was the artist's disease [...] The melancholy character [...] was a superior one: sensitive, creative, a being apart.<sup>77</sup>

Such considerations can easily be applied to madness. Not only tuberculosis, but also madness, have been the 'artist's disease'. In fact, whereas this notion has been abandoned in the case of tuberculosis, it has somewhat persisted in the case of madness, as it can be seen in Jamison's book *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament*<sup>78</sup>.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid. p.31.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. pp.32-33.

<sup>78</sup> Kay Redfield Jamison, *Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and The Artistic Temperament* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1994).

A psychiatrist by trade but also a sufferer of a mental disorder herself<sup>79</sup>, Kay Jamison offers us interesting insights into this problematic. Reflecting the relationship between manic-depressive illness and artists, she writes:

Recent research strongly suggests that, compared with the general population, writers and artists show a vastly disproportionate rate of manic-depressive illness; clearly, however, not all (not even most) writers and artists suffer from major mood disorders. There remains scepticism and resistance to the idea of *any* association, however – some of it stemming understandably from the excesses of psychobiography [...], but much of it arising from a lack of understanding of the nature of manic-depressive illness itself.<sup>80</sup>

However, at the other end of the spectrum, by being fearful of articulating, appropriating or simply engaging with the discourse of madness, one is condemning it to a space of exclusion, preventing critical reflection and stripping away its power as metaphor, when put at the service of literature and art. A powerful caveat is offered by Foucault: ‘In the serene world of mental illness, modern man no longer communicates with the madman: [...] the man of reason delegates the physician to madness, thereby authorising a relation only through the abstract universality of disease’<sup>81</sup>.

On one hand, the romanticisation of madness was in itself a form of excluding madness from epistemological dialogue, by claiming its special status when associated with the artist while, naturally, ignoring its validity when associated with those of no ‘special creative status’, that is, the majority of

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<sup>79</sup> Her ‘in-between’ position is quite similar to that of Lobo Antunes, her gaze is similar. With the necessary difference of being a mental patient herself, the carefulness and originality in which she perceives madness does strike a chord with Lobo Antunes’ writing.

<sup>80</sup> Jamison, p.5.

<sup>81</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001) p. xii.

sufferers of mental afflictions. On the other hand, as highlighted by Foucault, there is the natural tendency of ascribing the mad to a place of complete exclusion, delegating the responsibility of epistemological engagement to doctors and other agents, thus relegating the mad (or the traumatized, for that matter) to that universal abstract category that is not only materially excluded, coming to light only through medicalized discourse, only through study-cases and manuals of psychiatry. It is clear then that literature and art have a role to play.

Again, Jamison:

[T]here must be serious concern about any attempt to reduce what is beautiful and original to a clinical syndrome, genetic flaw, or predictable temperament. It is frightening, and ultimately terribly boring to think of anyone – certainly not only writers, artists and musicians – in such a limited way. The fear that medicine and science will take away from the ineffability of it all, or detract from then mind's labyrinth complexity, is as old as man's attempts to chart the movement of the stars.<sup>82</sup>

The dilemma is how to simultaneously respect the ethical boundaries of mental illness by representing its sufferers in a fair light whilst avoiding patronisations and stereotypes but at the same time challenging the suffocating and hegemonic discourse of 'scientific knowledge' by ascribing the narrative(s) of madness and trauma a status of epistemological validity. In other words, the 'narrative knowledge' of the mad and the traumatised (and other excluded margins) represents a safeguard, a resistance against the silencing of those marginalized narratives. À propos, Lyotard asserts :

scientific knowledge does not represent the totality of knowledge; it has always existed in addition to, and in competition and conflict with, another kind of knowledge, which I will call narrative in the interests of simplicity [...] I do not mean to say that narrative

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<sup>82</sup> Jamison, pp.258-259.

knowledge can prevail over science, but its model is related to ideas of internal equilibrium and conviviality next to which contemporary scientific knowledge cuts a poor figure, especially if it is to undergo an exteriorization with respect to the 'knower' and an alienation from its user even greater than has previously been the case.<sup>83</sup>

Therefore, it is a case of two competing narratives, one hegemonic and the other of resistance to that hegemony. The relation between the two is necessarily a Hegelian one, based on a dialectic dynamics. It is, so to say, a *Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*<sup>84</sup> relation, a dichotomy that is in constant struggle. Aiding this argument in the words of Hegel himself: 'The lord relates himself mediately to the bondsman through a being [a thing] that is independent, for it is just this which holds the bondsman in bondage; it is his chain from which he could not break free in the struggle, thus proving himself to be dependent, to possess his independence in thinghood.'<sup>85</sup> Thus, applying Hegel's somewhat abstract words to more concrete realities, one can present this dialectic as existing in many spheres, such as, for example, that of the relation between medicine and patient, more specifically for the matter at hand, psychiatry and the 'mad'. The Master (or Lord), under the guise of psychiatrist, relates itself to patients (the Slave, or Bondsman) only through the mediation of diagnostics, based on symptoms that are appropriated from the particular to the collective. The bond is then enforced by the creation of manuals of diagnostics that serve mainly a 'prescriptive'

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<sup>83</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992) p.7.

<sup>84</sup> Albeit properly translated as *Lordship and Bondage*, I will, for the sake of my argument, use the more common denomination of *Master and Slave*.

<sup>85</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977) p.115.

function and by the creation of a narrative (or better, several narratives) justifying the validity, importance and, especially, power of these manuals and diagnoses. They exist independently of the Master, for once formulated, they assume a role of their own, across the spectrum of disciplines and across time. Therefore, these manuals and narratives are the ‘thing’ in Hegel’s formulation, subjecting the Slave to its shackling.

The allegory can be expanded to other realities, also relevant to this study, such as the historical narrative of the Discoveries, a glorification of a reality that serves to justify the colonising attitude that would culminate in the traumatic Colonial War. Or the narrative of a certain idea of the ‘male subject’, or other narratives that assume the status of what Lyotard has defined as ‘metanarratives’ (or master-narratives):

A second-order, totalizing reflexion about a group of narratives or stories, aiming to explain, order, unify or contextualize them. [...] For Lyotard, ‘metanarratives’ represent overarching belief systems since they tend to explain all other ‘little stories’ and therefore make universal and totalizing claims about reality, knowledge or experience.<sup>86</sup>

The existence of these master-narratives and their totalizing claims does not go unchallenged. On the other side of the dialectic, there are precisely those ‘little stories’, those other narratives that refuse to be ordered, unified and totalized. Such narratives are characteristic of postmodernism. ‘Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives’<sup>87</sup> reflects

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<sup>86</sup> *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, ed. by J.A. Cuddon, p.432.

<sup>87</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, p.xxiv.

Lyotard, '[b]ut our incredulity is now such that we no longer expect salvation to rise from these inconsistencies'.<sup>88</sup>

These inconsistencies are what forms those 'counter-narratives' that respond, challenge and overcome the consensus created by master-narratives. For 'consensus does violence to the heterogeneity of language games. And invention is always born of dissension. Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable'.<sup>89</sup> Thus, these plural and heterogeneous counter-narratives hold the dynamism that animates the whole dialectic. It is the bondsman in Hegel's theory that has the power to free himself, to discover the truth that lives in himself, being the only one who, ultimately, can legitimise his experiences, knowledge and truth(s):

In the lord, the being-for-itself is an 'other' for the bondsman, or is only *for* him [...]; in fear, the being-for-itself is present in the bondsman himself; in fashioning the thing, he becomes aware that being-for-self belongs to *him*, that he himself exists essentially and actually in his own right. [...] Through this rediscovery of himself by himself, the bondsman realizes that is precisely in his work wherein he seemed to have only an alienated existence that he acquires a mind of his own.<sup>90</sup>

Postmodern writers, such as Lobo Antunes, seek to unearth those hidden or ignored narratives and make of them the substance of their writing. For him, there seems not to exist an inherent hierarchy between master and counter-narratives; they relate to each other not vertically but horizontally. They are equivalent. In one of his televised interviews, aired on 20 January of 2015, under

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid. p.xxv.

<sup>90</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, pp.118-119.

the title *O Meu Tempo é Hoje*, he declares: ‘Saber fazer pastéis de bacalhau é tão importante como ter lido *Os Lusíadas*. É uma forma de cultura’.<sup>91</sup> By declaring this somewhat controversial statement, he is challenging a Master-narrative, which has existed for centuries in Portugal. It does it by considering it as being as relevant and as important as a cultural act as that other mundane and low-brow type of knowledge that is to make cod fishcakes. It is, then, within the space of these counter-narratives that Lobo Antunes, the writer, exists. He is not alone, being the heir of many other writers that, with varying degrees of success and relevance, have challenged master-narratives (Sade, Lautréamont, Joyce, Kafka, Céline, etc.).

Despite being the continuation of the genealogy of writers placed in a counter-narrative spectrum, and logically the same romanticising tendency being a possibility, Lobo Antunes successfully steers away from this, his appropriation of this type of language in his style being ironic, hence the important presence of abjection in his writing. Far from idealising madness, he uses its language precisely to challenge the romantic idea of madness, placing it in the space of abjection, the space of the mundane and unpleasantness of those who have been, willingly or unwillingly, excluded. It is precisely in the aesthetical dimension that his ironic approach is a powerful medium to debunk a certain romanticization or, conversely, the vilification of these groups: ‘Underlying some of the moral judgements attached to disease are aesthetic judgments about the beautiful and the ugly, the clean and the unclean, the familiar or the alien or

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<sup>91</sup> ‘O Meu Tempo é Hoje’, RTP, 15th July 2015 , <http://www.rtp.pt/play/p1779/o-meu-tempo-e-hoje> [Accessed 15th July 2015].

uncanny'.<sup>92</sup> Lobo Antunes, by placing his writing amidst all of these realities, excluding none, framing no hierarchies between them, by writing in between abjection, beauty, boredom, trauma and tenderness, Eros and Thanatos, demolishes the borders that prevent marginalized counter-narratives from emerging.

The suffering present in his writing is not at all exclusive to those who are creative or consider themselves superior, whether artistically or propped up by master-narratives, but belonging to everyone who is encompassed in those counter-narratives covered in his novels. Pain and suffering are not the privilege of the few, but the reality of the many.

#### 1.4 Abjection

On her reflections about Céline, Julia Kristeva writes that:

The worlds of illusions, now dead and buried, have given way to our dreams and deliriums if not to politics or science –the religions of modern times. Lacking illusions, lacking shelter, today's universe is divided between *boredom* (increasingly anguished by the prospect of losing its resources, through depletion) or (when the spark of the symbolic is maintained and desire to speak explodes) *abjection* and *piercing laughter*. [...] Conclusively [...] Céline anchors the destiny of literature in the latter territory, not that the Death of God but a reassumption, *through style*, of what lies hidden by God.<sup>93</sup>

Kristeva's words could easily be applied to Lobo Antunes. Indebted to Céline, he continues to anchor literature to these less aesthetically pleasing tropes, with abjection assuming a decisive role in the early novels here analysed. As we shall appreciate in more detail later, in the chapters where the novels are subjected to

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<sup>92</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, p.127.

<sup>93</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror, An Essay on Abjection*, p.133.

close reading, images of unpleasantness – faeces, nausea, bird shit, etc. – are recurrent symbols, which allied to the violent and non-pleasurable sexual and military imagery that creeps in the background, form a height of abjection in his writing. It seems as though his narrators yearn an actual physical catharsis of the traumatic unpleasantness in the act of expulsion and expelling. ‘Actos físicos relacionados com a acção de expelir, como vómitos, escarros, excrementos, sangue e sémen, dão conta da aflição e menosprezo das suas personagens, em situações de perda e desorientação originadas pela guerra, a doença, o abandono e a miséria’.<sup>94</sup>

Abjection thus becomes a powerful resource to convey the madness and trauma of post-Colonial war Portugal. Allied with the free flowing nature of the Antunesian prose, this rupture provokes an artistic shattering that parallels the social shattering of the period in which the first novels appeared, brought about by the revolution of 1974. The disintegration is catalysed by those two traumatizing realities present in the first novels, the war and the world of mental institutions. ‘O meio psiquiátrico e a guerra colonial estimulam, em relação íntima com a desintegração mental que o sujeito sofre, a presença de atitudes e situações que no contexto são abjectas, de expulsão, mas também de absorção, revelando o horror que se abate sobre ele’.<sup>95</sup> Thus, the linguistic rendering of the convulsive and traumatic period is, for the type of writer that Lobo Antunes is, necessarily disruptive. However, this is nothing new in the history of literature.

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<sup>94</sup> *Dicionário da Obra de António Lobo Antunes (Vol.II)*, ed. by Maria Alziro Seixo, *et al*, p.13.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* p.14.

Decades earlier, and in the field of poetry, the French symbolist poet Mallarmé had already addressed this. By breaking with traditional verse ‘Mallarmé’s acute and singular perception of the celebration of the free verse as the violent experience of linguistic rupture, as the historical advent of a linguistic fragmentation in which the verse is violently and deliberately “broken”, in what Mallarmé describes as a “fundamental crisis” [...]’<sup>96</sup> he asserts that ‘the *formal* change is crucially, implicitly endowed with a *political* dimension’.<sup>97</sup> Thus, the disruptive and broken style of Lobo Antunes does have the same effect in his prose, charging it with political dimension. Reflecting on the impact of this stylistic rupture, Shoshana Felman states:

Paradoxically enough, the political upheaval and the civil shaking of foundations brought about by the fall of governments and the collapse of institutions may not be, in fact, as profound and as radical a change as the one accomplished by a linguistic or a poetic transformation. Insofar as the accidenting of the verse narrates the drama of the accidenting – the disruption and the shattering – of “this ultimate dogma”, insofar as the resistance of tradition is now finally and formally dissolved and the traditional hierarchical divisions between poetry and prose – between *classes* in language – are now disposed of and inherently unsettled, the breaking of the verse becomes itself a symptom and an emblem of the historical breaking of political and cultural grounds, and the freeing, or the *liberation*, of the verse [...] implicates the process of a vaster desacralization, of a vaster liberation taking place in social consciousness and in culture at large.<sup>98</sup>

It is easy to grasp, then, that Lobo Antunes’ writing stylistically emulates, or narrates, those political, social and cultural changes of post-Revolution Portugal, at the same time breaking and challenging literary traditions. The cathartic (but

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<sup>96</sup> Shoshana Felman, ‘Education and Crisis, or The Vicissitudes of Teaching’, in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (ed. Cathy Caruth), p.27.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* p.28.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

painful) liberation of the traumatic past takes shape in Lobo Antunes' aesthetic of rejection.

### 1.5 Chronicles

In parallel to his novelistic production, Lobo Antunes is also the author of many 'chronicles', published since 1984, although the ones which have been compiled into book form start from 1993. These (1993 onwards) are the ones we are interested in and they have appeared in two different publications – the newspaper *PÚBLICO* first, between 1993 and 1998, and since then the magazine *VISÃO*, in which he continues to publish.

The importance of these texts is somewhat minimised by the author himself, who went as far as calling them 'literatura alimentar'<sup>99</sup>, denoting their nature as mainly a source of income, a duty which he performs in order to facilitate the 'slow and difficult' writing of his novels:

Necessitava de todo o tempo para os meus romances, que escrevo devagar e com dificuldade, e tornava-se difícil abandoná-los de quinze em quinze dias para redigir uma página de revista imaginando os eventuais leitores de um suplemento de domingo gostariam de um trecho leve, simples, agradável e fácil de escrever – o contrário do que pretendo nos livros.<sup>100</sup>

As Lobo Antunes hints, the chronicles are of a completely different nature from the novels. They are supposed to be light and simple, easy to write (and to read). Or at least that is what he aimed for.

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<sup>99</sup> Maria Alzira Seixo, *As Flores do Inferno e Jardins Suspensos* (Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 2009) pg.131.

<sup>100</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Livro de Crónicas* (Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 1998) p.389.

The dismissal of his chronicles might nevertheless be a promotional stunt, a constructed discourse to set the readers on the wrong course and by doing so, surprising them even more with the content of such texts.<sup>101</sup> This constructed discourse would not be dissonant from the public persona the writer tries to incarnate, somewhat dismissive and rebellious. This gesture is in accordance with what I have argued. It is a conscious artistic attitude – an ironic and defiant attitude that not only manifests its rebellion through his literature, but also through his pose.

What type of chronicler is, then, Lobo Antunes? How are his chronicles defined in terms of literary criticism? What is – in this context - a ‘chronicle’?

In the Portuguese tradition and context, the chronicle genre has a significant role, linked with the very formation of a concept of national identity and consolidation of an idea of nation. To understand how this genre shaped the notion of Portuguese identity and had its literary status elevated within the country’s literary tradition, one needs to look back in medieval times. In fact, in Portugal, ‘the royal chronicle as such first started and gained importance from the early 15th century onwards’<sup>102</sup>, in particular with the ‘Crónica de Portugal de 1419’ of authorship which is attributed to Fernão Lopes. The fact that there

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<sup>101</sup> ‘Tais declarações devem no entanto ser tomadas, como muitas palavras públicas dos escritores, em jeito de recurso aleatório da palavra, que nestes casos serve prioritariamente o interesse promocional, procurando construir uma imagem que se entenda por conveniente.’ Maria Alzira Seixo, *As Flores do Inferno e Jardins Suspensos*, p.131.

<sup>102</sup> Bernardo Vasconcelos e Sousa, ‘Medieval Portuguese Royal Chronicles. Topics in a Discourse of Identity and Power.’ e-JPH, Vol. 5, number 2 (Winter 2007), pp.2-7 (p.2) <[https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Portuguese\\_Brazilian\\_Studies/ejph/html/issue10/pdf/bsousa.pdf](https://www.brown.edu/Departments/Portuguese_Brazilian_Studies/ejph/html/issue10/pdf/bsousa.pdf)>.

are other (older) chronicles, preceding this particular one, does not alter its importance, as they are to do with the larger Iberian context. In the ‘Crónica de Portugal de 1419’, ‘Portugal is subjected to a narrative treatment that is totally independent of the Iberian context, something that was contrary to what happened until then’.<sup>103</sup> This independent narrative has, even before *Os Lusíadas*, started the construction of the Lusophone identity, a narration that Lobo Antunes undoubtedly pursues and continues, albeit in very different terms and with very different aims. As seen elsewhere in this work, he attempts it throughout several of his novels, particularly in *As Naus*, in which he deals with this historical narrative more directly. It is then, unsurprisingly, that the chronicle is a genre also explored in Lobo Antunes’ literature and that (perhaps unconsciously) he continues not only that tradition of the form, but also the tradition of the style. He is the inheritor of Fernão Lopes’ ‘construction of discourse, the narrative sequence, the liveliness of the style, the conception of history’<sup>104</sup> as he also imprints his chronicles with his very own literary mark. However (but crucially), he does not share the vision or the ideology that Lopes and his successors constructed: ‘They did not hesitate to attribute a transcendent mission to the Portuguese Crown, which is expressed through the revival and relaunching of a crusading ideal in which the Portuguese monarchs become the staunchest and most faithful players’<sup>105</sup>. This resembles very clearly the same propagandistic discourse of the dictatorial regime under which Lobo Antunes

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.p.4.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.p.5.

was born and which he was sent to ‘defend’ in the colonial war in Africa. Like the jingoistic discourse makers of the Estado Novo, the monarchy’s (or any form of oppressive master-narrative) ‘interest in the chronicle genre was the aim of appropriating the past and of “constructing” this same past so that an absolute identity could be established’.<sup>106</sup>

Quite on the contrary, Lobo Antunes uses the chronicles as a form of criticism, of satire of contemporary Portugal, in an effort to dismantle that same ideological construct that sent him and many men of his generation to war. Therefore, the chronicle is, in Lobo Antunes, a form of constant questioning, a provocation of the master-narratives that prevail in Portuguese society, forcing the readers to confront themselves of those seemingly non-important counter-narratives of mediocrity, banality and of the mundane that are normally overlooked, but in which resides the essence of his literary artistry.

The importance of these texts to the analysis of the author’s corpus cannot be ignored as it permits a better understanding of his literary production as a whole, allowing different perspectives and different takes on the subject (s) of this thesis. We have seen what the author intended the chronicles to be in stylistic terms. Considering that, if we focus our scrutiny on the content of the chronicles, despite some of these conforming to the labels ‘light’ and ‘simple’, we discover that, on the contrary, the content of others is far more challenging and relevant. In fact, some of the chronicles are keys that unlock a broader (never complete) understanding of the author’s literary spectrum.

It is also in the chronicles that we can find a continuation of the literary incipit started with the ‘trilogy’ that his first three novels constitute and where

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

the author has the liberty of expressing (and exploring) the guidelines of his literary project: ‘Foi nas crónicas que Lobo Antunes encontrou a possibilidade de expressar os princípios que orientam o seu labor literário’<sup>107</sup>. Much like *Memória de Elefante* or *Conhecimento do Inferno*, the majority of the chronicles deal with an authorial ‘I’ that touches the realm of the autobiographical without denouncing its autobiographical truth. As we will see further, even the most blatant autobiographic chronicles have a fictional layer, applied by the author in order to dilute any concept of a fixed subject or, for that matter, a fixed author.

This *unfocusing* of the subject is aptly defined by Maria Filomena Barradas, who identifies it as a characteristic of not only the chronicles, but also of the novels. She uses the metaphor ‘book of mirrors’<sup>108</sup> to describe this effect of multiple voices and perspectives. In more detail, she writes:

É porque estão sujeitos a esta dinâmica do espelhamento que os romances do autor parecem tão desorganizados. Aquilo que o autor faz é convocar continuamente memórias, fragmentos, fantasmagorias que dificultam ao leitor a construção de quadros de referência pela constante mudança dos horizontes, chamando a atenção para a própria complexidade do real. O livro das páginas de espelhos confronta-nos com o facto de que – a ser possível – representar a totalidade, tal ter de passar por uma forma de contar que dê conta dos múltiplos fragmentos que compõem essa totalidade.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Maria Filomena Barradas, ‘Da literatura alimentar ao romance das páginas de espelhos – Uma leitura de Livro de Crónicas de António Lobo Antunes’ (unpublished Master’s thesis, Universidade de Lisboa, Faculdade de Letras, Departamento de Estudos Românicos, 2002) p.8.

<sup>108</sup> ‘A metáfora do “livro das páginas de espelhos” deseja dar conta de um *modus faciendi* literário que valoriza o ludismo’. Maria Filomena Barradas, ‘Da literatura alimentar ao romance das páginas de espelhos – Uma leitura de Livro de Crónicas de António Lobo Antunes’, p.31.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid. pp.31-32.

Despite being here employed in the analysis of the novels, this metaphor can be extended to the chronicles. In fact, it is particularly valuable to the chronicles if one considers that each chronicle represents one of those multiple fragments, free from the organizational limits required by the novelistic form. Contrary to the novels, the chronicles, even when compiled as a book, lack a sense of unity – a wholeness – which plays in its favour, elevating them as the best representatives of the employment of this technique ('the book of mirrors') in Lobo Antunes's body of writing.

The variety of registers employed by the author in his chronicles testifies to the wealth of different perspectives, very much akin to his novels, albeit delivered in a shorter breadth. Maria Alzira Seixo identifies this variety 'nas crónicas, sempre de índole tão variada, o escritor fala de si (com sinceridade, ou, por vezes, numa perfeita invenção!) e dos outros [...] com sentimentos diversos'<sup>110</sup> and presents a tentative categorisation of the chronicles:

'a crónica apresenta-se por vezes próxima da evocação lírica ou nostálgica, ou mesmo do poema em prosa, mas também do ensaio, do diário, da autobiografia, do conto, do relato circunstancial, do retrato, da paródia e da fantasia'.<sup>111</sup>

Less tentatively, Alzira Seixo manages to identify four different categories<sup>112</sup> (or groups) of chronicles: autobiographical; fictional; literature/writing related and those concerning or dedicated to people (real or imagined, famous or unknown). It is this categorisation that we will bear in mind for further analyses, albeit the fact that it cannot be considered a definitive

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<sup>110</sup> Maria Alzira Seixo, *As Flores do Inferno e Jardins Suspensos*, p.133.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* pp.133-134.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.* p.135.

systematisation due to the nature and intention of the chronicles. It would seem a pointless exercise to force into a system what the author deliberately intends to be a complex, unsystematic literary conception – one needs only to consider the constant dilution of a concept of self, of author and ultimately of autobiography, in both the novels and the chronicles; with the full intentional consequences of reading a text of such complexity and difficulty part of the author's agenda.

However, because of the limitations of the present exercise, it is necessary that some sort of categorisation (despite the recognised limitations mentioned before) is employed in order to facilitate the application of analysis. Therefore, it is mainly on the first two types of chronicles – autobiographical and fictional – that we will focus our attention. Within these, the criteria falls obviously on those that deal directly or indirectly with the themes of this thesis. Therefore, the selection of chronicles here presented are normally around Lobo Antunes's personal life (the suicide of friends, for example), his experiences as a psychiatrist, his practice in the hospital, his memories and traumas from the war, some fictional texts and characters that are either mad or in whose stories madness plays a major role.

Throughout the next chapters, the chronicles will serve to inform and exemplify the problematisation of the different themes in the author's writing, always having in sight their *biographical* quality.

## CHAPTER 2

### Lobo Antunes, as Soldier

Entre 1961 e 1974, os militares portugueses estiveram envolvidos em operações de combate em Angola, Moçambique e Guiné, naquilo que se designou por guerra colonial.

Apesar das dificuldades em encontrar estatísticas dos três ramos das forças armadas, há algum acordo de que participaram nas operações cerca de um milhão de soldados Portugueses, dos quais cerca de 10.000 terão perdido a vida e 40.000 ficaram feridos.<sup>113</sup>

The horrors experienced in a conflict that involved so many men (more or less a tenth of the Portuguese population), can be read in several texts, many produced by its participants, like Lobo Antunes and, for instance, the poet Fernando Assis Pacheco. It is from one of the latter's poems that we must (elliptically) apprehend the importance of the war not only for Lobo Antunes' literature but for Portuguese culture in general:

As bombas – e tu se calhar crês que não – explodiam na / mesa de cabeceira. Literalmente. Explodiam às três e às quatro. Morri uma sexta-feira, uma quinta, no dia seguinte davam-se massas / ao faxina para recolher tudo para o balde – ossos, tripas, tudo.<sup>114</sup>

The stanza from the poem *Não Dormias, Não Dormes*, published as early as 1972, evidences the horrific and abject environment the combatants (undoubtedly from both sides) encountered in the conflict. Bombs exploding frequently, the traumatic abjection of being witness to violent deaths, hinted at by the act of ashamedly having to pay the reluctant cleaner to mop up human insides – *ossos, tripas, tudo* – bones, guts and other things of that nature. Worthy

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<sup>113</sup> Ângela Maia, *et al.* 'Por baixo das pústulas da guerra: reflexões sobre um estudo com ex-combatentes da guerra colonial' in *A guerra colonial (1961-1974)* ed. by Manuel Gama (Braga: Universidade do Minho, Centro de Estudos Lusíadas, 2006) pp. 11-28. (pp.11-12).

<sup>114</sup> Fernando Assis Pacheco, *A Musa Irregular* (Lisboa: Assírio e Alvim, 2006) p. 61.

of notice is the poet's use of the first-person singular in the verb *morrer* (to die): *Morri uma sexta-feira, uma quinta*. In Assis Pacheco's verse we find the use of the collective voice (channelled through the singular voice of the author) that Lobo Antunes will also use in his prose. The collective voice is indeed a fundamental trait of Lobo Antunes' early writing, especially in the novel *Os Cus de Judas* and it is clear from the excerpt from this poem that this is a device shared by other writers who went through the experience of war, as is the case with Francisco Assis Pacheco. Perhaps the use of this literary device is nothing less than a necessity for a generation to express themselves, collectively channelled in the voices of these authors.

The sequential, and impossible, act of individual dying in consecutive days, although in a backwards direction (a direct retrospective remembrance) is a poetic appropriation of the collective voice of a traumatised and impaired (dead) generation. The trope of a collective voice will be most effectively articulated by Lobo Antunes, in the perfected craft he develops in his novels, thus proving that the novelist's preoccupations (both aesthetically and in content) are not a personal obsession but rather the preoccupations of an entire period and society at large, simultaneously marking him as a socially engaged writer who nevertheless seeks to innovate and as a writer in permanent dialogue with his contemporaries, with whom he shares and addresses a collective trauma.

This poem and Assis Pacheco's work is nevertheless only mentioned here as an early example of how the war found its way into literature. Another example could be the novel *Autópsia de um Mar em Ruínas*<sup>115</sup>, by João de Melo,

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<sup>115</sup> João de Melo, *Autópsia de um Mar em Ruínas* (Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 2007).

amongst many others. However, arguably none of the many examples one could mention articulates as successfully, consistently and extensively the war, the experiences in the conflict and its consequences as does Lobo Antunes. For him, as for countless of his contemporaries, the horrors of the conflict engendered a crisis of unreferential history, resulting in a constant state of waking nightmare from where the author's literature stems, a zombiefied literature where abject, pain, trauma, existential suffering and the absurdity of the world are repeated in fragments, a cluster-bomb literature that obliges the reader to put it together, committedly. These fragments, spread in his novels, chronicles and letters, and their piecing together by the reader, who somehow functions as a surgeon reattaching a fragmented tissue or a psychoanalyst putting together the pieces of a narrative puzzle in order to construct a larger picture, are the synecdoche that establishes his literature as a comprehensive rendition of trauma, in all its dimensions.

Lobo Antunes departed for Angola on the 6th of January 1971. At the moment of his departure, he was in his late twenties and his wife was pregnant with their first child.<sup>116</sup> It was, then, a period of dramatic changes in Lobo Antunes' life. Notwithstanding, regardless of his personal circumstances, he was, like many other men of his generation, sent to the war in Africa.

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<sup>116</sup> 'Os nossos pais conheceram-se e começaram a namorar no Verão de 1966 na Praia das Mações. Em 1969 o nosso Pai licenciou-se em Medicina e foi chamado para a recruta, de onde viria a partir para a Guerra Colonial. Decidiram casar-se a 8 de Agosto de 1970, a nossa Mãe ficou grávida no mês seguinte e o nosso Pai partiu para Angola a 6 de Janeiro de 1971.' *António Lobo Antunes: D'este viver aqui neste papel descrito*. ed.by Maria José Lobo Antunes and Joana Lobo Antunes (Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 2005) p.11).

Having just finished his degree in Medicine, Lobo Antunes was nonetheless subjected to the process of military training before being sent to perform his duties as a doctor in the army. In this way, despite not being expected to be actively involved in fighting, he was also trained as a soldier, given a rank and assimilated into the larger body of the armed forces. This was not a specific reality of the Portuguese army, but rather what seems to have been common practice in many other military cultures. Writing about the Korean War (1950-1953) historian Kevin Brown remarks that: ‘The fresh-faced young doctors, many of them straight out of medical school [...] were often unprepared for what they were to find on their arrival at their postings.’<sup>117</sup> The shock provoked by the immersion in an unfamiliar situation must have been a traumatic experience in itself, regardless of the training they were subjected to. ‘They were given no time to settle in to the strange and unfamiliar situation in which they now found themselves and were unaccustomed to military life and discipline, though their medical training had given them a respect for hierarchies of competence and experience.’<sup>118</sup>

Moreover, it was not only the adjustment to the mentality and inner structures of the army but to the different (hostile, from their perspective) geographies, geologies, landscapes and climates, often much hotter than their homeland. Of these difficulties, we can read an early letter by Lobo Antunes, written on his arrival to Gago Coutinho:

27.1.1971

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<sup>117</sup> Kevin Brown, *Fighting Fit: Health, Medicine and War in the Twentieth Century* (Stroud: The History Press, 2008) pp.197-198.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*p.198.

[...]

Isto é o fim do mundo: pântanos e areias. A pior zona de guerra de Angola: 126 baixas no batalhão que rendemos, embora apenas com dois mortos, mas com amputações várias. Minas por todo o lado. [...] Um clima de amplitude térmica de 30 e tal graus. [...] A instabilidade e improvisação caracterizam esta guerra. [...] A miséria do negro é assustadora. As sanzalas inundam-se de esqueletos subalimentados, em contraste com a majestosidade da paisagem.<sup>119</sup>

Therefore, the coexistence between the roles of doctor and soldier were simultaneous, undoubtedly shaping his authorial *ethos*. This simultaneous coexistence might seem irrelevant per se, but if taken into account when analysing his early novels, it takes on an importance that is hard to disregard, especially in the case of *Conhecimento do Inferno*, where it is precisely this coexistence that forms the main narrative dynamics of the novel.

Another coexistence is that of the young man aspiring to be a writer, a preoccupation that is clearly visible in the letters, with the other two roles. Such coexistence, despite being long established in literature, is historically not a peaceful one, with inherent frictions emerging from it. In the Portuguese context, this is not an exception. Eduardo Lourenço, in his essay ‘No Antigo Regime – O exército ou a cortina da ordem’, reflects on this issue:

A aliança das “armas e das letras”, ideal camoniano ou cervantino, não isento de interno dilaceramento, carta de nobreza e marca divina do “intelectual”, é todavia um caso-limite que mais comprova do que afirma o *carácter sociologicamente negativo* das afinidades entre “o militar” e “o intelectual”. [...] Como membros da dicotomia aversiva “militar-intelectual”, como representantes de *dois mundos*, duas atitudes globais diante de si e da vida, “o militar” e o “o intelectual” são sobretudo uma realidade sociológica *moderna* [...] Mas se tal relação negativa é um facto, como será possível esperar qualquer

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<sup>119</sup> António Lobo Antunes: *D’este viver aqui neste papel descripto*. ed. by Maria José Lobo Antunes and Joana Lobo Antunes, pp.29-30.

conclusão ou mesmo abordar o problema do “militar”, e do “intelectual”, numa perspectiva útil? <sup>120</sup>

To Lourenço’s question, formulated as early as 1958<sup>121</sup>, an answer seems to be possible if materialized in the very nature of Lobo Antunes’ writing. Nevertheless, before addressing and exploring the way in which Lobo Antunes constitutes a possible answer to Lourenço’s question, it is necessary to consider, in brief, the context of the Portuguese armed forces within Portugal’s history.

Lourenço’s essay is motivated by the lack of critical thinking about the role of the army in the Portuguese society at the time, an intellectual and critical ignorance and dismissal that will seem paradoxical when, in 1974, it is precisely the army that takes into its own hands the fate of Portuguese society, becoming *de facto* responsible for carrying out the Revolution. ‘De um tempo em que *não eram* questão para o País nem para si mesmas (sociológica e subjectivamente falando), as Forças Armadas *tornaram-se a questão da Nação* sem que a Nação se sinta disposta a ser a questão das Forças Armadas.’ <sup>122</sup> Yet, what seems to be a mutual divorce, an incompatibility of natures and purposes, does not affect both partners equally. The armed forces, no matter their importance in the fabric of Portuguese society, will be relegated to a space of epistemological invisibility, the silence that, paradoxically, will become visible in the years after the war.

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<sup>120</sup> Eduardo Lourenço, *Os Militares e o Poder (seguido de O Fim de Todas as Guerras e a Guerra Sem Fim)*, (Lisboa: Gradiva, 2013) pp. 21-22.

<sup>121</sup> In the preface of the referenced book, Lourenço acknowledges that he had written the essay from which the passage is extracted in 1958, continuing his reflection (which are the other essays included in the volume) afterwards, in 1975, after the fall of the dictatorship.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* p.10.

[A]s forças armadas são em Portugal um elemento determinante da vida política (para não falar da social e económica) da Nação. É exactamente por isso que o Exército não pode gozar de tão estranho estatuto de invisibilidade perante si mesmo e perante a consciência nacional.<sup>123</sup>

The fact that Lobo Antunes has belonged to the larger body of the Army does represent a fundamental feature of his writing, as it constitutes another biographical element he draws upon in his novels and chronicles. As he does with other (counter) narratives, he rescues the narrative of his military experiences in Africa from that status of invisibility Lourenço has identified.

The war is, clearly, an open wound in the author's biography. During the comprehensive interview João Céu e Silva has conducted with the author personally, he noted: 'A dado momento, António confessa: "Tenho de ter cuidado para não tocar na guerra. Depois, quem paga as favas sou eu! Não consigo dormir!"'.<sup>124</sup> The confession of this insomnia provoked by the remembrance of the war resonates with that same insomnia that afflicts the narrators of the trilogy, in particular the narrator of *Os Cus de Judas*.

The impossibility of sleep is only one amongst many indicators of the traumatic centrality of the war, a theme that appears constantly under many guises, some less hidden than others. Another one of these indicators is the maladjustment of most (certainly all of the ones from the trilogy) Antunesian narrators. In the specific case of *Memória de Elefante*, *Os Cus de Judas* and *Conhecimento do Inferno*, that maladjustment immediately follows the narrators' return to Lisbon and to their life that they can no longer resume, having

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid. p.28.

<sup>124</sup> João Céu e Silva, *Uma Longa Viagem com António Lobo Antunes*, p.116.

changed with the military experience. Conflict itself was not the single factor responsible for that change, but also the shock of going from the military back to the civilian way of living. The army would take care of the soldier's needs whilst they belonged in their ranks, annulling any kind of responsibility the soldier might have had, maximising their availability for the task at hand – fighting.

A sensação de que tudo é igual e de que tudo mudou. Eu lembro-me de chegar e a minha família dizer “não mudaste nada” e de ficar tão indignado. Não percebíamos o que se estava a passar, porque antes o exército tomava conta de nós, não tínhamos de pagar água, luz ou gás, dava-nos de comer, pagava ao fim do mês – pouco, mas pagava – e não havia onde gastar dinheiro. Não tínhamos de tomar conta de nós e, de repente, desembarcávamos aqui e havia que reaprender tudo isso.<sup>125</sup>

With his writing, Lobo Antunes literally puts the Army back in the forefront of the national conscience, albeit always in critical mode. It is through it that he relates his experience in the war, attacking (as we will perceive when analysing the novels in more detail) the silence surrounding the problem of the war and post-war.

All-encompassing, the war has occupied a central role in his literary output. Besides the novels, it features in both his chronicles and his letters.

## **2.1. The Letters**

From his period in the war, the best testimonies are his letters to his wife, who stayed back in Portugal. These letters, although not recognised by the author himself as part of his literary corpus, were collected and edited by both his

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid. p.115.

daughters and provide a poignant and enlightening insight into the author's personal experiences.

The letters mirror the narrative structure of the novel *Os Cus de Judas* as they are a one-sided account of a masculine experience of war, told to a woman (the author's wife) who, albeit answering back, also in the form of letters, is not presented or available to the reader. By emulating the novel's structure, the compilation of letters can be interpreted as part of the narrative, a prologue to the continuum the author seeks, completing, filling in the gaps on the pre-war existence of the same subject of the trilogy. A kind of epistolary *bildungsroman*, the volume that contains the letters permits a new perspective on the fictionalised subject of the novels, obviously taking into consideration the necessary differences and limits between the two. If the novels relate the difficulties, traumas and pains of the subject's post-war existence, the letters permit the inscription of a pre-war existence, as well as the existence *in war* itself. The voice the reader encounters in them is a voice that speaks directly from the traumatic *locus*, from the formative years of the author in which we can find the beginnings of a writer's mind at work.

In fact, it has been noted by Norberto do Vale Cardoso that:

as cartas irrompem nos romances, podendo ser entendidas como um *proto-romance*. De facto, nos três primeiros romances, parecem existir excertos de cartas (Ex: “Daqui a um mês ou dois no máximo estou aí saudades para todos deste que assina António” [...]), que se ligam já aos processos de criação literária e á necessidade de o sujeito evacuar a dor existencial que, por coacção, reprimira.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Norberto do Vale Cardoso, *A Mão-de-Judas: Representações da Guerra Colonial em António Lobo Antunes* (Lisboa: Texto Editores, 2011) pp.191-192.

Cardoso's considerations confirm the possibility of reading these letters as part of the literary continuum of the author's oeuvre, in dialogue with the novels, informing and expanding the reader's knowledge from a pre-war (and pre-novels) real existence.

Cementing that link between letters and novel is the title chosen for the compilation of letters, *D'este viver aqui neste papel descripto*.

[E]ra o título que o nosso Pai tinha escolhido para o que veio a ser o primeiro romance publicado [...] É uma citação de uma carta de Ângelo de Lima [...] ao Prof. Miguel Bombarda. Este poeta passou vários anos da sua vida internado nos Hospitais de Conde Ferreira, no Porto, e Rilhafoles, em Lisboa, onde foi seguido por Bombarda.<sup>127</sup>

It is also because of the title, although in an elliptical way, that one can begin to see the interconnection of war with madness and the world of psychiatry, a dual presence that cannot be separated. Indeed they will, as will be perceptible later, become equivalent, stylistically, ethically and symbolically.

The letters have been compiled in book format by Lobo Antunes' two daughters, Maria José Lobo Antunes, who is a constant presence in the letters as the baby yet to be born and as the new-born to an absent father, and Joana Lobo Antunes. In them, we can find the author immersed in the war in Angola, twenty-eight years of age, recently married and about to become a father for the first time. As a way of staying in touch (and staying sane) he wrote a letter a day, when possible, to his wife, relating his experiences, hopes, frustrations and state of mind. In them we can find numerous references to a novel that he was writing at the time, later discarded, where it is easy to perceive how his literary preoccupations were already an integral part of his day-to-day existence;

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<sup>127</sup> *António Lobo Antunes: D'este viver aqui neste papel descripto*, ed. by Maria José Lobo Antunes and Joana Lobo Antunes, p.12.

references to Africa, to the life in the army, references to the occasional armed episode and to the medical consequences of the fighting, be it regular concerns or more violent realities such as blown up human beings with exposed insides and severed limbs.

Despite the obvious horrors inherent in such a violent conflict, and in contrast with the novels, the letters display a sense of hopefulness, perhaps still surviving due to the nourishment of the possibility of return, the looking forward to that return. In the period when they were written, the young author, because he was experiencing it first hand, had not the time to reflect on the consequences and the trauma of war, which is only possible retrospectively. That happens later, when, looking back, he retrospectively summons his memories of the war and pours them into the novels. The Lobo Antunes one finds in the letters is a man whose worldview still keeps a scent of optimism, a man hoping and wishing for a happy and settled future upon his return. Unfortunately, his expectations are thwarted. ‘O milagre esperado nas *Cartas* nunca chega a acontecer nos romances, mas são estes que o sublinham através da integração da carta na ficção, denunciando que a guerra foi o algoz de uma geração’.<sup>128</sup> Perhaps it was the painful realisation of the futility of his hopes that prompted the author to distance himself from the letters, excluding them from his bibliography, their publication being an independent product of the labour of his daughters.

However, this distance and reluctance exists not just in the letters. The war is not a straightforward issue and the author has the awareness of the difficulty of narrating this issue in a literary perspective. The problematization

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<sup>128</sup> Norberto do Vale Cardoso, p.193.

of the war in his novels is always done in a lateral manner, never in a direct descriptive way, highlighting not only the impossibility of addressing the issue with the tools of traditional narratives but also its traumatic spectrum in the very fabric of language. As we will see in the next chapter, the latter aspect, the lateralization of language when addressing war, is a common feature of trauma as it is impossible for traumatised victims to recall their traumatic experiences in a direct way.

The authorial distance Lobo Antunes wishes to maintain from these letters is evidenced in an interview, where he confesses how painful they are to him, undoubtedly due to the recalling of the memory of his deceased wife, from whom he divorced upon his return and who died of cancer years later, but also because of the inevitable triggering of the memory of the war.

Eu não tive intervenção no livro – só o li aqui e ali, porque me era muito doloroso, mas se as pessoas através daquilo compreenderem como toda a guerra é absurda e um erro horrível, já fico contente. Ninguém ganha uma guerra, toda a gente perde e não são só os mortos, nasceu-nos uma filha que não vimos e que não sabemos quem é, não sabemos como foi e não estivemos lá. São coisas que eu não perdo a ditadura, para além de todo o sofrimento que aquela guerra me trouxe e aos demais.<sup>129</sup>

His self-proclaimed distance from this compilation of letters denounces how ill at ease he is to address this traumatic issue in other ways than in his literature. Perhaps due to the triggering of the memory of his dead wife, perhaps due to the very nature of war and the transformations it has forced upon his self.

[N]ão havia considerações ideológicas de espécie alguma, nós chegámos e não queríamos combater, então um rapaz foi à água e morreu com uma mina. Vamos vingar-nos! Combater tornou-se, de repente, uma questão pessoal e já viu o horrível que isto é. Foi um tempo importante para mim.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> João Céu e Silva, *Uma Longa Viagem com António Lobo Antunes*, p.34.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.* p.35.

This confession highlights the cruel irony that some of the soldiers were trapped in, reluctantly forced to fight for an ideology they did not necessarily believe in, and rapidly finding the will to fight in personal matters, such as to ‘avenge’ someone. The cruel paradox reflects the uncaring concern of ideologies for the human life and will and at the same time, the absurd situation, due to the inevitability of saying no to military deployment, of inadvertently transforming one’s attitude from rather pacifist to a belligerent one.

From this important time in the author’s life, epistolary evidence remains from the period between the 7th of January 1971 to the 30th of January 1973, more or less two years. There are several themes running through the letters, from the author’s impressions of the cities he lives in in Africa (‘Que cidade horrível. [...] Nunca pensei vir encontrar tanta pobreza, tanta porcaria, tanto calor’<sup>131</sup>), the memories he recalls, certainly from happier times before the war (‘Olha, tenho-me lembrado muito hoje de Tomar, e quanto mais me lembro mais bonita a acho – e vivível’<sup>132</sup>) his daily labour of writing, which is nevertheless continuous despite the war (‘A minha história lá vai, crescendo sempre. Depois das 5, agarro no caderno, sento-me à mesa e é só transcrever o que me aparece feito dentro da cabeça’<sup>133</sup>) and obviously, the ‘military activities’, combat or not,

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<sup>131</sup> *António Lobo Antunes: D’este viver aqui neste papel descripto*, ed. by Maria José Lobo Antunes and Joana Lobo Antunes, p.22

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* p.100.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

he experiences ('Ontem, novo alarme à noite no quartel, tiros, correrias, o pandemónio que já se vai tornando quotidiano e habitual'<sup>134</sup>).

However, no matter the abundance of themes in Lobo Antunes' letters, due to their brevity and perhaps some reluctance by the author to touch on more delicate matters, the information disclosed in them is somewhat superficial and those readers looking for more detailed descriptions will have their expectations thwarted. Letters, not the real ones penned by the young man Lobo Antunes and sent to his wife, but letters as a theme, or better, a fictional tool that undoubtedly has its origin and inspiration in the real letters, have a central place in his works.

In fact:

[n]a obra ficcional do autor, as cartas são referidas como meio de comunicação entre personagens da mesma família, sobretudo em situações efabulativas muito frequentes nos primeiros romances, como as da guerra colonial em que as cartas asseguram não apenas a ligação do combatente aos seus [...] como, ainda, acalentam a sua esperança de poder regressar ao meio que é o seu [...] No entanto, estas cartas podem conter informações deformadas pela necessidade de encorajar o militar na situação difícil da guerra, não dizendo verdades difíceis e desagradáveis [...].<sup>135</sup>

Unsurprisingly, everything seems to be a valid material for the writer to use in his work and the letters are no exception. The actual existence of these letters just gives more substance to the biographical aspect of his literature, in particular the question of war, adding another layer to the complexity of his writing and raising the question to what point have his fictional works been influenced by the autobiographical letters? Moreover, to what extent are the *real* letters different from the fictional ones in their honesty and level of disclosure

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> *Dicionário da Obra de António Lobo Antunes (Vol.I)*, ed. by Maria Alzira Seixo, *et al.*, p.105.

of those ‘verdades difíceis e desagradáveis’? Are they a cruder, more immediate and truthful, and therefore more effective, way of relaying trauma? Is the articulation of traumatic events more successful (and more impactful) in the real letters than in the equivalent fictional attempts? Is the retelling of these experiences more, or less, self-censored?

Because of the scope and nature of this work, the pertinence of these questions is not, however, going to be explored in depth, but I beg the reader to bear them in mind throughout this section as a backdrop for the explorations here attempted.

Less of an archaeological effort and more of an analytical one, the attempt to contrast the letters and scrutinise those which are more relevant to the topic does not intend to prove anything, except the importance of the traumatic experiences in the author’s biography for the establishment of trauma as a major topic of his literature. On a textual level, it is irrelevant if the letters are fictional or not. They are also a ‘text’ and therefore not exempt from analytical endeavours or, for that matter, symbolic literary power.

The tone of the letters is very different from that of the novels and some of the chronicles, less bitter and more hopeful, oscillating between the romanticism of an enamoured man, the humour he must muster in order to take each day with a pinch of salt and the increasingly darker undertones and visible despair of the later letters. However, the most common topics of the letters are complaints about loneliness, missing his life back at home, missing his wife, the terrible isolation and precariousness of conditions he was subjected to in Angola:

28.2.71

Primeiro que tudo quero dizer-te que gosto de tudo em ti, em mais este domingo separados um do outro por tanta distância e tanta saudade. Cada vez gosto mais de ti e sinto a tua falta todos os dias

muito e muito. Nunca me esqueço de ti, e só Deus sabe a vontade que tenho de te ver. Gosto tudo tudo tudo de ti.<sup>136</sup>

[...]

19.4.71

De novo sem água, e provavelmente por muito tempo, por avaria no motor da dita. De todos os incómodos é este o maior e o mais aborrecido, e o que mais me custa suportar. Por outro lado, a comida atinge as raias do execrável. Hoje, por exemplo, os pedaços de carne de porco com batatas (comemos batatas há 3 dias, ininterruptamente) estavam tão esturrados que, ao deixá-los cair no prato produziam um som de seixos.<sup>137</sup>

[...]

18.5.71

A falta de interesse das minhas cartas deve mostrar bem que os meus miolos se transformaram na areia que cobre tudo. Sinto-me estúpido e vazio, e quase tenho vergonha de exhibir a minha idiotia em cartas... [...] Isto é um triste deserto. Arbustos ralos, árvores e vez em quando, lagoas estagnadas e, agora, frio. Noites geladas e sem lua, dias frescos. Tosses e gripes. Como custa viver aqui!

No quarto, desconfortável e com um buraco no tecto, tenho a cama, a espingarda, uma mesa de cabeceira de caixotes e várias granadas de mão. Foi realmente um imenso azar cair neste buraco no fim do mundo, sem o menor conforto, a menor possibilidade de distração.<sup>138</sup>

The hardship he complains about, apart from the military incidents he recounts (as we will perceive soon), is, in itself, a drastic change that dramatically altered his way of living. A new way of living in which the coexistence with guns is almost siamese. ‘Como me apetece poder viver sem uma espingarda à cabeceira!’<sup>139</sup>, he cries in another letter.

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<sup>136</sup> *António Lobo Antunes: D’este viver aqui neste papel descripto*, ed. by Maria José Lobo Antunes, Joana Lobo Antunes, p.68.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.* p.134.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.* p.166.

<sup>139</sup> Letter dated 15.5.71. (*Ibid.* p.161).

These circumstances, this new way of living that has been forced upon him, could already be considered as traumatising under a certain light, but they are nothing compared to the horrors he routinely finds in the reality of the conflict. Very early on (31.1.1971), the young Lobo Antunes has direct contact with war:

Começou a guerra a sério para nós. Uma das companhias, colocada em Ninda, foi atacada por morteiros e metralhadoras e as consequências, embora relativamente pouco importantes para nós (um morteiro caiu na pista de aviação e dois na parada) dão um bocado que pensar.<sup>140</sup>

The seemingly uninteresting episode marks the start of ‘hostilities’ Lobo Antunes will face, increasingly more horrific and traumatic. War becomes routine, a part of daily life that is almost more of a nuisance than a real threatening event. ‘Ontem á noite acordámos todos ao som dos tiros’.<sup>141</sup> The drudgery of his daily life is nevertheless punctuated by medicine, which ironically becomes a way of killing time. ‘De resto tenho os dias bastante ocupados, e vou-me distraíndo fazendo um pedaço artesanal de cirurgia: ontem amputei 2 dedos e abri um fleimão no braço’.<sup>142</sup> After all, one must remember that Lobo Antunes’ principal occupation, even when involved in armed conflict, is medicine. It is in this capacity that he nevertheless encounters most of the horrors of the conflict, having to deal with the immediate aftermath of combat. Contrasting with the day-to-day activities he describes in the transcribed

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid.p.35.

<sup>141</sup> Letter dated 10.2.71(Ibid. p.47).

<sup>142</sup> Letter dated 7.2.71 (Ibid.p.45).

excerpts of his letters, there are inevitably other much more horrific episodes, which are far from being merely routine:

20.3.71

Estive na picada de volta de vários feridos gravíssimos. Às 8 da noite de anteontem recebemos um rádio pedindo um médico com urgência. E como as máquinas voadoras não voam de noite, meti-me num rebenta-minas, com uma escolta e lá fomos. A mata era tão densa que nos batia na cara, e a tensão constante. Um dos feridos não tinha uma perna já, e a única frase que ele dizia era o meu pai quando souber mata-se, o meu pai quando souber mata-se. Outro estava cego, e outro cheio de estilhaços, um negro, e rezava em voz alta. Nunca mais me hei-de esquecer disto. À luz de lâmpada de bolso, fiz o que pude – o coto da perna tinha um aspecto horrível – e empreendemos uma longa viagem de regresso (60km) [...] Chegámos depois de 7 horas de viagem incríveis, sempre à espera do pior [...] À chegada, o amputado entrou em choque. Demos-lhe 6 litros de sangue [...], hipertensores em doses de cavalo, etc. A perna estava horrível. Os estilhaços que o outro tinha eram: um no peito, que era o olho de metal por onde o atacador passa na bota, e o do cotovelo um pedaço de osso. Ambos pertenciam ao pé desaparecido do amputado, e, com a explosão, tinham-se cravado no corpo do outro.<sup>143</sup>

The traumatising episode is the direct action of what perhaps was the most damaging weapon of the conflict, landmines. These terrifying objects were abundant in Angola and the consequences of their use has, unfortunately, endured even after the conflict was over. At the time, this was a common fighting tool and it had been used in many other conflicts, such as the Vietnam War, for instance. Its destructive and scarring power was well known:

Many men suffered horrendous injuries from the hidden landmines, containing ten pounds of explosives and three pounds of metal fragments. [...] It might take the surgeons up to six hours to remove as much as sixty fragments from the chest or abdomen of one casualty. In cases where it would have been more harmful to remove debris from the body, it would be left as a lasting souvenir.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid.pp.95-96.

<sup>144</sup> Kevin Brown, p.202.

Lobo Antunes was experiencing this horror first-hand. The destruction, on a physical level, is clearly described in his letters, with an almost chilling detachment and matter-of-fact tone, which was certainly more the product of his medical point of view than that of a fictional writer. The immediacy of the event influences the straightforward way in which the very event is described, leaving no space for other emotional engagements, which will, as it will be possible to perceive in the next chapter, only come at a later stage and not necessarily in a direct fashion. The Lobo Antunes of the letters is, therefore, a very different one from the one of the chronicles and novels; more naïve and hopeful, less critical and caustic. He is undoubtedly experiencing these events on a human level, not yet processing them and converting them into literary material, which will only come later, in a critical and cathartic space only literature can inhabit.

As for landmines, the epitome of the cruelty and stupidity of war, their absurdity and damaging effect has now been widely recognised, their traumatic power even more highlighted by the recognition of their futility as a weapon of war. However, it was not until 1997, more than two decades after the period in which Lobo Antunes witnessed their destruction, that they were finally banned. ‘In 1997, the Ottawa Treaty banned anti-personnel landmines as weapons likely to cause “superfluous injury or unnecessary suffering”’.<sup>145</sup>

This, of course, refers mainly to the physical suffering caused by landmines. Needless to say, there is also a big psychological component associated with it, and one can easily imagine the close relationship between the horror of landmines and psychological trauma. A close reading of Lobo

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid.p.201.

Antunes' letter can hint at some aspects that go beyond the deforming and mangling of the body. One of the victims, the one whose leg had been obliterated, screams that his father will kill himself upon the knowledge of the incident [o meu pai quando souber mata-se], denouncing the far reaching impact of the destructive action of the landmine. To the already violent image of the amputee, the violence of suicide is summoned to haunt the words recounted by Lobo Antunes in his letter. It is a doubling of trauma. On one hand, the son, who has to face a life without a limb, the psychological consequences of having to adapt to this reality, has also to face the possibility of his father's suicide, thus enforcing added guilt on himself. On the other hand, the father, having to face the shame of having a war-disabled son, victim of a war he had no choice but to send him to, will also undoubtedly feel overwhelmingly guilty and in despair, to the point of considering ending his own life. These are only speculations, of course. There is no information about the fate of the soldier's father's or even about the fate of the soldier himself. There is only the registering of the soldier's cry in Lobo Antunes' letter, and the opening of the possibility of suicide remains exactly that, a possibility. Yet, the invocation is a powerful one and the symbolic effect of trauma provoked by the landmine is thus denounced. Like the material nature of the landmine, which fragments, multiplying its destruction, so does the suffering caused by this very same destruction, multiplying, fragmenting into a multiplicity of psychological effects. Suffering (trauma) is transferred from son to father, from victim to witness, from epistolary writer to reader. Thus, the traumatic power of the landmine transcends materiality, permitting a transferral of suffering that leaves no one unaffected.

The detached, clinical tone in which Lobo Antunes relates the episode does not last forever. In a letter dated two days after the one recounting the incident, it is perceptible that the episode has not left him indifferent. This is the first time in which a sharp shift in tone is clearly visible, and when the mild exasperations of loneliness and the like give way to a strong voice of discontent and revolt. The war had finally showed itself in its true horrific full nature. It had turned real.

#### 22.3.71

Acabo de escrever [...] uma carta talvez azeda demais mas sincera. De vez em quando preciso de desabafar o que tenho dentro, de largar um imenso lastro de sofrimento que vou acumulando dia a dia. Nunca perdoei a um dos tios que defendia esta guerra ter acrescentado, pouco depois, que só esperava que ela estivesse acabada quando os filhos tivessem idade para nela entrarem, e, ao começar a escrever, lembrei-me disso, e indignei-me de tal forma que vomitei tudo o que até agora tenho calado para mim.<sup>146</sup>

Curiously, this is a sort of matrioska letter as it contains references to another letter, written not to his wife, but to distant family. Unfortunately, the latter letter has never been published or reproduced elsewhere, so access to its content is (at this present time) impossible. One can nevertheless guess that the tone and content, based on the impressions of the author himself, are not the most pleasant. In spite of the impossibility of accessing this letter, it is interesting to note that the ‘matrioska letter’ is dated only two days after the one relating the violent incident, and

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<sup>146</sup> *António Lobo Antunes: D’este viver aqui neste papel descripto*, ed. by Maria José Lobo Antunes and Joana Lobo Antunes, p.99.

therefore this can hint at a traumatic impact<sup>147</sup> on the author, whose change and shift to darker regions in attitude and spirit are palpable.

Alongside this immersion into darker regions, there is also the formation of a kind of resilience, an acceptance of the order of things, perhaps because of the frequency and intensity of the attacks, which also permits a degree of habituation. ‘Ontem, novo alarme à noite no quartel, tiros correrias, o pandemónio que já se vai tornando quotidiano e habitual’<sup>148</sup>; ‘[p]ouca coisa aconteceu de ontem para hoje, exceptuando um alferes dos comandos que ficou sem uma perna no Luma-Cassai aqui perto, o que realmente não tem grande importância para o desenrolar da guerra’.<sup>149</sup>

Resilience or traumatic adjustment? The question is relevant. One of the changes the young author will notice in himself as a product of his military endeavour is the development of a tendency to silence. ‘Uma coisa engraçada que tenho reparado em mim é que praticamente deixei de conversar, [...] não digo nada a ninguém, e ando forrado de silêncio por dentro.’<sup>150</sup> This new found penchant for silence will be echoed in *Os Cus de Judas* and it could, as I have pointed out elsewhere, be interpreted as a characteristic response to trauma:

É neste emparelhamento que Lobo Antunes parece depositar a sua noção de resistência. A dimensão de silêncio é constantemente desafiada pela impossibilidade de esquecimento ou da recusa desse esquecer [...] O silêncio é outra das características associadas ao

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<sup>147</sup> I use this expression with caution, as I am not looking to medicalise it or to assign any pathology to Lobo Antunes himself.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.p.100.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.p.100.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.p.134.

Stress Pós-Traumático e inevitavelmente está também presente nos romances.<sup>151</sup>

Indeed: ‘Foda-se, disse o furriel que limpava as botas com os dedos, Pois é, disse eu, e acho que até hoje nunca tive um diálogo tão comprido com quem fosse’<sup>152</sup>.

Isabel Moutinho has also noticed this:

Lobo Antunes’s [...] novels very clearly relate silence, or the difficulty in verbal communication, first of all to a natural predisposition to solitude and isolation on the part of the protagonist(s) / narrator(s); secondly, and no less importantly, to the experience of the war. This dialectic of silence and speech, or of the entrapment in silence and the urge to break it, is constantly reworked in the entwining of the fiction of autobiography and colonial war.<sup>153</sup>

In direct contrast with this personal silence, is the increase of mentions of the war. ‘Tenho a impressão que estou a falar demais em guerra, não é?’<sup>154</sup> This somewhat apparent dichotomic relationship between describing the war and confining himself to silence in what consists of his personal life highlights the complexity of the subject in his literature. On one hand, he does not talk too much, or too specifically about the war when addressing it personally, that is, as the empirical person António Lobo Antunes, as it is hinted at in his letters and clearly visible in his interviews. On the other hand, the war and the experiences he was subjected to, are one of the most permanent topics of his literature, in fact

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<sup>151</sup> Ricardo Rato Rodrigues, ‘Torno, Retorno e Transtorno: Trauma e Stress Pós-Traumático nos romances de António Lobo Antunes’ in *As Humanidades e as Ciências, Disjunções e Confluências*, ed. by Ana Gabriela Macedo, et al (V.N Famalicão: Edições Húmus, 2014) pp.197-208 (p.206).

<sup>152</sup> Lobo Antunes, *Os Cus de Judas*, p.62.

<sup>153</sup> Isabel Moutinho, pp.71-90 (p.74).

<sup>154</sup> Letter dated 27.4.71 (*António Lobo Antunes: D’este viver aqui neste papel descripto*, ed. by Maria José Lobo Antunes and Joana Lobo Antunes, p.141).

so central that they constitute the major issues (on a par with psychiatry) dealt with in his early novels.

The reluctance and uneasiness with which the war is articulated denounces the complexity of the issue for Lobo Antunes, who symbolically refuses to engage in a simplistic view of the matter, a refusal embodied in his writing. One of the aspects he seems to be aware of is the tendency of others to glorify his (and the army's) actions in Africa:

#### 8.5.71

Dá-me ideia que as pessoas da família me estão a achar uma espécie de herói de coragem e espírito de sacrifício, o que é asneira. Qualquer dia ponho tudo a pratos limpos. Pratos limpos é giro. A maior parte das coisas não as posso contar, e as minhas opiniões sobre esta guerra não devem ser escritas. Isto é tudo muito diferente do que aí se pensa, escreve e diz [...]. No que penso muito é no drama que vai ser a minha readaptação a uma vida normal.<sup>155</sup>

It is worth reflecting upon these words in some depth. Already in 1971, we can perceive some of the preoccupations that will emerge in his early novels in such a succinct paragraph.

First, one must consider the insistence on his refusal to be seen as a hero or to glorify the war in any way. It is clear that the unpleasantness of the war, to put it euphemistically, has made it impossible to regard it with a glorified perspective. Moreover, it reinforces the traumatic nature of the conflict, aided by the absurd motive for the war, which was primarily<sup>156</sup> the defence of an ideology and worldview with which most of its participants did not agree:

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid. p.153.

<sup>156</sup> I am not taking into account economic motivations for the conflict, which could well be the primary motive. This thesis, for the sake of its own subject matter, could not indulge in deep considerations about the nature of the Portuguese Colonial War.

It is only when narratives of triumph are challenged, when individual deaths seem worthless or polluted, when those who have fallen are seen not as sacrificing for a noble cause but wasted as victims of irresponsible chicanery, that wars become traumatic indeed.<sup>157</sup>

Thus, with his refusal, which we must remember was written as a *personal* matter, Lobo Antunes is revealing the true traumatic nature of the conflict and, more importantly, foreshadowing the fate of those involved in it, their narratives of suffering largely ignored and silenced in the post-war period. The war was (and still is) a very traumatic event for the Portuguese collective identity and has been kept relatively unaddressed, which only reaffirmed its traumatic impact.

In the passage chosen above, Lobo Antunes is already combining individual and collective aspects of a traumatised identity, something he will continue doing, with great success, in his early novels. This is a very important point, not only for the unique stylistic approach of the author but also when seen as a social construction to which the author's novels contribute. 'To transform individual suffering into collective trauma is cultural work. It depends upon speeches, rituals, marches, meetings, plays, movies, and storytelling of all kinds'.<sup>158</sup> It is this cultural work (or better, culture *at work*) that legitimises the importance of the author's oeuvre and justifies it as a fundamental key to the understanding of contemporary Portugal. Lobo Antunes's contribution to the cultural fabric of Portuguese identity is the keeping alive of that trauma, a permanence undoubtedly painful and difficult but nevertheless necessary for the addressing and challenging of those many-layered conflicts that still haunt

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<sup>157</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, p.3.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid. pp.3-4.

modern Portuguese society. Indeed, '[t]hese constructions have the potential to trigger horrific group conflict, but they can also become the platform for amelioration and reconciliation'.<sup>159</sup> It seems fair to claim that Lobo Antunes' novels, chronicles and letters have been the latter: a literary platform in which, despite all the pain associated with writing and reading it, the community of readers, and the community at large, can find a space of both cathartic introspection and benign dialogue with the world.

Going back to the letter itself, it is also interesting to highlight the statement: 'A maior parte das coisas não as posso contar, e as minhas opiniões sobre esta guerra não devem ser escritas'. Lobo Antunes seems to be reluctant to write about his experiences and opinions about the war, claiming that they cannot and should not be written. Now, we should notice the two verbs he decides to use, *poder* ('posso') and *dever* ('devem'). Literally, 'can' and 'must'. It is not clear why this is so. Perhaps the full scale of Lobo Antunes' manifestations about (probably against) the war would be too explicit and therefore seized by the existing censorship. Or perhaps it is simply a sense of self-restraint, of self-censorship that prevents this from happening. As we will see in the next chapter, this self-restraint, or better still, this *impossibility* or *unwillingness* to address the events in any other fashion than descriptively (that is, to express opinions and feelings about the event), if addressing it at all, is a common occurrence in those people who have been involved in traumatic episodes.

Lastly, Lobo Antunes' worry about the 'drama que vai ser a minha readaptação a uma vida normal' is also a foreshadowing of the most common

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid. p.4.

problem veterans feel upon returning from a conflict. When framed in terms of PTSD, this is incredibly vital and such foreshadowing gives even more urgency to the works by the author, whose early preoccupations about his own readaptation to civilian life emulate and anticipate a major reality of the post-war.

Of Lobo Antunes' individual suffering, we are able to point out two different dates as the epitome of his traumatic experiences: the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May 1971 and the 13<sup>th</sup> of October 1972. These dates are important for different reasons, but both indicate a very impactful level of suffering/trauma in the author's biography.

In a letter sent to his wife, who at this point was still living in Portugal (she would join her husband in Angola around April 1972), dated 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1971, Lobo Antunes justifies his silence of three days (his previous letter had been written on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May) with a series of horrific episodes he had been subjected to:

Não te escrevi anteontem nem ontem em consequência de tristes e horríveis episódios que aqui aconteceram, e que me ocuparam quase todo o dia no pequeno posto de socorros que aqui tenho. Não vou falar entretanto sobre isso. Apenas queria dizer que passei ontem aqui o dia mais dramático da minha vida.<sup>160</sup>

Again, the same reluctance, the same unwillingness to recount his experiences. However, we can nevertheless perceive, by the indication that he had spent most of his time in the medical aid station he had been assigned to, that the horrors he experienced on this day were in his medical capacity and therefore a direct consequence of armed conflict. On this occasion, in terms of his narrative

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<sup>160</sup> *António Lobo Antunes: D'este viver aqui neste papel descripto.* ed. by Maria José Lobo Antunes and Joana Lobo Antunes, p.147.

discourse, Lobo Antunes could be identified as a victim, albeit not a first-hand one. The most dramatic day of his life, according to himself. Notice that he does not refer to it as traumatic, but *dramatic*, in yet another normal occurrence when narrating traumatic events. It is not until later, aided by memory and cultural constructions, that the traumatic meaning will be attributed to the event. 'Events are not inherently traumatic. Trauma is a socially mediated attribution. The attribution may be made in real time, as an event unfolds; it may also be made before the event occurs, as an adumbration, or after the event has concluded, as a post-hoc reconstruction'.<sup>161</sup> Obviously, this does not serve to deny the violence of the event and its destructive and traumatic potential, but rather to frame it as something that needs to be articulated beyond the concept of event itself. Social mediation by different agents needs to be taken into account, a mediation that necessarily needs to encompass the wider historical, political, social and scientific contexts.

However, traumatic experiences do not occur *solely* to victims of a violent event. To a certain extent, in specific contexts and contingencies, they can also be applied to those who perpetrate them. This seems to be the case in what concerns the second date, the 13<sup>th</sup> of October 1972. There are no letters dating from this period. At the time, Lobo Antunes' wife and daughter were living with him, after a period of separation already in Angola, motivated by his wife's illness, hepatitis, already contracted in Africa. She had arrived in April of 1972 and fallen ill in July of the same year, a few months later. Due to her illness she had been sent to Angola's capital, Luanda, for treatment. During this period (April to July) the letters are interrupted, only to be recommenced on the 15<sup>th</sup> of

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<sup>161</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, p.3.

July 1972 and extending to the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 1972. In August 1972, the letters are again interrupted as she returns from Luanda. The last letters are sent already in 1973, on a few days of the month of January. Lobo Antunes had returned to Marimba after being in Luanda to take his speciality exams. His wife had stayed in Luanda while he returned to serve the last days of his campaign.

So, there is no register of the day of 13<sup>th</sup> of October. However, in the interview with João Céu e Silva, decades later, Lobo Antunes confesses:

Havia alturas em que o sofrimento se tornava quase insuportável, a culpabilidade, o remorso, a ausência, e como não era capaz de escrever, isso agravava as coisas. [...] Dei-me conta em África de que sou capaz de grande violência física, participei numa coisa horrrosa – horrrosa! – no dia 13 de Outubro de 1972 e nem sequer foi numa situação de guerra. Aí haveria uma desculpa. Foi indesculpável, de uma violência inaudita. E então [...] passei a ter medo de mim mesmo. Porque matar é muito fácil [...], mas nem foi o caso, foi pior ainda. Eu não imaginava, não fazia a menor ideia de que existia dentro de mim tanta violência [...], que, provavelmente, existe dentro de todos nós.<sup>162</sup>

This is an admission of guilt and the recognition of a suffering that has a completely different origin, not that of a victim but that of a perpetrator. The episode is not addressed in detail, but simply hinted at, a secrecy that is uncommon in Lobo Antunes and that only reinforces the idea that it had been of extreme violence. Its potential as a traumatic event is therefore augmented by the (in this case unhelpful) unwillingness to address it.

In the interview, Lobo Antunes accuses the Portuguese army of having committed ‘excesses’, sometimes specifying the exact episode in detail. As it is not difficult to imagine, his claims about these ‘excesses’ were met controversially by certain sectors of the ex-combatants and veterans of war:

Lobo Antunes descreveu um cenário de barbárie causado pelos militares portugueses na zona de Angola onde cumpriu comissão de

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<sup>162</sup> João Céu e Silva, *Uma Longa Viagem com António Lobo Antunes*, p.164.

serviço na guerra, numa das entrevistas que integram o livro *Uma Longa Viagem com António Lobo Antunes*. Descontente, um grupo de ex-combatentes, oficiais na reforma, quis processar o escritor por "atentado à honra e dignidade dos militares", tendo apresentado ao chefe do Estado-Maior do Exército uma petição nesse sentido.<sup>163</sup>

Despite the controversy and claims of untruthfulness, it is still worth considering the impact of these words and what they represent in the context of Lobo Antunes' literature. 'Sometimes, in fact, events that are deeply traumatizing may not actually have occurred at all; such imagined events, however, can be as traumatizing as events that have actually occurred'.<sup>164</sup> Moreover, we must not forget that, despite being a *fiction* writer, the author was *personally* involved in the conflict, albeit as a doctor. These two facts must not be used against the author's testimony and, steering away from the nebulous region, an attempt to investigate the truth behind them and the influence of his roles as writer and doctor would have in the process of remembering the events, we must take his statement with the same open-mindedness as we would take any other statement from any other participant in the war. The power of Lobo Antunes' statement is in the fact that it does not deny a direct participation in the whole process, assuming the role of perpetrator, whether it is as a conscious or coerced one. The willingness to participate in the debate opens the door to a wider dialogue between all the groups involved directly or indirectly in the conflict. In this confession, he is also highlighting the potential for violence that 'existe dentro de todos nós', a warning that forms part of his ethos as a writer, attentive precisely to what exists *within* every one of us. Instead of a stagnating glorification/epistemological separation of the victims of the war, Lobo Antunes

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<sup>163</sup> <http://blogueforanadaevaotres.blogspot.co.uk/2010/08/guine-6374-p6912-controversias-104-o.html> [Accessed 11th September 2015]

<sup>164</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, p.13.

is calling for the assumption of moral responsibility by society at large. This is crucial in the social process of trauma.

Insofar as they identify the cause of trauma in a manner that assumes such moral responsibility, members of collectivities define their solidary relationships in ways that, in principle, allow them to share the suffering of others [...] Refusing to participate in the process of trauma creation, social groups restrict solidarity, leaving others to suffer alone.<sup>165</sup>

With his confession, what Lobo Antunes is doing is making a claim, a fundamental process in the shaping of an event as truly traumatic:

The cultural construction of trauma begins with [...] a claim [...]. It is a claim to some fundamental injury, an exclamation of the terrifying profanation of some sacred value, a narrative about a horribly destructive social process, and a demand for emotional, institutional, and symbolic reparation and reconstitution.<sup>166</sup>

As will become apparent, Lobo Antunes' claim is very important both individually and collectively. The claim strengthens the message Lobo Antunes' literature holds, and it serves as a performative speech act that is fundamental for the establishment of successful master-narrative of trauma.

By giving access to a wide body of biographical elements (his letters and his interviews), Lobo Antunes is confirming the inclusivity of his writing. The level of exposure is not total, but it is sufficient for the author not to exclude himself from the dialogue between the parts that his literature involves, becoming an integral part of it. The author is, therefore, not dead, but very much alive and communicating.

## 2.1. The (War) Chronicles

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.p.6.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid. p.16.

Like a bleeding wound, the experiences of the war expand to every area of Lobo Antunes' work. The chronicles are no exception. As we have seen before, the war is one of the constant themes of the chronicles, making its appearance like an unwanted but persistent guest. In terms of biographical importance, the chronicles are a very interesting 'object' as they seem to be midway between the letters and the novels. The freedom permitted by the relatively short length of the chronicles results in a writing that is not as direct as in the letters and one that engages more artistically with the issue, addressing it in what its perhaps the most pungent manner in Lobo Antunes' work. Their brevity, allied with the expressiveness the author employs in them, make them the best medium in which to express the experiences of the war. The examples are abundant, but let's focus on a few. Strikingly, the chronicles in which the war is the subject matter seem to be the ones in which the tone is the most personal and candid.

### **2.1.1. *Emília e uma noites***

It is in *Emília e uma noites*<sup>167</sup>, collected in *Livro de Crónicas*, that the war appears for the first time in the chronicles. Under a deceptive title, it literally forces its presence into the text. 'Esta crónica era para ser outra coisa mas sucede que de repente, ao principiar a escrever, Angola me veio com toda a força ao corpo'.<sup>168</sup>

Thus, as becomes obvious, the title does not match the content of the chronicle. By using a pun (*Emília e uma noites* / *Mil e uma noites*) the author is deceiving the reader into thinking that this will perhaps be a comedic chronicle.

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<sup>167</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Livro de Crónicas*, pp. 217-219.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.* p.217.

However, his intention becomes clear in the opening sentence. Angola (the memory of it) came to him, seizing him forcefully. The shock that the contrast between title and content creates is perhaps a stylistic metaphor of the effects of war (or post-war) within the meanders of memory. Its unexpectedness might sharpen the attention and focus of the reader into what the chronicle is really about, giving weight to the subject matter. It is a neat trick. The expectations of comedy quickly disappear, giving way to a powerful text, an abruptness that reflects the importance of the issue in Lobo Antunes' works. Indeed, its power is such that the author cannot contain it. The opening sentence is charged with the sense of inevitability but also physicality. Angola does not come to his memory, or his mind – but to his *body*. The physical dimension of the memory of war is, as we shall see, an important issue in Lobo Antunes' writing. It relates to the abject condition of that very memory, which is felt like a corporeal event, one that exists in the very body of the author. What else would be the most suitable vessel for abjection if not the body, its materiality reinforcing the inescapability of the outcomes of war? By placing the 'coming of Angola' in the body, not the mind, Lobo Antunes gives it the urgency of a bodily matter, as if Angola had become a necessity for the body (like the most basic animal needs).

Then, after apologising to the reader for thwarting her expectations and for having deceived her in such a way, he goes on to explore the sudden need to write about Angola; 'porque é insuportável sentir que Angola me veio com toda a força ao corpo.'<sup>169</sup> The choice of words here is apt. 'Insuportável'; indeed,

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

unbearable. From then on, it is clear that the issue became too unbearable to be avoided and thus forces the author to mention and explore it.

The painful memory of Angola finally took over for good, annihilating any possibility for nuance. ‘Não vou ter humor nem ser inteligente nem subtil nem terno nem irónico: Angola veio-me com toda a força ao corpo, custa muito’<sup>170</sup> cries the author before abruptly shifting to the description of a horrific episode, ‘o Macaco, o condutor, acaba de morrer de uma mina no Ninda [...] Pus a mão no peito do Macaco e não havia peito, e no entanto nem uma gotinha de sangue’.<sup>171</sup>

Swiftly, a gruesome episode in which a soldier nicknamed Macaco had lost his life to a landmine is described, condensed in a few brief sentences, the strange horror felt when trying to touch the soldier’s chest and discovering that the entire chest was missing, with the unusual absence of blood reinforcing the shock. Then, as quickly as the horrific episode is disclosed, the tone changes again back to a more confessional and emotional one. Resisting revealing more details about that very episode or even mentioning others, he nevertheless hints:

Este foi o primeiro. Podia relatar-vos muitos outro. Podia relatar-vos coisas horríveis, absurdas, cruéis ao ponto de ter vontade de  
não escrevo a palavra escrevo só que  
Angola me veio com toda a força ao corpo e eu acuso a guerra de ter  
mudado a minha vida.<sup>172</sup>

This is a poignant and revealing passage. Here, the author confesses his reluctance to disclose more episodes but hints at their existence, providing instead a string of adjectives to describe them: horrible, absurd and cruel. The

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid. p.218.

trademark Antunesian suspended sentence also makes an appearance, with a very impactful effect. The sentence is interrupted before the disclosure of what the terrible episodes motivated him to do, certainly an unpleasant will as the act of self-censorship indicates.

The absence of the word resonates with the absence of blood in the episode previously described, mirroring the shock and the intensity of feeling, so hard to manifest that only its absence can successfully transmit it. This, as we shall see in the next chapter, mirrors quite well the process of trauma and its narration. It is this impossibility and absence that indicate trauma, whether because of the sheer lack of adequate words to describe the events, or the necessary exercise of repression and self-control in order to avoid a larger breakdown that would not permit an intelligible speech but only those disconnected sounds of hysterical despair.

Fragmented sentences will become a trademark of Lobo Antunes' writing, more developed and common in his later novels, but we can clearly perceive their significance in conveying the traumatic meaning(s) of the author's work. The stylistic option for fragmentation and suspended sentences highlights the silence, the impossibility of communication or retrieval of the traumatic event(s) and its consequences in human language. It is a kind of failure of language. Unable to continue, the normal alignment of language is disrupted and gives way to a new relationship between signifier and signified. The expression 'Angola me veio com toda a força ao corpo' substitutes whatever the author was unable, or unwilling to express, nevertheless embodying those various aspects (horror, trauma, violence) through their absence. Thus, the expression comes to fulfil a new meaning, one that is composed of several other meanings, all embodied in

it. So, in this context, the signifier ‘Angola me veio com toda a força ao corpo’ presupposes and encapsulates a much wider signified; a rhizomatic signified in which its many meanings coexist simultaneously, permitting its immediate summoning. It is as if Lobo Antunes is trying to alter the very nature of language, perhaps mirroring the way in which the war has also altered his life, an explicit accusation made clear in the text.

In this chronicle, Lobo Antunes manages to articulate language in a way which facilitates the integration (or levelling out) between language and the emotional power he tries to convey. It is as if language itself had embodied the very trauma of war. Indeed, embodiment is a fundamental aspect in the author’s writing; ‘há tanta coisa em mim, tanta metralhadora, tanto morteiro, tanta horrível miséria.’<sup>173</sup> All the components of war, from its material and emotional consequences to its instruments, are therefore proclaimed as being inseparable from the author himself, existing *within* him, in an embodiment that is all-encompassing. War is then assumed as something inextricable from the author’s self.

The chronicle proceeds in this tone, more an emotional exposé of its consequences than a description of its horrors. Emotional exposé seems indeed appropriate, as the chronicle then takes the approach of an almost forceful attempt at validation and legitimization of the author’s experiences. He writes:

Lê-se que a guerra estava controlada em Angola: a Guerra estar controlada era eu contar os mortos. Se calhar não foram muitos: para mim foram demais. Se calhar a guerra estar controlada tem que ver com um número reduzido de cadáveres: a merda é que eu os vi. Os conhecia. Costumava falar com eles, essas perdas insignificantes. Eu

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

próprio sou uma perda insignificante a falar de perdas insignificantes.<sup>174</sup>

This passage denotes the anger and revolt the author feels about the post-conflict reception of veterans and those involved in the war, a silencing and indifference invoked elsewhere and echoed throughout the novels. In this chronicle, the issue of that silencing is tackled directly, as seen in the passage; the accusation directed at the media of the time ('Lê-se', he writes, without specifying where), a veiled accusation but nevertheless clear enough, which claimed that the war was under control and that the death toll had been insignificant. This retrospective reading is possible because of the cry of indignation manifested in the attempt to undermine the silent master-narrative inferred by the counter-narrative the chronicler engages with. To the official discourse the chronicler responds with his ironic response; 'na Guerra estar controlada era eu contar os mortos', directly contradicting the claim with the reminder of the human reality behind the statement. He reminds the reader of the human costs of the war: the dead he saw who were once people that he knew, now reduced to 'a small number of dead bodies', the fact that those 'perdas insignificantes' used to be real people with whom he used to have conversations. The effect is poignant and it gives the whole chronicle a sense of pain, of personal grief and sorrow, as well as the usual irony and anger one can read in the background of Lobo Antunes' writing. Finally, he ends up identifying himself also as a 'perda insignificante', in a moment of identification that transcends simple empathy; a solidarity of pain and a shared epistemological existence which attempts to equate the life of the author with the death of those invoked in the chronicle. The annulment of life

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<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

and death by that ‘insignificant loss retelling those other insignificant losses’ recalls Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence:

What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: ‘This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more’ ... Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: ‘You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine.’<sup>175</sup>

Strikingly, the inevitable return of death under the guise of war, or even, the very geographical location where it took place, Angola, appears in a time of affirmation of life – the author’s birthday. ‘[N]ão mereço isto hoje dia 1 de Setembro, dia dos meus anos em que Angola me veio com toda a força ao corpo [...] É aborrecido fazer anos e receber Angola de presente’.<sup>176</sup> The moment of birth is then haunted by the heightened presence of death in the author’s life. The two come at once, the impact of their coexistence heightened by the polysemy of the word ‘presente’, both ‘present’ (in the temporal sense) and ‘gift’.

For all of these aspects, it is my opinion that this is a fundamental text to unlock the power and meaning of Lobo Antunes’ writing. The question which the chronicle culminates in is, thus, the perfect metonym for the writer’s oeuvre: ‘[S]erá que se consegue soltar um grito devagar?’<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974) p.273.

<sup>176</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Livro de Crónicas*, pp. 218-219.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.* p.219.

### 2.1.2. *Esta maneira de chorar dentro de uma palavra*

In another chronicle, collected in *Segundo Livro de Crónicas*<sup>178</sup>, Angola (another word for ‘war’ in the Antunesian vocabulary) is again the main topic of the text. Contrasting with the previous chronicle here analysed, in this we do not find a clever trick between title and actual content. This time around, the title takes a much more poetic form, announcing the poignancy of the chronicle. In a sense, this is much more like a chronicle in the traditional sense, as it retells an episode clearly located in time, in the year of 1971. Recalling an episode also told in his letters,<sup>179</sup> he remembers a little African girl, from the Kamessekele tribe, who survived a military attack and ended up staying with him for a period.

Em 1971, em Angola, depois de uma acção de pirataria  
(pirataria era os helicópteros sul-  
africanos deixarem a tropa a quatro metros do chão, saltar-se lá para  
baixo e destruir tudo)  
fiquei com uma menina kamessekele que sobrou, não sei como,  
daquela benfeitoria.<sup>180</sup>

Lobo Antunes opens the chronicle in a somewhat sarcastic tone, by describing an undoubtedly horrific military action in a matter of fact language, euphemistically giving it the name of ‘pirataria’, a term by which the type of operation was referred to by soldiers. Further on, he uses the term ‘benfeitoria’, ironically qualifying the operation as the actions of benefactors.

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<sup>178</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Segundo Livro de Crónicas*.

<sup>179</sup> Letter dated from 30.11.71: ‘Ontem trouxe uma miúda da mata. Os pais digamos que partiram para um mundo melhor. É de raça kamessekele, tem cerca de 3/4 anos e chama-se Tchihinga [...]. Fiquei com ela. É muito bonita, segue-me para toda a parte, mas, apavorada, recusa-se a dizer uma palavra.’ (*António Lobo Antunes: D’este viver aqui neste papel descripto*. ed.by Maria José Lobo Antunes and Joana Lobo Antunes p.308).

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.* p.173.

The little girl was displaying signs of hunger; '[...] o cabelo ruivo da fome e empurrava adiante de si uma barriga imensa'<sup>181</sup> when he found her and she ended up living with him for an indeterminate period of time, in Chiúme, until, according to the author, she was taken away from him with no explanation. 'Um dia, ao voltar da mata, não a encontrei. Não me deram explicação alguma. Para quê? As coisas passavam-se dessa forma e acabou-se.'<sup>182</sup>

The lack of explanation or justification for the disappearance of the girl are received naturally by the author, albeit with a degree of bitterness manifested in his ironic language. It is as if the natural course of things amounted only to a metaphorical 'shrug of the shoulders', human will and control of one's own destiny denied in the inevitability that war brings. Crucially, it also denotes the reduced value of human life in such a context.

Following the reminiscence about the girl, the author quickly turns his meditation to the striking image of the coffins waiting for the dead bodies of soldiers, aligned against the wall. The confrontation with this image prompts the question '– Qual vai ser o meu?'<sup>183</sup> as if the coffins were themselves an inevitable reality and one of them was already destined to be his.

Visitávamos o barraco onde os caixões esperavam e perguntávamos  
- Qual vai ser o meu?  
Não deitados, caixões de pé contra a parede, todos iguais. Também  
me lembro do sopro do maçarico ao soldá-los, o que se fazia o mais  
cedo possível dado que os mortos apodrecem depressa naqueles  
lugares de calor. Perguntávamos  
-Qual vai ser o meu?<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid. pp.172-173.

A question repeated as a traumatic echo, its possibility reinforced by such repetition, the very materiality of its doomed reality haunting the author in the coffin's verticality (an unnatural position for the purpose of coffins); a reminder of his own mortality and susceptibility of becoming a casualty of war. The verticality of the coffin is somehow equated to the verticality of the author, undoubtedly a haunting similitude. Moreover, the absurdity of having the coffins welded to delay the process of decomposition bolsters up the sense of fragility and precariousness of life in the harshness of war.

Then, as if the gloomy question was the catalyst for horrors, the author conjures up a string of horrifying episodes. He remembers the time when, again after military incursions, they brought a pregnant woman with them, resulting in the unspeakably violent action of an officer: 'Um oficial que andava conosco nessa altura empurrou a mulher para o armazém dos caixões e [...] obrigou-a a colocar um dos pés sobre uma urna e penetrou-a sem baixar as calças, abrindo a breguilha apenas'.<sup>185</sup>

The disclosure of horrifying acts is escalated in the narration of this chronicle. The rape of the native woman in the coffin warehouse is perhaps the pinnacle of the horror. It consummates the nature of war and the type of horror and conflict one is expected to find in it. Indeed, this episode has more to do with abuse of power, with the accountability of certain individuals within the army, with the twisted gender and race relations present in the Portuguese society of the period and of which the military were only a small part.

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid. p.174.

More acts of violence are described: ‘Quando se saía, colocava-se o inimigo no guarda-lamas do rebenta-minas e ele gritava de pavor o tempo inteiro [...], aqueles que o chefe da Pide enforcava numa árvore e lá ficavam.’<sup>186</sup>

The gratuitous violence seemed to be endemic, strengthened by a regime that seemed to endorse it in the practices of its secret police, which was also present in Africa and not only in Portugal. These practices, already hinted at in the passage above, are regularly described by Lobo Antunes with powerful irony:

O chefe da Pide de Gago Coutinho, em contrapartida, era mais civilizado: preferia aplicar choques eléctricos nos testículos e num gesto de simpatia convidou-me a assistir. Esse acto designava-se por reeducação. Se um reeducado morria enterrava-se em cima de uma prancha.<sup>187</sup>

The war had become a game. To the actions of the soldiers different scores, or points, were attributed. ‘Tudo estava reduzido a pontos: uma arma apreendida tantos pontos, um canhão sem recuo tantos pontos, um inimigo tantos pontos’.<sup>188</sup> After a certain number of points, the unit was sent to a quieter zone, with no active conflict. ‘No caso de conseguirmos um certo número de pontos mudavam o batalhão para um lugar mais calmo, e foi quando nos mudaram para um lugar mais calmo, sem guerra, que os soldados principiaram a suicidar-se’.<sup>189</sup>

Here, the chronicle takes an unexpected turn. From violence against others, the author now touches upon violence upon oneself. A tainted gift, the result of

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

sending the unit into a quieter location results in a series of suicides. This is perhaps a surprise turn of events. However, we have seen the value of human life being reduced to close to zero with the sight of the coffins, and so the suicides described by the author only underpin this:

For society to be able thus to compel some of its members to kill themselves, the individual personality can have little value. For as soon as the latter begins to form, the right to existence is the first conceded it; or is at least suspended only in such unusual circumstances as war. [...] For the individual to occupy so little place in collective life he must be almost completely absorbed in the group and the latter, accordingly, very highly integrated. For the parts to have so little life of their own, the whole must indeed be a compact, continuous mass.<sup>190</sup>

In his seminal book about suicide, Durkheim points towards the very same issue of the loss of individuality within a group that aims to integrate its parts in its quasi-absolute whole, much like the army aims to do. Now somewhat dated (as it was published in 1897) Durkheim's book nevertheless supplies very interesting insights on this problematic:

It is a general fact [...] that the suicidal aptitude of soldiers is much higher than that of the civilian population of the same age. [...] This fact is at first sight all the more surprising because it might be supposed that many causes would guard the army against suicide. [...] The cause most often suggested is the disgust with the service. This explanation agrees with the popular conception which attributes suicide to the hardships of life; for disciplinary rigor, lack of liberty, and want of comfort makes barracks life appear especially intolerable.<sup>191</sup>

In the chronicle, one of those suicides is described very vividly. Lobo Antunes is less interested in investigating the causes of the suicide than in describing it in his impactful and expressive manner.

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<sup>190</sup> Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A study in sociology* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010) p.179.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.* pp.186-190.

Uma noite entrei no lugar dos beliches. Um cabo na cama de cima encostou a G3 à base do queixo, disse  
- Até logo  
e disparou. [...] Bocados de miolos e de osso espalmaram-se no zinco do tecto e ele durou três horas, sem metade da cabeça, a deixar de respirar. Também me lembro do  
-Até logo  
e do disparo, mas houve tantos disparos em Angola que talvez o que me lembro não fosse o dele.<sup>192</sup>

The image is striking. A soldier shoots himself in the head, not dying instantly but agonizing for three hours with half of his head missing, before finally succumbing. His brains and pieces of bone scattered in the zinc ceiling of the barrack. The image could hardly be more abject. Again, the fragmentation of the scene and the repetition of the soldier's last words, 'Até logo', serve to convey the traumatic nature of the episode. Those last words, a Portuguese 'see you later', echo in his memory as if they were defying death, the soldier not saying goodbye but confirming that the author's time was coming too, that his death was inevitable. A true haunting from beyond the grave, which lives *ad infinitum* in the chronicle.

Another haunting, which coexists with those last words, is the sound of the shot. In fact, what is permanent in the author's memory is precisely this sound, which seems to drown out any other concrete memory associated with specific people. The sense of individuality is then annihilated by the sound, or better, sounds of multiple shots, so frequent were they that they merged into one, becoming one single intense memory. It is as if the sound took over the author's

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<sup>192</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Segundo Livro de Crónicas*, pp.174-175.

memory, in a sort of possession. 'To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event'.<sup>193</sup>

The issue of how traumatic memory is articulated and relayed will be explored in more detail in the next chapter, but as the reader can perceive, this is a constant problematic in Lobo Antunes' writing, cropping up in nearly every single one, if not all, of his texts. But turning our attention to the chronicle at hand, we must ask what follows such despair, such bleakness that comes with suicide, death, horror? The suicide of the soldier is the overwhelming horrific climax of the chronicle, yet treated as a natural and inevitable occurrence, thus echoing Durkheim's observation that

it is recognised that the profession of a soldier develops a moral constitution powerfully predisposing man to make away with himself. For this constitution naturally occurs, in varying degrees, among most of those who live or who have lived under the colors, and this is an eminently favorable soil for suicides, little is needed to actualize the tendency to self-destruction which it contains; an example is enough. So it spreads like a trail of gunpowder among persons thus prepared to follow it.<sup>194</sup>

However, this 'moral constitution' is dramatically contrary to Lobo Antunes' ethos of resistance. He is not prepared to follow it. In fact, he *opposes* it. Pointing out the absurdity of the violence and horror of the war is only a stage (a painful one, nevertheless) from which his writing propel him in search of moral anchors for survival. Thus, the chronicle continues like a palliative attempt to alleviate the suffering of traumatic memory.

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<sup>193</sup> Cathy Caruth, 'Introduction' in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) pp.4-5.

<sup>194</sup> Émile Durkheim, *Suicide: A study in sociology*, pp.198-199.

The locus of his memory shifts from Angola to Portugal, towards a closer chronological time to that of the production of the chronicle. ‘A semana passada um homem procurou-me no hospital. Trabalhava com o rádio e foi ele que me anunciou o nascimento da minha filha’.<sup>195</sup> The author is visited by the radio operator of the unit in which he served, the man responsible for announcing the birth of his daughter. This man shows him a recent photograph from the most recent group dinner of the unit, figuring several of the veterans who had served with them:

Mostrou-me o retrato do último jantar da Companhia. Quase velhos todos, impossíveis de reconhecer na sua quase velhice. Ele apontava-os e dizia os nomes, o furriel Este, o sargento Aqueloutro, a estudar o retrato com ternura. Entre eles, acho eu, o maquiro com quem dei na picada a segurar os intestinos nas mãos e a estender-mos numa espécie de oferenda [...] Aí estavam a sorrir, quase velhos, quase alegres, agarrando-se pelos ombros e no entanto deu-me a impressão que os olhos deles continuavam a não exprimir nada, conforme os olhos da menina kamessekele não exprimiam nada. Ou se calhar os olhos dos quase velhos exprimiam. Eram brancos, não pretos<sup>196</sup>, e o facto de não exprimirem nada pode muito be ter sido defeito do fotógrafo.<sup>197</sup>

The image (a double image, as it is an image describing another image, a photograph) is not perfectly joyful, but it conveys a sense of bonding, of collective remembering and of communality which can be perceived as major resistance points. These nevertheless do not transform the image into something

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<sup>195</sup>António Lobo Antunes, *Segundo Livro de Crónicas*, p.175.

<sup>196</sup> It is interesting to note the distinction here inserted by the author. By highlighting the fact that the veterans were not black, he is contrasting their experiences with those of the indigenous people, relativizing them and hinting at the possibility of relative joy and happiness precisely because of the fact that the results of their involvement were not as gravely damaged as the true victims of the conflict.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

that it is not. It is an image tainted by trauma, haunted by the apparition, in the photograph, of the soldier who the author found holding his own guts and extending them to him as an offering. Such an abject intrusion denotes the inexorable presence of trauma in its most horrific guise. It is unlikely that the man was actually in the picture, an uncertainty aided by the doubt of the author, when confessing ‘acho eu’ for having recognized him in the picture. Is it an apparition or the fact that the author clings on to the face of that particular soldier, being unable to forget it and therefore placing it everywhere? Either way, the image bores its way into the text, into the picture that the author is describing, a traumatic intrusion that reminds the reader of the impossibility of forgetting, of totally recovering from whatever factors caused that trauma.

Moreover, the people in the picture are described as empty-eyed, like the little kamessekele girl. Those empty eyes that express nothing were, in both cases, the result of conflict and their similarity strengthens the traumatic potential of war, sparing no one on both sides.<sup>198</sup> It is also relevant to notice the use of ‘quase’ when describing the current state of the veterans; they are ‘quase velhos’ and ‘quase alegres’, an unfulfilled state that indicates the amputation of the possibility of *being* in its totality. They are *almost* old and *almost* joyful, an

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<sup>198</sup> It would not be correct to assume that both the indigenous black population and the soldiers who brought the war into their midst are traumatically affected in the same degree. The kamessekele girl was a back-to-back victim of war. The veterans depicted in the photograph had been perpetrators and therefore the two must not be compared in terms of who suffered more. It seems to me that the author is merely highlighting the absurdity and the potential for trauma inherent to war, so to say a ‘democratic’ spread of horror that affects *everyone* involved in it, albeit in different ways and degrees. Also, wider considerations of responsibility and the assessment of the intensity of trauma is certainly not the objective of these chronicles, or any other of the author’s writings. They are, above all, works of literature and should therefore be treated like it.

incompleteness that is undoubtedly the result of their military experience. Yet, they are smiling. They meet up to commemorate and to remember, in a rite that, despite all the trauma, keeps memory alive, resisting the silence and forgetfulness that would otherwise have been observed. This is a kind of existence set against the inevitable trauma and the pessimism that ensues. A kind of existence about which Schopenhauer has written:

How could I exist if all those of my species which came before me had not died? However much the plays and masks on the world's stage may change it is always the same actors who appear. We sit together and talk and grow excited, and our eyes glitter and our voices grow shriller: just so did *others* sit and talk a thousand years ago: it was the same thing, and it was the *same people*: and it will be just so a thousand years hence.<sup>199</sup>

It serves of little consolation against all the trauma, against all the horror. But it is in this very little where the Antunesian ethics of resistance gain their momentum.

It is not hard to envisage what is the word never mentioned, but encapsulated in the metonymic title. It is an ungraspable and elusive word, like the very nature of trauma. It is precisely its absence that better incorporates the reality it refers to, that intangible, unnameable realm where trauma, horror and violence coexist simultaneously in a place that is directly inaccessible, the only access to it being the tangentiality of the title, which can merely point out (yet highlighting it) the impactful depth of the very word that is missing. The metonym is apt, the chronicle is indeed a way of crying within a word.

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<sup>199</sup> Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Suffering of the World*, p.46.

### 2.2.3. 078902630RH+

The final chronicle I have selected to analyse<sup>200</sup> represents what I think is a climax in the crescendo on the way in which Lobo Antunes addresses the war in his chronicles. It has been collected in *Terceiro Livro de Crónicas*<sup>201</sup> and it has an almost dithyrambic quality which qualifies it as the most intensely emotive chronicle Lobo Antunes has written about the war.

The title is not a word, but rather a sequence of numbers and letters. After using metonymy to encapsulate the consequences of war, as seen in the previous chronicle, he seems to completely abandon words altogether as a valid way to entitle a chronicle about the war, succumbing to the impossibility of using words to convey what he wants. Thus, he chooses numbers. Looking closely, however, the sequence is not completely made up of numbers, but also of two letters and a plus sign; RH+. These letters stand for a blood type, his blood type, reinforcing the visceral quality of the chronicle. In fact, this is a highly personal chronicle as the numbers are not casual or accidental, but the symbolic numbers of his military service, as the blood type is nothing less than his own blood type, as will be disclosed in the chronicle itself.

‘E de súbito isto regressa como um vômito, o mesmo enjoo, o mesmo mal estar, o mesmo nojo.’<sup>202</sup> Thus starts the chronicle, with the full force of abjection manifesting itself in the gush of a strong sentence, which starts with the

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<sup>200</sup> I could have selected plenty, but the scope of this thesis is limited and therefore I had to proceed to some kind of selection. The criteria for this selection are based on what I deemed relevant for the topic of this chapter, the war.

<sup>201</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Terceiro Livro de Crónicas* (Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 2006).

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.* p.111.

abruptness of ‘E’ (and), an unusual grammatical construction normally associated with speech rather than writing. The abject words stringing up in a violent musicality; ‘vômito’, ‘enjoo’, ‘mal estar’, ‘nojo’. An overemphasis on abjection that preludes the traumatic subject matter of the chronicle. It is as if the chronicle had come to him in an uncomfortable burst, as if it was an illness manifesting its unpleasant symptoms. Blurting out onto the page, the horrors follow each other in a quick succession:

O prisioneiro sem pernas que se amarrava ao guarda-lamas do rebenta-minas e gritava o tempo todo. O quartel da Pide com prisioneiros lá dentro, e a mulher do inspector que lhes dava choques eléctricos nos tomates. O alferes que durante um ataque saiu da caserna com um colchão na cabeça, a borrar-se literalmente de medo. O primeiro morto, um condutor a que chamávamos Macaco.<sup>203</sup>

Again, the now familiar episodes of violence, torture, fear. In a short burst, the author releases some traumatic episodes he has experienced, re-summoning some past experiences he had already written about previously. They are like a persistent virus, coming back unannounced and provoking in him nausea and sense of malaise which is (as we will see) a characteristic of his early writings.

In the next chapter, we shall see the importance of the persistence and recurrence of these images when analysing in more detail the concept of trauma. For now, it suffices to merely hint at this importance and how it really is one of the paramount features of Lobo Antunes’ writing. From this summoning of the past, one figure comes back to haunt him again; Macaco, one of the drivers and the first casualty in the unit, whose tragic death had been told in *Emília e uma*

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

*noites*. The haunting is brief but, as it is one that is recurrent, it is significant in the formation of a traumatic memory:

This singular *possession by the past* [...] extends beyond the bounds of a marginal pathology and has become a central characteristic of the survival experience of our time. Yet what is particularly striking in this singular experience is that its insistent reenactments of the past do not simply serve as a testimony to an event, but may also, paradoxically enough, bear witness to a past that was never fully experienced as it occurred. Trauma, that is, does not simply serve as a record of the past but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned.<sup>204</sup>

Complete ownership of the experience seems to be impossible, with its ghosts forcefully returning and recurring. Traumatic memories are fleeting and seem to possess a life of their own, defining exactly how and when they want to be remembered, controlling but not controlled. Surviving becomes a dual experience, both tarnished by a past that causes pain and suffering, but at the same time in need of remembering in order to justify its own existence. The impossibility of ownership, as frustrating as it might be, renders the subject impotent and dangerously places it in very close proximity with the helplessness that leads to death. In many cases, death is the outcome of such impotence against the pain of trauma. For the author of this chronicle, it is precisely the possession by his traumatic past that propels the writing, permitting an existence that dwells very close to the boundaries of death and yet it is very much alive. As long as the traumatic memory is allowed such a haunting, then survival is assured. Thus, for Lobo Antunes, writing *is* surviving.

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<sup>204</sup> Cathy Caruth, 'Introduction' in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) p.151.

The ghost of Macaco is not the only image that recurs in the chronicle. As a chain reaction, after the summoning of his ghost, another recurrent image reappears:

A gente a escolher os nossos próprios caixões na arrecadação: continuo a lembrar-me do meu. Pregava-se a medalha que trazíamos ao pescoço, com o número mecanográfico e o grupo sanguíneo (a minha 078902630RH+) na madeira.<sup>205</sup>

Again, the image of the coffins described in *Esta maneira de chorar dentro de uma palavra* reoccurs. However, a new and crucial detail is added. The military numbers, such as the one that gives its title to the chronicle, were pinned to the coffins, stripping them of the little human value they still had and reducing them to mere numbers. Echoing elsewhere(s) in his writing(s), the same denouncing of the conflict's little value for human life. In fact, this seems to be the major complaint and catalyser of the chronicle.

O Melo Antunes a comunicar que tínhamos feito prisioneiros (uns velhos, uma mulher grávida) o Pide a dar um pontapé na barriga da mulher grávida [...]. Como perdíamos muitas camionetas com as minas, a ordem - As Mercedes são ouro, os homens que piquem e com as picas as minas anti-pessoais a arrancarem as pernas aos soldados.<sup>206</sup>

Angola as a hostile memory-place, where a pregnant woman was kicked by a PIDE agent, where the high-patent military officers attribute more value to the Mercedes vans used by the army than to the soldiers themselves. The absurdity of the conflict reaching a peak in its disregard for human lives. It is hard for the author to contain the emotion that these memories cause:

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<sup>205</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Terceiro Livro de Crónicas*, p.111.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.* p.112.

Isto regressa como um vômito e tenho de falar nisto. E vocês têm de ouvir, porque eu continuo a ouvir. Em nome do Pereira, do Carpinteiro, dos outros que perdemos. Vocês têm de ouvir. Mesmo que eu escreva isto mal porque estou a escrever com o sangue dos meus mortos. Não posso esquecer. Não consigo esquecer. Eu, o 078902630RH+, não consigo esquecer. Porque no dia em que me esquecer mereço que alguém pague a minha medalha no primeiro caixão. Escrevo mal porque estou a escrever com o dedo na terra. Não é uma crónica, não é já um vômito, são lugares comuns se calhar mas não importa. Eu estive lá. Eu vi. Não pretendo fazer arte, alinhar coisas bonitas. Não sou escritor agora: sou um oficial do exército português.  
Não terei sido um criminoso por haver participado nisto?<sup>207</sup>

It is very hard to render any kind of analysis of this passage. Its intensity and the way in which it condenses several issues in such a short paragraph is testament to the masterly skill of the writer. Any attempt at analysing it would not be apt and it would only be a pale effort when compared to the power of the paragraph itself. However, it is unavoidable not to analyse certain aspects of the text.

Firstly, as we have perceived, the paragraph is a notably crafted piece of writing, encapsulating not only an emotional state, but also several key features in the ethos of the author's writing. Stylistically, the author manages to convey the dithyrambic and relentless force of the traumatic episodes he is recalling, again referring to the nature of the chronicle as that of vomit. An abject reaction which is the only way in which the trauma contained in it can be adequately manifested.

Secondly, it is worth noticing that the tone has now changed from an almost painful rant to a forceful interjection frontally directed at the reader(s). 'Vocês tem de ouvir.' You *must* listen, he cries. There is now an urgency in his call, as if he wanted the impossibility of forgetting not to be exclusive to himself.

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

The plural use of the personal pronoun (vocês) denounces the awareness of an audience, someone who, on the other side of the page, is reading/listening. A plural audience made of readers who, more poignantly than ever, are called by the author to participate directly with what is being written in the chronicle. This is a fundamental achievement of Lobo Antunes' writing; the participation (active role) of the reader. In this way, he is not only calling for empathy, he is *forcing* an engagement, willingly attempting a more 'in your face' approach, heightening the intensity and violence of the text.

Thirdly, there is an embodiment, a quasi shamanistic quality in the recalling of the name of the dead. He brings their memory (or the memory of their names) alive, rescuing them from oblivion. Excusing himself for 'writing badly', he claims he is 'writing with the blood of the dead'. The chronicle now transcends, without abandoning, a simple act of literature, of writing and reading. Suddenly, he is no longer interested in writing a chronicle, but rather in fixing the image of the 'writing in blood' in the reader's imagination. Thus, he questions the very nature of the text as a chronicle ('Não é uma crónica, não é já um vômito'), confessing that it does not matter to him as, no matter what the text is, it cannot convey the *reality* of his experiences. This inadequacy enlightens the reader to the impossibility of referring back to trauma in a direct manner, with the only access possible via this tangentiality and incompleteness. He is then trapped in between the impossibility of forgetting and the impossibility of retelling. Nonetheless, it is from that difficult place that his tentative writing is born, shunning straightforwardness and embracing its own incapability. He claims not to be a writer any longer: 'Não sou escritor agora: sou um oficial do exército português.' With this self-categorization, we have reached the core of

the Lobo Antunes' writing ethos. In a simple claim, he transforms himself into that hybrid writer, who in the same voice is capable of encapsulating all of those different realities inherent to the different roles he plays and different existences he had throughout time. Although he momentarily refuses to be a writer, one is aware that it is from him that the words of the chronicle come, it is he who is ultimately responsible for their appearance in the text. Even if his own consciousness of that role is suspended for a moment to give way to that other voice, the soldier's, the two cannot be completely separated, thus simultaneously coexisting in this powerful paragraph. But the weight of bearing with what is being written in the chronicle, the literary responsibility behind it, is no longer his – it now belongs to the reader. The momentary refusal of performing the role of the writer also marks a solidarity with those that served with him in the army. He is a soldier again, he is still one of them, and their suffering is *his* suffering. Excusing himself from the task of having to perform as a writer, he is also excusing the excruciating task of having to engage with it in any critical or artistic way, opening the door of his emotions ajar so they can flow unmediated by that filter I call a *literary* act. In terms of acknowledging, registering and ultimately dealing in *reality* with that suffering and all the rest invoked in the chronicle, that is now up to someone else.

Lastly, it is worth pointing out the final question of the passage, where he asks himself if he had not been, in fact, a criminal. The question, although discretely inserted amidst so many other powerful sentences, unravels a series of other questions that reach out from the sphere of literature, its ramifications pertinent to Portuguese society at large. It hints at the guilt that was never addressed, the silenced responsibility of the perpetrator, however unwilling that

perpetrator really was in participating in the conflict. This is another relevant aspect which comes up every now and again in the writer's work, one that cannot be ignored or underplayed and one which deserves further exploration and addressing elsewhere.

The chronicle goes on, emotive and intense as ever. Episodes of brutality, fellow soldiers and friends, the moment when the geographically distant birth of his daughter was announced, all are recalled in the same poignancy, emotiveness and intensity, until that now familiar 'scream' that pierces the author's texts barges in, like an unavoidable protest:

A literatura que se foda  
(desculpem)  
a escrita que se foda  
redesculpem. Agora, prometo, vou lavar as mãos e torno a escrever coisas como deve de ser. Mas por favor compreendam: de súbito isto regressa como um vômito. E tenho nojo de ser gente. No interior de mim não passo de um prisioneiro sem pernas [...] gritando. Se eu saltar com o rebenta-minas que fique, ao menos, o eco do meu grito. Completem esta crónica, vocês, os que cá ficam. 078902630RH+. Filha.<sup>208</sup>

The rejection is now total. In the full force of foul language, he dismisses literature first and then the actual act of writing, a total rejection of the nature of himself and of the text produced on the page. What remains is only abjection, the nausea and self-disgust that takes form in the image of the screaming legless prisoner tied to the bumper of the 'rebenta-minas'. Seemingly giving up or collapsing under the weight of the text, he wishes simply that all that remains is the echo of his scream, not even the scream itself. He seems unable to go on, asking of those who remain, those who are alive and will outlive him, to complete the rest of the chronicle for him. This is a clear indication of his

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid. pp.113-114.

acknowledgement about the ethical, moral and historical incompleteness of his experiences, the acknowledgement of the impossibility of coming to full terms with it, as well as the indication of a collective necessity of finishing his (hi)story. In the end, his only solution is to retreat into a numerical sense of his own identity, to annihilate his individual existence and adopt as his name his military numbers. '078902630RH+' appears as almost the closing syntagm of the text, a closure that would be fitting with that retreat, that erasure of the self that follows such an emotional explosion. It is almost as an existential suicide, a total surrendering to the destructiveness of war.

Reflecting on the destructiveness of war, Susan Sontag has nevertheless found some ambiguity in it:

The destructiveness of war – short of total destruction, which is not war but suicide – is not in itself an argument against waging war unless one thinks [...] that violence is always unjustifiable, that force is always and in all circumstances wrong – wrong because [...] violence turns anybody subjected to it into a thing. No, retort those who in a given situation see no alternative to armed struggle, violence can exalt someone subjected to it into a martyr or a hero.<sup>209</sup>

This rather romanticising claim (which might otherwise be essentially correct when applied to other historical context or social struggles) could not be further away from the essence of Lobo Antunes' text. It is against such 'turning into a thing' that he is writing, against the dehumanization of the subject and his transformation into a numerical 'thing'. At the same time, his efforts seem not to be fruitful and he apparently gives up fighting against it. The process of self-

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<sup>209</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin Books, 2004) p.11.

erasure and retreating into an existence as number appear to be inevitable, thus denying the possibility of martyrdom or heroism.<sup>210</sup>

Yet, a ray of hope appears in the very last word, 'Filha'. It comes almost as a final call for help, a contrarian reminder of the continuation of his existence, in the person of his daughter. The apparition of this word as the last thing in the chronicle reminds the reader of the corporeal existence of the man behind the chronicle, rescuing him from being merely a number, highlighting the existence of other people in his life, people that matter to him. This is a powerful appeal for it reminds the reader of his/her very own material life, as a member of a community, with friends and family, someone's son or someone's daughter. People that matter and to whom the transmission of memory and one's story, be it pleasant or unpleasant, is owed. This seems to be the deep core of the author's writing, his path towards catharsis and ultimately his contribution towards the making of a better community and society.

Once again, it is in the absence that Lobo Antunes seems to insert the importance of his writing. What he has written unearths all the ghosts, emotions and horrors inherent in his military experience. But it is in what he has *not* written that we, those who remain, must find some sense and solace, some possible guidance in order to draw our lessons for the future; some *empathy*:

War tears, rends. War rips open, eviscerates. War scorches. War dismembers. War *ruins*. Not to be pained by these pictures, not to recoil from them, not to strive to abolish what causes this havoc, this carnage – these [...] would be the reactions of a moral monster. And [...] we are not monsters [...] Our failure is one of imagination, of empathy: we have failed to hold this reality in mind.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Moreover, there is the specific claim in the chronicle: 'Não conheci nenhum herói. Conheci pobres homens, nem sequer homens [...]' (António Lobo Antunes, *Terceiro Livro de Crónicas*, p.113).

<sup>211</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, p.7.

## CHAPTER 3

### Lobo Antunes, as Psychiatrist

- E porque se decidiu pela psiquiatria?
- Isso foi depois da guerra. No início do internato geral, fui chamado pelo Exército para ir para a Guerra de Angola. Voltei da guerra a querer ser cirurgião, mas essa especialização era muito competitiva e requeria todo o tempo para estudar, tempo que tinha de roubar à escrita. Assim, pensei que devia escolher uma especialidade que me proporcionasse esse tempo para escrever. A minha dúvida pairava entre dermatologia e psiquiatria. Naquele tempo, como veterano de guerra, podia escolher qualquer das duas.<sup>212</sup>

Somewhat dismissive about its importance, this is how Lobo Antunes answered the question of why he chose psychiatry as his medical speciality. There are no mentions of a personal calling, an inspiration or even particular interest. Pragmatically, psychiatry was the speciality that gave him more time to dedicate himself to his main objective, writing. Thus, at a first glance, psychiatry seems to be an excuse, an easy way out of the time consuming duties of the medical profession. However, it would perhaps be naïve to take the author's word without a minimum of suspicion and questioning. We have seen the close relationship of the author's father with neurology and psychiatry, having even worked in the very hospital in which the author would develop his medical practice. In his answer, it is possible to detect the simultaneous presence of those three roles (writer, doctor, soldier), existing in a liminality that could naturally permit an influence between them. The choice to be a psychiatrist is taken *post-war* and, even if the two do not seem to be directly correlated, they appear as

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<sup>212</sup> María Luisa Blanco; *Conversas com António Lobo Antunes* (Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 2002) p.49.

inseparable realities. Asking the chicken or egg question would then be a useless endeavour as, whether the writer has chosen psychiatry in order to be able to write, or as an attempt to understand his/others' experiences of the war, the fact is that *in his writing* all these realities appear simultaneously and inseparably. The text thus elicits a reading that takes them into consideration, necessarily calling for an exploration of the interstices between their points of contact.

Despite being a personal affair<sup>213</sup>, the medical dimension of his early novels has to be addressed, not only because of biographical circumstances, but also due to its importance within Portuguese culture and society. It will become apparent that it is thanks and through his medical mind that the specificities and ethos of his writing will arise. Yet, regardless of this 'medical inspiration' the decision to study medicine instead of literature was not a peaceful one. Clearly inclined to literature, he claims to having wanted to be a writer from a very early age. Reminiscing about his childhood, he recalls the moment in which he decided to be a writer almost as an illumination, as his most important and lasting memory:

- Que recordações tem da sua infância?
- Uma das minhas recordações mais nítidas é o dia em que decidi que ia ser escritor.  
Foi no dia 24 de Dezembro, tinha sete anos, ia num táxi e, de repente, tive como que uma revelação: "Vou ser escritor", pensei. E quando cheguei a casa, mal cheguei, pus-me imediatamente a escrever. E foi assim, exactamente como lhe conto.<sup>214</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> Not only his father and himself, but also (and especially) his brother, the notorious neurosurgeon, João Lobo Antunes are deeply connected to the field of brain medicine and psychiatry.

<sup>214</sup> María Luisa Blanco; *Conversas com António Lobo Antunes*, p.24.

This kind of illumination, of almost divine inspiration more common to romantic writers denounces Lobo Antunes' tendency towards literature, not medicine. Of course, we might take his claims of such 'calling' with a pinch of salt, as being part of the image the author creates around himself, his pose.<sup>215</sup> The childhood awakening to literature is nevertheless thwarted (this according to the writer) by his father: 'O pai matriculou-o em Medicina e ele chorou furioso pela imposição dos estudos, mas depois nunca lamentou tê-los feito.'<sup>216</sup>

Thus, Lobo Antunes ends up studying medicine as an imposition and not a choice. Curiously, to the initial disappointment followed a sense of gratefulness, the perhaps surprising acknowledgement that his scientific education had actually helped shaping his writing; 'alegrou-me toda a vida ter uma educação científica. A minha formação ajudou-me muito como escritor porque, além disso, se tivesse ido para a Faculdade de Letras, seguramente escreveria como Sartre ou Camus ou talvez fosse um crítico literário'.<sup>217</sup>

Medicine has, then, been a direct influence in the author's literature, not only informing it in terms of content but actively shaping the writing ethos in itself. The 'medical gaze' into literature seems to be the starting point from which he developed his craft. Early attempts of the type of exercise that applies

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<sup>215</sup> In fact, he seemingly contradicts himself: 'Creio que não tenho talento literário. O que outros conseguem com facilidade eu consigo-o com muito trabalho e o esforço é muito variável.' *Ibid.*, p.45.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.* p.47.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.* p.48.

the ‘medical gaze’ to literature can be found in four articles he wrote with his friend Daniel Sampaio<sup>218</sup> prior to the publication of the novels.

António Carlos de Bettencourt has written in more detail about these articles:

It is from this close friendship and collaboration that four articles were written and published in scientific magazines. They dealt with psychiatric issues related to literature and to artistic creation. They also addressed the role of the psychiatrist in society, as well as scientific questions related to group analysis.<sup>219</sup>

It is noteworthy to mention their latter preoccupations, the role of the psychiatrist and group analysis will figure in Lobo Antunes’ novels, with particular incidence in *Memória de Elefante* (group analysis) and *Conhecimento do Inferno* (role of the psychiatrist).

Maybe the date in which these articles have been written, between 1978 and 1982 (thus overlapping the time frame of the writing of the novels), could help explain the transference of these issues onto the novels. One must not forget that Lobo Antunes’ writing is porous and liminal. In fact, it is this porosity that makes his writing so important and distinctive. The numerous points of contact between his literary writing and the writing that emanates from his work as a psychiatrist are evidence that both are intrinsically connected, one nurturing the other without completely absorbing or restraining it. They feed each other, but not in a symbiosis that damages either of them. This is where Lobo Antunes’

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<sup>218</sup> Daniel Sampaio (b.1946) is a psychiatrist and writer, close friend of António Lobo Antunes.

<sup>219</sup> António Carlos Trigo de Bettencourt, *Lobo Antunes, the Psychiatrist*, in ‘Facts and Fictions of António Lobo Antunes’ (Dartmouth, Massachusetts; Tagus Press; 2011) pp.261-266 (p.262).

originality lies, in the delicate juggling of these two different spheres, something that, as it will become apparent further on, is very difficult to do.

The interconnectedness between the writings is particularly strong in the first co-authored article:

The first of those articles is entitled ‘*Alice no país das maravilhas* ou a esquizofrenia esconjurada’ [...]; published in 1978, as the title suggests, it is a psychoanalytic approach to Lewis Carroll’s classic. [...] Carroll seems to have influenced Lobo Antunes’ earlier work. Without being too exhausting, we should keep in mind that in the initial quotation from *Memória de Elefante* there is a sentence taken from *Through the Looking Glass* and that the descent to hell in *Conhecimento do Inferno* is very similar to Alice’s fall. As a matter of fact, much in this novel and *Memória de Elefante* reminds us of Carroll’s universe.<sup>220</sup>

António Carlos de Bettencourt’s essay explores this and the other articles briefly and without much detail, nevertheless unearthing a link and a crucial relationship between the medical profession and literature. However, his essay steers away from the most delicate question about this relationship and takes for granted the medicalization of literature, as demonstrated in the essay about Carroll. The question is one constantly posed by Lobo Antunes, one that challenges the tension in between the roles of doctor and writer. Instead of medicalising literature, he frees himself from the conventions of medicine (its apparatuses, jargon, rules and more importantly, power structures) and, without forgetting them, applies its scrutinizing gaze in his writing.

The tradition of writing-doctors, or writers who happened to be doctors, is quite an established one. Anton Chekov, Arthur Conan Doyle, Mikhail Bulgakov and Louis-Ferdinand Céline are just some of the most famous examples. In the Portuguese context, this is also a longstanding tradition, with writers such as

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid. p.263.

Júlio Dinis, Fernando Namora and Miguel Torga appearing as some of the most prominent names. Lobo Antunes is an heir to this tradition, with the unusual difference of being a psychiatrist. Elsewhere, and writing about another figure within the context of Portuguese medical sciences, Barahona Fernandes (himself a prominent psychiatrist) has also noted the high numbers of doctors who were writers but also the scarcity (or in fact, inexistence) of those who were specialised in psychiatry. Writing about the psychiatrist Sobral Cid<sup>221</sup>, major figure in the history of Portuguese psychiatry, he notes Cid's excellence as 'escritor médico':

Sobral Cid vivenciou com grande expectativa e angústia [...] aquele mundo de encanto e arte (o teatro francês e escandinavo, o romance psicológico) e outras subtilezas intelectuais que havia tecido na sua imaginação, como jovem coimbrão e culto [...] A sua formação e bom gosto literário – embora não tivesse escrito fora do âmbito da sua especialidade – tornam-no um excelente *escritor médico*.<sup>222</sup>

Then, he adds in a footnote:

Sabe-se como na Medicina há muitos escritores com grande êxito literário [...] Os mais notáveis [...] não foram porém psiquiatras, como se a redacção das histórias e exames médico-psiquiátricos tivesse, como em Sobral Cid, absorvido todo o ímpeto estilístico e entendimento do viver e sofrer humanos.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> José de Matos Sobral Cid (b.1877 — d.1941), mainly known as Sobral Cid, was a doctor and Professor of Psychiatry in Universidade de Coimbra. He also served as Minister of Public Instruction (what we today know as Minister of Education) in two governments in the Portuguese First Republic. His importance for the modernisation and development of Portuguese psychiatry was paramount, as highlighted in Henrique Barahona Fernandes' second half of the book *Um Século de Psiquiatria e A Psiquiatria em Portugal*.

<sup>222</sup> Pierre Pichot; Barahona Fernandes, *Um Século de Psiquiatria e A Psiquiatria em Portugal* (Lisboa, Roche, 1984) p.289

<sup>223</sup> Ibid.

It is clear that Barahona Fernandes tries to establish Cid's writing credentials, subordinating his literary accomplishments to his medical writings. This, in my view, is very problematic. Firstly, he is implying a subordination, as if literature had a subaltern position in relation to psychiatry, here hinted at as the more important, time consuming activity. Secondly, he is prescribing an impossibility. None of the most notable writers have been psychiatrists, he implies, perhaps because the nature of their medical profession has summoned their literary creativity to itself, thus making it impossible for psychiatrists to be writers. Thirdly, he seems to be implying that the supposed literary quality of Cid's scribbling artistry is then channelled to the writing of case studies and medical reports. If Barahona Fernandes is trying to equiparate *medical writing* to works of literature, perhaps somewhat bluntly, I pose the question of how many other doctors or any other professionals in different fields, which require the constant writing of reports and scribbling activities of the sort, have not felt inclined to flourish their prose, to use a 'more literary' style to dispel dullness from their pages? Are all of these people, no matter how accomplished stylists they might be, really writers? Is *medical writing* really the same as literature?

Lastly, we have to consider Barahona Fernandes' musings as an attempt (perhaps unconscious) of legitimising the *medicalisation* of discourse, of literature. This goes completely against what Lobo Antunes sets out to do. Such medicalisation inherits a positivist spirit which, despite its well documented historical benefits, has also brought about several oppressions and injustices. An accomplished writer and psychiatrist, thus contrary to Barahona Fernandes' prediction, Lobo Antunes writes against the grain of this master-narrative of an all-encompassing, never-failing and reductionist Medicine. He writes against the

medicalization of the subject, the medicalization of identity and the medicalization of a culture, at the same time engaging critically with the power structures behind Medicine, particularly in the Portuguese context. He does this by placing himself in the space between, not quite doctor, not quite writer and not quite patient. In the interstices, attentive to human suffering, he satirizes and subverts.

Thus, such a long tradition of writing physicians has then sparked attempts into linking the inclination of doctors to become writers, perhaps to compensate the cold focusing of their professions with a dosage of a more ‘human activity’, such as writing, in order to elicit a higher level of empathy in themselves. In other words, maybe doctors have sought literature to become more empathetic, have sought literature to make themselves ‘better doctors’.

Whatever the case and no matter how interesting this line of research is, it is not what has been set out to be investigated here. Furthermore, other critics, like Iain Bamforth, have written handsomely about this complex relationship.<sup>224</sup> Nonetheless, we must not dismiss the matter with such brevity and despite not engaging in depth with this problematic, we must briefly take it into consideration as it is relevant to better understand Lobo Antunes’ ethos.

A sceptic that literature can make better doctors, Bamforth writes:

I am sceptical about the asseveration that literature can make for better doctors. Most of the doctors-writers represented in my book, as distinct from writing doctors, are writers who just happen to have been doctors, and who have ended up in medicine for any number of reasons. Even then, the best of them have to resist a temptation to reach for ‘the trigger of the literary man’s biggest gun’ (William Empson): the reductive view, a life seen only in terms of symptoms,

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<sup>224</sup> His Introduction in *The Body In the Library: A Literary Anthology of Modern Medicine* is of particular interest.

illness, or even death. Medicine is indeed a library, but it has to be read in the right way.<sup>225</sup>

The scepticism and the concerns behind it are indeed justified, considering how many times Medicine has been a master-narrative, a reductive and hegemonic narrative appropriated by the political and economic powers. The dark history of the Eugenics model and its appropriation by the Nazi regime serves as a horrible reminder, for example.

In fact, it was in part due to *writing* that Medicine managed to save itself from its cruel tendencies and emerge as a humane and caring discipline. Bamforth places this emergence in the nineteenth century, naturally accompanying the technical and industrial advances of the period, illustrating the British context of the Victorian era and how the doctors' social status was greatly improved in this period:

Bawdy humour about doctors and bodies became unacceptable to the Victorians. As medicine became more virtuous and evangelical, and physical examination came to figure in the consultation in a way which would have struck eighteen-century patients as odd [...], it would simply not do to have brutish or lecherous practitioners. Medicine had to get its act together; and it did.

Clinical skills might have been learned at the bedside, but doctors wrote and wrote: medicine was moving back into the library. It was to be an age of noble men, and thick biographies. *The Lancet* had been founded in 1823, and its first editor, the surgeon Thomas Wakley, battled to raise standards. Medicine was slowly becoming more humane.<sup>226</sup>

The raising of standards, this *humanisation* which Bamforth describes, has a lot to do with the act of *writing* in itself. It was by moving back to the library

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<sup>225</sup> *The Body In the Library: A Literary Anthology of Modern Medicine*, ed. by Iain Bamforth (London and New York: Verso Books, 2003), p. xxvii.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.* pp.xiv-xv.

that medicine was able to raise itself as a discipline, undoubtedly capitalising on the benefits writing in the medical context brought about.

It is fair to perceive that Medicine has not been impervious from political, social and economic interferences. Doctors, as agents within that not so impervious Medicine, are not those neutral, saint-like figures who hold the key to the understanding of one's identity. At least not on their own.

Reflecting on this issue, Michel Foucault asserts:

What was fundamentally invisible is suddenly offered to the brightness of the gaze, in a movement of appearance so simple, so immediate that it seems to be natural consequence of a more highly developed experience. It is as if for the first time for thousands of years, doctors, free at last of theories and chimeras, agreed to approach the object of their experience with the purity of an unprejudiced gaze. But the analysis must be turned around: it is the forms of visibility that have changed; the new medical spirit [...] cannot be ascribed to an act of psychological and epistemological purification; it is nothing more than a syntactical reorganization of disease in which the limits of the visible and invisible follow a new pattern; the abyss beneath illness, which was the illness itself, has emerged into the light of language [...] For clinical experience to become possible as a form of knowledge, a reorganization of the hospital field, a new definition of the status of the patient in society, and the establishment of a certain relationship between public assistance and medical experience, between help and knowledge, became necessary; the patient has to be enveloped in a collective, homogeneous space. It was also necessary to open up language to a whole new domain: that of perpetual and objectively based correlation between the visible and the expressible [...]

This structure, in which space, language, and death are articulated [...] constitutes then historical condition of a medicine that is given and accepted as positive. Positive here should be taken in the strong sense [...]

It will no doubt remain a decisive fact about our culture that its first scientific discourse concerning the individual had to pass through this stage of death. Western man could constitute himself in his own eyes as an object of science, he grasped himself within his language, and gave himself, in himself and by himself, a discursive existence, only in the opening created by his own elimination.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003) pp.240-243.

However, Bamforth's and Foucault's preoccupations can maybe be slightly assuaged by Lobo Antunes' writing. Given the author's claim that medicine had been a parental 'imposition', his calling being literary and not medical, we can place him in the latter category, that of 'writers who just happen to have been doctors, and who have ended up in medicine for any number of reasons'. Having already tried the temptation of medicalising a literary text (*Alice in The Wonderland*) in the essay co-authored with Daniel Sampaio, his literature then departs from this kind of attempt, arriving to a much more complex articulation of Medicine in literature. Seeking to write about 'life' in its totality, his authorial efforts inevitably touch the medical sphere but in a manner that is as engaged as it is critical, a manner that despite coming from a medical agent (with its medical gaze) nevertheless resists that reductive view denounced by Bamforth. Symptoms, illness and death are all present in his novels, but rather as a part of something more encompassing, something which is not delimited in such reductive terms as these.

We have seen how the medical experiences in the war front have been brought to the fore and informed his literature, but we will also see how his medical experiences post-war would define his writing. Learning his trade as a doctor has also served to shape his craft as a writer, in a real transference of skills that will permit the development of his style: 'É o texto que se constrói independentemente de mim. Tive um professor na Faculdade de Medicina que dizia; "Os doentes melhoram apesar do médico". E isso acontece muitas vezes com o livro'.<sup>228</sup> The metaphor fits perfectly with the author's actual process of

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<sup>228</sup> María Luisa Blanco; *Conversas com António Lobo Antunes* (Dom Quixote, Lisboa, 2002) p.44.

writing and to the relative independence of his novels<sup>229</sup>, which call for the active participation of the reader. In this instance, it is the academic learning of medicine that influences the writing. Yet, a more important type of knowledge is found, apparently both for Medicine and Literature, in the crucial moment of *actual* contact with the patient. This contact does not mean that the patient automatically becomes object or subject of the author's literature. In fact, he seems to have reluctance in writing about patients at least in an open and direct way. 'Eu seria incapaz de escrever sobre doentes. O meu pai ensinou os filhos a terem um profundo respeito pelo sigilo médico e nunca seria capaz de fazer sequer alusão'.<sup>230</sup> The ethical preoccupations of the author are telling of the committed ethos of his literature, which simultaneously tries to address paramount issues for individuals and the collective, without either being too abstract or breaking the patients' privacy, exposing them or romanticising them. Again, similar to the biographical elements of his own life, he seems to draw on his patients' *biographemes* in order to construct his fictional realities, albeit displaying a higher level of ethical concern with regards to them.

Nonetheless, it is from the direct contact with patients that Lobo Antunes learns the most. He seems to hold this aspect of Medicine in great esteem.

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<sup>229</sup> Despite the fact that this dimension is more accentuated in the later novels, it is not absent in the early ones. It is fair to observe that the heavier autobiographical dimension of the initial trilogy limits the books' 'life-of-their-own'. Even so, the necessity of an active readership is undoubtedly present albeit in a lesser degree, an aspect that will be intensified through his literature. In the early novels, this can be found in the constant shift in locus and person, the unannounced eruption of different episodes and images, and the constant chain of thoughts and words reminiscent of the process of 'free association' commonly used by psychologists and psychiatrists.

<sup>230</sup> João Céu e Silva, *Uma Longa Viagem com António Lobo Antunes*, p.118.

Eu tinha a sensação que saía muito enriquecido dos hospitais, mas o sofrimento das pessoas tocou-me sempre muito [...] Na faculdade tive a felicidade de ter professores que eram homens excepcionais, que davam muita ênfase à importância da relação interpessoal, que agora quase desapareceu com todos os meios auxiliares de diagnóstico – é quase uma engenharia que pouco tem a ver com o que Hipócrates dizia do médico que cura com o facto, a erva e a palavra. Uma pessoa que está doente é um príncipe e tem de ser tratada assim.<sup>231</sup>

This sentiment is shared by Iain Bamforth. Both are calling for a *rehumanization* of medicine, a rescuing of the importance of the patient in that Hippocratic triangle that makes up medicine. Taking us back to mid nineteenth century, when doctors started to seek aid in mathematics, in a period when the first social statistics were being elaborated and patients were on their way to become numbers, Bamforth reflects: ‘The individual patient was on the way to becoming a case study, while the old Hippocratic notion of the medical triangle (disease, doctor, patient) gave way to a dual between doctor and disease.’<sup>232</sup>

According to the Portuguese novelist, a fundamental lesson for his writing was learnt, ironically, from a mental patient. Reflecting about his early medical career, he recalls the episode:

Recordo daquela época que o melhor ensinamento foi tirado de um louco. Estava no jardim do hospital. Aproximou-se de mim com o seu ar misterioso e disse-me: ‘Sabe? O mundo começou a ser feito por detrás...’  
Reflecti sobre a frase deste louco e pensei: ‘A escrita é assim.’  
Quando começamos escrevemos para a frente, até que compreendemos que temos de escrever por detrás, às avessas.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid. p.118.

<sup>232</sup> *The Body In the Library: A Literary Anthology of Modern Medicine*, ed.by Iain Bamforth, p. xiv.

<sup>233</sup> María Luisa Blanco; *Conversas com António Lobo Antunes*, p.55.

In this episode of reversed learning, for it is the patient who teaches the doctor, we observe the powerful subversion, despite the banality of the act in itself, of the traditional structures inherent to the medical master-narrative. Even more so when the master-narrative is that of psychiatry, where it is taken for granted that the supposed 'sane' (psychiatrists), legitimised by the medical apparatuses and with the added power of being the sole responsible for creating the models, setting the rules and ultimately controlling the parameters that separate them from the 'insane'. Throughout history, this has been noticeable in the evolution, creation and rejection of certain diagnoses, so what had been considered an illness would lose that status in time.

This lability of illnesses is a clear indication that they are not independent of the theories of which they are the object. In fact, psychiatric theories are never simply external to the psychopathology that they are concerned with. Quite the contrary, they constantly interact with them: the physician's expectations influence the patient's behaviour, and the latter in turn influences the theories that are formed about it. For the most part, the history of psychiatry is nothing other than the history of those interactions and complex negotiations from which emerge in a more or less random fashion new syndromes, new 'realities' shared by the patients, the physicians, and the society that surrounds them.<sup>234</sup>

The Foucauldian act of subversion marked by the mental patient being the one 'setting the rules' denotes, in the author, a special empathy towards the patients, not the type of empathy developed by the medical ethos, that which comes in the moment of the consultation or contact with the ill, but which becomes absent soon the patient leaves or is removed from the 'gaze', becoming invisible. Medical empathy is also necessarily finite, as there are limits to what Medicine and doctors can do, leaving behind a sense of impotency that can overcome

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<sup>234</sup> Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, *Making Minds and Madness: From Hysteria to Depression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) p.24.

empathy. '[S]empre me custou ver o sofrimento alheio. Quando praticava medicina, não era só o sofrimento mas a minha impotência para com ele que me custava'.<sup>235</sup> Perhaps, one of the ways Lobo Antunes found to try to dispel such impotence was to dedicate himself to literature, overcoming that inevitable feeling by exploring deeper regions of self, identity and memory.

The type of empathy Lobo Antunes is trying to elicit is wider and deeper, one that is bound by a common identity, one that acknowledges suffering in others as well in itself. This equalizing between the 'epistemological validity' of doctors and patients, this subversive role reversal, will become a trope in the novels, with particular relevance in *Conhecimento do Inferno*. That common identity seems to have been discovered by the author while still at war in Africa, as he confesses in a letter sent closer to the final days<sup>236</sup> of his military endeavour: 'Libertar-me-ei algum dia desta angústia? Chego a pensar que não, que sairei daqui para um hospital psiquiátrico – como doente'.<sup>237</sup>

The acknowledgement of the possibility of ending up as a mental patient in a psychiatric hospital, a thought that comes to the author before his decision of choosing psychiatry as his medical speciality, is telling of his identification with 'the mad'. His empathy is, then, *traumaborne*<sup>238</sup>.

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<sup>235</sup> João Céu e Silva, *Uma Longa Viagem com António Lobo Antunes*, p.26.

<sup>236</sup> The letter is dated 22.1.73. The final letter sent by Lobo Antunes dates 30.1.73.

<sup>237</sup> Maria José Lobo Antunes, Joana Lobo Antunes, (org.) *António Lobo Antunes: D'este viver aqui neste papel descripto*. (Dom Quixote, Lisboa, 2005) p.423.

<sup>238</sup> Like a virus or illness can be waterborne or airborne, empathy can be *traumaborne*, that is, carried by the thing (trauma) specified. I coin the word acknowledging that it does not have the same deadly or negative connotation, at least not in this instance. Quite on the contrary, it implies that due to the suffering

Indeed, he ends up in the psychiatric hospital. As a doctor. We must not forget that it was in this material space where such interconnectedness of epistemological spheres was made possible. The empirical existence of such space has necessarily informed his writing, both serving as setting and source. In fact, the main *locus* of the inaugural novel *Memória de Elefante* and of *Conhecimento do Inferno* is the very place in which he performed his medical activity, Hospital Miguel Bombarda, in Lisbon.

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provoked by trauma this kind of empathy is reached, permitting a deeper understanding of the other's pain.

### 3.1. Miguel Bombarda (Hospital, Doctor and... Metonym)

[A] primeira vez que entrei num hospital psiquiátrico tive a sensação de estar a contemplar uma mistura de cenas situadas entre um filme de Fellini e a casa do meu avô.

O hospital psiquiátrico era como uma dessas grandes casas, enormes, sombrias e cheias de ameaças. Com gente estranha que me parava, me tocava...<sup>239</sup>

This is how Lobo Antunes describes his first impressions of the psychiatric hospital. Curiously, the images evoked by the contact belong to the memory of his grandfather's house, hinting that he had been 'amongst the mad' before, in a familial context. The surreal strangeness he found (Fellini) in the almost unreal atmosphere of the hospital will be reflected in his writing, with filmic references and metaphors being applied (as it was here) when describing the hospital. These references heighten the sense of unreality, as if the hospital was not a real but a fictional place, subjected to the augmentations, excesses, hysteric exaggerations common to the cinematic universe. In fact, throughout the trilogy, like a hyperreality, Lobo Antunes summons different characters, images and situations from the world of film, thus caricaturizing and satirizing institutional psychiatry.

In this passage from one of his interviews, a sense of decay, an almost comical decrepitude, is also visible. The inadequacy and eeriness emanating from the hospital mirror the historical difficulties and delays in Portugal's history of psychiatry. The state of affairs denounced by Lobo Antunes is also pinpointed by Barahona Fernandes, in the only known attempt towards the compilation of a History of Psychiatry in Portugal<sup>240</sup>. Therefore, we can see that

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<sup>239</sup> María Luisa Blanco; *Conversas com António Lobo Antunes*, p.54.

<sup>240</sup> The lack of bibliography regarding this subject is indeed staggering. The attempts to investigate and trace the history of Portuguese psychiatry are scattered in various articles, with the only more straightforward historical

Lobo Antunes' negative view of the conditions of his own profession, clearly noticeable in the novels and chronicles, was still justified in the time period when they were formulated. Once again, the importance of his writing in the Portuguese literary scene is highlighted by this added weight that comes when writers decide to put the finger in the most profound and endemic wounds of society.

It is worth relaying Barahona Fernandes' observations:

Foram [...] certas *dificuldades históricas* que, no decurso dos séculos XVIII e XIX, retardaram quase meio século a introdução entre nós dos grandes avanços epocais da Psiquiatria. Só depois do triunfo e estabilização do liberalismo em 1848, se criou a primeira instituição oficial de assistência “aos loucos” [...] As *resistências* opostas às ideias do *iluminismo* e do *proguessismo* e a seguir do *naturalismo científico* explicam muitas das dificuldades sofridas. No plano pragmático foi necessário – como noutros países – superar o lastro de preconceitos e *prejuízos culturais* de ordem arcaica, mítica e religiosa, com que eram encarados os enfermos da mente [...]

O começo da Psiquiatria em Portugal, em meados do século XIX foi [...] moroso e também penoso, como o próprio tema de que se ocupava, cheio de incógnitas e ainda bem pobre de conhecimentos rigorosos e de técnicas terapêuticas efectivamente actuaentes.<sup>241</sup>

Both Barahona Fernandes and Lobo Antunes seem to share the same critical view of the historical and cultural conditions that hindered the development of Psychiatry in Portugal. The sense of decadence and ‘lagging behind’ of the field traverses both their writings, with sharp criticisms to the specific cultural conditions of Portuguese society, in particular the nefarious influence of religion. When reflecting upon the practices that would lead to modern psychotherapy,

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compilation (in terms of a chronological ordering) being Barahona Fernandes' book mentioned here.

<sup>241</sup> Pierre Pichot; Barahona Fernandes, *Um Século de Psiquiatria e A Psiquiatria em Portugal* (Lisboa: Roche, 1984) pp.239-241.

such as mesmerisation, or hypnotism, Barahona Fernandes' words become particularly sharp when describing the kind of resistance they were met with:

Estas correntes não foram muito notórias no Portugal de oitocentos, reprimidas como eram (e são) pelas práticas religiosas e suas degradações espiritistas. Divulgaram-se mais as credices supersticiosas de videntes, bruxas, mulheres de virtude, etc., quando não os 'exconjuros' dos párocos das aldeias aplicados a doentes 'desarquetados' que teriam 'o diabo no corpo' [...] Neste atraso cultural reside afinal o nosso drama, extenso também – e com mais forte razão – à Psiquiatria. Se algo tipifica a sua evolução em Portugal são as *resistências* de toda a sorte, sempre postas ao seu progresso e desenvolvimento.<sup>242</sup>

From these words, we can conclude that the history of psychiatry in Portugal has been marred by a series of resistances, something that Lobo Antunes also notices and experiences. As it will become apparent when analysing the novels, the specific political, cultural and social realities bore their way into clinical realities. One must remember that, in the period where Lobo Antunes' novels are set, Portugal was under, or had just been under, an oppressive dictatorial regime. It is then natural that fear and mistrust were part of the environment that surrounded the medical profession. In Barahona Fernandes somewhat romantic view, it had been thanks to certain *personalities*, certain enlightened doctors, that the field had been saved in the troublesome context of Portugal. He identifies a tendency for the reoccurrence of these resistances throughout history, followed by counter resistances spearheaded by these enlightened doctors, a circularity of history that he ascribes as the norm for the Portuguese context:

Na atmosfera de desconfiança e medo, quando não de oposição aberta, que periodicamente se volta a repetir, só a emergência de *personalidades* notáveis logrou vencer e dar os passos fundamentais de cada novo acontecer histórico das mutações psiquiátricas. O povo sofria os males e as torturas da doença, tantas vezes agravadas ainda pelos efeitos dos impiedosos 'tratamentos' infligidos [...] Foi um

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid. pp.246-247.

grupo de médicos reunidos na Sociedade de Ciências Médicas de Lisboa, que, instruindo-se na Europa, ‘arrancou’ – como já é da tradição – a influência do Marechal Saldanha junto da Rainha D. Maria II, para a instalação em Rilhafoles do primeiro ‘Hospital de Alienados’.

A repetição destes *surtos criativos* ensombrados de *resistências* (e trevas), e peados pelas dificuldades socioeconómicas (a assistência aos loucos não era ‘rentável’...) são um traço comum que veremos desenvolver-se na Psiquiatria em Portugal.<sup>243</sup>

In his view, it is because of the individual and collective action of doctors themselves that progress was brought about to Portuguese psychiatry. One of those doctors was Miguel Bombarda, who would become one of the most notorious Portuguese psychiatrists and whose name would be intimately linked with the political activism of the country, most particularly with Republicanism<sup>244</sup>. It is worthy to dwell for a bit on this man, for he embodies the dilemmas, contradictions, excesses and progresses of Portuguese psychiatry. Moreover, he was one of the directors of the Hospital in which Lobo Antunes would perform his medical profession. As the reader will perhaps have noticed by now, the Hospital de Rilhafoles has been renamed after the famous psychiatrist, in a gesture that honours not only his life, but his tragic (and ironic) death. Perhaps peering into the man could be peering into the place, the institution.

O Hospital de Rilhafoles, como sucede a todos os estabelecimentos nosocomiais (‘manicómios’) oferecia já, desde 1866, sinais crescentes de decadência e regressão – o que é comum neste tipo de

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid. p.247.

<sup>244</sup> ‘It was junior military officers who triggered off the *coup d’état* of 1910 which ushered in the republic. Working-class influences were soon eclipsed, however, as middle-class intellectuals and lawyers took charge [...]. The republican revolution of 1910 was a Lisbon revolution. Half of the country’s teachers, doctors and accountants lived there [...].’ David Birmingham, *A Concise History of Portugal* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) pp.148-151.

estabelecimentos, quando falha ou falta uma direcção médica inspirada no tratamento humano dos doentes e no interesse e investigação científica da clínica [...]

Apesar da boa vontade do segundo director de Rilhafoles, [...] a decadência acentuou-se até que, em 1892, sob pressão da opinião pública levada à Câmara dos deputados e, por intervenção do político Dias Ferreira, M. Bombarda foi nomeado director do hospital e enceta a sua fulgurante intervenção em todos os aspectos da organização e gestão da terapêutica e do estudo científico da Psiquiatria e suas implicações filosóficas.

M. Bombarda (1850 – 1910) é uma personalidade singular não só na história da psiquiatria, como na política da época, detentor [...] da maior glória da psiquiatria portuguesa.

Uma fama tamanha que persistiu na tradição culta e popular (aureolada pelo seu assassínio por um paranóico seu antigo doente na antevéspera da revolução republicana de 5 de Outubro de 1910), e a despeito dos repetidos ataques de que foi alvo, desde o plano político ao médico-jurídico, do clínico ao filosófico.

Foi efectivamente um daqueles homens fulgurantes que despertam altos potenciais afetivos.<sup>245</sup>

It is clear that Miguel Bombarda played a big part in the modernization of Portuguese psychiatry. However, he is also object of some criticisms that denounce a tendency for authoritarianism and dogmatic positivism.<sup>246</sup> If on the one hand, Bombarda:

não tarda em encetar a sua pertinaz reorganização atacando os mais urgentes problemas. Acabou – apesar de todas as resistências – com as cadeiras fortes, as coleiras, as prisões ao leito e outros processos

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<sup>245</sup> Pierre Pichot; Barahona Fernandes, *Um Século de Psiquiatria e A Psiquiatria em Portugal* (Lisboa, Roche, 1984) p.260.

<sup>246</sup> ‘M. Bombarda pode pois ser integrado na grande corrente anti-teológica e antimetafísica que vem do iluminismo ao positivismo. As suas raízes mais próximas encontram-se, muito mais do que em Augusto Comte, [...] no materialismo alemão de Feurbach, Moleschott, Buchner, Carl Vogt, e, em especial, em Spencer e outros como E. Haeckel, cujo sincero *élan* doutrinador M. Bombarda tão bem representava [...] Tentando ligar esta corrente psiquiátrica com o ambiente cultural da época, recordamos que, embora dentro da mesma linha geral de inconformismo, M. Bombarda não tem afinidades próximas com as correntes do pensar português que vão de Verney a Herculano, Antero e Oliveira Martins, Joaquim de Carvalho, António Sérgio e Sílvio Lima. Separase duns pelo mecanicismo excessivo, doutros pelo anti-idealismo materialista e radical ateísmo. Está mais perto da corrente *positivista* sem contudo se identificar com ela.’ (Ibid. p.272).

inquisitoriais, de ‘contenção’ dos doentes que estavam em uso e mesmo em abuso corrente.<sup>247</sup>

On the other hand:

[o]s doentes formavam militarmente, à sua passagem, em hábitos que hoje não correspondem às nossas concepções psicoterápicas, mas que se compreendem pela necessidade premente de ‘disciplina’ a que se viu de começo obrigado a recorrer. Fixou-se depois em excesso, neste autoritarismo, o que não o inibia, de curar do bem-estar dos seus enfermos [...]

O forte autoritarismo de M. Bombarda levou-o a apelar para alguns meios mais enérgicos de repressão, que, em princípio repudiava.<sup>248</sup>

Evidently, these excesses were to be curbed in subsequent decades, but it is telling to register the contradictions embodied by one of the most emblematic Portuguese psychiatrists, contradictions and tendencies that have also been noted by Lobo Antunes throughout his novels. In the symbolic dimension, it then seems to me that Miguel Bombarda best encapsulates the history and the characteristics of Portuguese psychiatry (and of psychiatry in general), with the added significance that it is his name that is associated with the hospital as a material space. His death at the hands of one of his patients, his political struggles and his tendencies towards authoritarianism are the best example of what psychiatry could be and indeed has been. As a whole, and despite the positive advances within it, the wider field of psychiatry has also been guilty of repression and authoritarianism throughout its history, as it has been shown by

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<sup>247</sup> Ibid. p.261.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid. pp.262-264.

many specialised historians and thinkers, such as Edward Shorter<sup>249</sup>, Roy Porter<sup>250</sup> and Foucault.

If all this seems to be a digression, we just have to remember that it is precisely against these ‘less pleasant’ traits of his medical specialization that Lobo Antunes writes again. Moreover, it is very relevant that he does so, that he decides to turn his scrutinising fiction towards psychiatry (in its Portuguese context) because of the relative lack of criticism the field seems to have attracted in the country. Surely, it is fair to point out that, compared with other countries, Portugal’s history of psychiatry is not the grimmest despite what seems to be an endemic tardiness and decay of its institutions. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight such criticisms as a way to balance the overemphasizing of its accomplishments and the romanticising of its protagonists, like Miguel Bombarda. This is what Lobo Antunes seeks to do, to confront psychiatry with its own failures, to force a dialogue between that master-narrative and the counter-narratives he explores in his literature. Thus, again in the symbolic dimension, the author seems to be the opposite extreme of Miguel Bombarda: also a game-changer in his main field (literature), an innovator with a strong personality and views, he repudiates authoritarianism and the reductionism of positivism with the same vigour.

This emphasis on certain negative aspects and criticisms is not to disregard the advances of psychiatry in the recent period of Portuguese history, as Barahona Fernandes describes in detail in his section of the book here

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<sup>249</sup> Edward Shorter, *A history of psychiatry: from the era of the asylum to the age of Prozac* (Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, 1997).

<sup>250</sup> Roy Porter, *Madness, A Brief History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

mentioned. The merits of psychiatry are, however, not what this study aims to explore. In fact, what our author's literature elicits is a critical look into the field, no matter how well developed and advanced it is, and that is what I shall pursue. Literature is a human exercise and Lobo Antunes' literature in particular is of a particular humanising gaze, so it is only natural that the human dimension behind every advance, every progress, or conversely, every failure, is what is set out to be explored here. Therefore, to look at the man (Bombarda) who, for better or for worse, gave the definitive impulse to the establishment of a Portuguese psychiatry is no futile endeavour. As it is not futile to assess his positivistic inclinations, that, despite bringing about unequivocal progress, also created the perfect conditions that culminated in the 'discovery' of lobotomy by Egas Moniz. This was a horrific and ill-fated procedure that nevertheless granted him the Nobel Prize in Medicine, the only one Portugal has ever won in this field.

Miguel Bombarda is then the starting point, the inaugural man that sets in motion the specific type of Psychiatry Lobo Antunes inherits but also rejects. Moreover, it is not only the difficult history of the discipline that Lobo Antunes inherits. Let us consider that if already in 1866 the hospital was showing signs of regression and decadence, the situation in the 1970's could not have been much better, despite attempts at its modernisation. As we shall see, this decadent and inadequate environment seems to be what Lobo Antunes describes in his novels and chronicles.

This state of affairs (authoritarianism and decay) was however not a constant reality and the context of psychiatric hospitals definitely improved for a while, boosted by the construction of an alternative hospital (Hospital Júlio de Matos), which opened its doors in 1942. This event allowed a period of relative

renaissance and modernization of the practices in Portuguese psychiatry, which ironically was in direct contrast with the political and social realities of the country at that time. Barahona Fernandes describes this period in detail and with eloquence, concluding:

Fomos tentados a tomar o descrito [...] como uma espécie de 'Revolução de Abril' (antecipada 32 anos) – claríssimo está que *restrita à psiquiatria* e circunscrita ao espaço limitado do hospital. Por circunstâncias peculiares foi então possível criar ali um *clima 'democrático'* – em oposição ao ambiente geral da época no nosso país, basicamente autocrático, repressor das liberdades individuais e pouco favorável à satisfação dos direitos humanos – quanto mais dos *direitos dos doentes ... quanto mais dos 'alienados'*...<sup>251</sup>

Ironically, the space of the hospital had become an oasis, a protective bubble that permitted, within its walls, the existence of a freer, more just society. This represented a source of temporary hope for the addressing and fixing of the problems that Lobo Antunes would highlight in his literature. A strange occurrence, given the vehemence and urgency of the author's criticisms – such as the call for the tearing down of the hospital walls in *Conhecimento do Inferno*.

In this brief period, the more humane treatment of patients called for by the author was, according to Barahona Fernandes, a reality:

[O]s loucos foram então tratados como não eram os sãos – a compreensão humana, a atitude de ajuda fraterna, o ambiente de tolerância, a permissividade, empatia para os seus problemas pessoais. Em suma um clima de liberdade [...] contrastando com a *censura* do exterior, com a regressão da vida daquela época, dita *normal*, embora 'alienada' no sentido sócio-filosófico.

Pode parecer uma 'ironia' este 'elogio' bem *erásmico* da 'loucura'.<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Pierre Pichot; Barahona Fernandes, *Um Século de Psiquiatria e A Psiquiatria em Portugal*, p.300

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

Of course, these new developments would not last. Not only were they circumscribed to Hospital Júlio de Matos, permitting us to infer that in Hospital Miguel Bombarda things went on as they used to (that is, with the same problems) but they were fated to failure.

Entretanto, tal espécie de ‘paraíso’ psiquiátrico, assim *insulado*, não poderia durar muito tempo. Pouco a pouco, a pressão exterior penetrou os ‘muros’ da ‘ilha democrática e humana’ do hospital e aconteceu a sua regressão [...]; as dificuldades humanas começaram, progressivamente agravadas, o *sentido médico* do hospital, de cunho humano, foi lentamente substituído pela *matriz administrativa* que facilitou a degradação do ambiente e de grande número de actividades terapêuticas.<sup>253</sup>

Therefore, it is not a surprise that the environment of the mental hospital described in Lobo Antunes’ novels is still one of decay, with the constant and insidious interference of the political power, with its ideological appropriations of space and people, from the regime-aligned doctor in *Memória de Elefante* to the angel-destroying injections in *Conhecimento do Inferno*.

Indeed, it is in his literature that Lobo Antunes will develop his sharp criticism of psychiatry and call for a more human understanding of mental patients, thus taking advantage of his liminal experience and making it the ethos of his writing. All of his writings have in their core the *locus horrendus* of the Hospital Miguel Bombarda, a constant presence that simultaneously informs and pervades, a presence from which and against which he his continuously writing.

All this considered, the author’s literature can be placed alongside the antipsychiatric movement, without being limited or defined by it. Lobo Antunes’ work cannot be ascribed to a specific movement due to its fierce independence and strong subversive dimension. However, the initial moment in his writing

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

trajectory does share many characteristics with the antipsychiatry movement, which contributes to its unique place in the history of Portuguese literature.

### 3.2. Lobo Antunes and Antipsychiatry

We are not going to describe in detail the history of the antipsychiatry movement. Writer and psychologist Richard P. Bentall summarizes it very aptly:

[T]he biggest threat faced by psychiatry [...] came, not from outside the profession, but from within its own ranks. David Cooper, a South African-born psychiatrist living in London, coined the term *antipsychiatry* in the mid-1960s in order to express his objection to the kind of dehumanizing treatment he saw being offered to severely ill patients in the large mental hospitals. The idea of a movement explicitly opposed to the aims of conventional psychiatry quickly caught the imagination of an emerging counter-culture eager to spurn anything that seemed old fashioned or illiberal. By the mid-1970s, antipsychiatry ideas were being espoused not only by dissident psychiatrists but also by sociologists, philosophers, and other intellectuals clamouring to establish their anti-Establishment credentials. Whether or not there really was an antipsychiatry *movement* as such, however, is still debated.<sup>254</sup>

This somewhat superficial description of the history of the movement nevertheless resonates with the kind of criticisms of psychiatry we can find in Lobo Antunes' novels and chronicles.

Thomas Szasz<sup>255</sup> and Ronald Laing<sup>256</sup> are two of the major names for the movement. Their works have been influential not only for the field in itself but

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<sup>254</sup> Richard P. Bentall, *Doctoring the Mind: Why psychiatric treatments fail* (London: Penguin Books, 2010) pp.69-70.

<sup>255</sup> 'Thomas Szasz, a Hungarian-born psychiatrist and psychotherapist worked at the State University of New York at Syracuse, was a political and moral libertarian. Troubled by the fact that psychiatric patients can be compelled to receive treatment against their will, he argued for the separation of psychiatry and the State'. (Richard P. Bentall; *Doctoring the Mind: Why psychiatric treatments fail*, p.72).

<sup>256</sup> 'For the British public, the archetypical antipsychiatrist was Ronald (R.D.) Laing [...] Born in Glasgow in 1927, Laing began his career as a conscripted

also for many other areas, also transcending the English speaking world. Szasz's *The Myth of Mental Illness*<sup>257</sup> and Laing's *The Divided Self*<sup>258</sup> have brought about an unprecedented level of scrutiny to psychiatry and psychiatrists, creating a mind-set of suspicions towards the field: 'The suspicion was raised that psychiatry might have more to do with the control and regulation of behaviour than with healing.'<sup>259</sup>

Lobo Antunes shares this suspicious view, articulating in his literature the same issues which Szasz and Laing have unearthed. Yet, despite the object of criticism being the same, the difference comes in the chosen medium, with Lobo Antunes deciding to criticise psychiatry as part of a bigger worldview, constructed in his literature, and not the sole purpose of his writing. Whilst Laing and Szasz have chosen their medical expertise to write and criticise the field, Lobo Antunes has used his medical background, but as an integral part of his literary activity, rather using his *writing expertise* to gaze upon psychiatry. In other words, Lobo Antunes' criticisms come from the informed perspective of a writer who peers into a past reality from a distance.

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psychiatrist in the British Army, where he found conversation with some of the patients more congenial than the company of his fellow officers [...] *The Divided Self*, published in 1960, combined dense existential theorizing with psychotherapeutic insights to provide a dazzling account of the inner world of the psychotic patient. Although it was presented as a serious study of schizophrenia, it was widely read [...] by many outside psychiatry'. (Ibid.p.70).

<sup>257</sup> Thomas S. Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010).

<sup>258</sup> R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (London: Penguin Books, 2010).

<sup>259</sup> Richard P. Bentall; *Doctoring the Mind: Why psychiatric treatments fail*, p.73.

It is noteworthy that Laing had also served in the military, something he shares with the Portuguese writer and that has undoubtedly sharpened his views against psychiatry but has paradoxically permitted that very same *traumaborne* empathy with the mentally afflicted. In the end, the ‘movement’ of Antipsychiatry did not succeed or last very long, nonetheless leaving behind an indelible mark that continues to resonate to this date.

[I]t was not the opposition from organized psychiatry that prevented the antipsychiatry movement from achieving its goal of a liberal revolution in mental health care. Rather, it was the inability of leading figures in the movement to establish a workable alternative to conventional treatment.<sup>260</sup>

Despite its relative failure to revolutionise mental healthcare, the original intentions and momentum of the movement live on, carried and nourished by literature. Apart from the novels here analysed, it is unavoidable not to mention the literary legacy of Antonin Artaud or the very famous Ken Kesey’s novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*<sup>261</sup>, amongst others. They are good company for Lobo Antunes’ literature, a multiplying of voices across time that give weight to the importance of this problematic in a chorus of counter-narratives to which the Portuguese novelist adds his own.

‘C’est ainsi qu’une société tarée a inventé la psychiatrie pour se défendre des investigations de certaines lucidités supérieures dont les facultés de divination la gênaient.’<sup>262</sup> Artaud’s piercing cry of condemnation of psychiatry,

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid. pp.73-74.

<sup>261</sup> Ken Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* (London: Penguin Classics, 2005).

<sup>262</sup> Antonin Artaud, *Van Gogh le suicidé de la société* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008).

which he regards with the utmost suspicion, reverberates and is encapsulated in Lobo Antunes' work, the continuing movement in that dissonant symphony that makes up antipsychiatry's music.

The validity of these attacks on a discipline that has worked hard to be taken seriously and to establish its credentials as a true medical branch, a source of help and alleviation of those who suffer, are perhaps best summarised in the milder (but still full of intent) words of Thomas Szasz:

Psychiatry cannot attain professional integrity by imitating medicine, or scientific integrity by imitating physics. It can attain such integrity – and hence respect as a profession and recognition as a science – only by a courageous confrontation with his historical origins and an honest appraisal of its authentic characteristics and potentialities.<sup>263</sup>

The absent word, yet that word which is omnipresent behind Szasz's (and Artaud's, and Lobo Antunes') sentence is – *human*. Psychiatry must confront its human origins and dimension, as it is from and by human subjects it was created and to whom it is aimed at. Given its troublesome history in human terms, with abuses and oppressions being rife, such confrontation is inevitably *traumatic*.

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<sup>263</sup> Thomas Szasz; *Ideology and Insanity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974) p.67.

### 3.3. Lobo Antunes and Trauma

The problematics of trauma are central in the literature of Lobo Antunes. It is transversal to all his writing and it seems to be constantly present. Given the unique position of the author, whose different medical and military roles permit a multiplicity of views and experiences about the issue, trauma appears as an internal and external reality, something that he experienced as a military and something he has to deal with as psychiatrist. Moreover, trauma has added importance in the temporal context of Portuguese history, as his novels come out in the transitional period after the fall of the dictatorship. Undoubtedly, the dictatorship had been traumatic at many levels, its influence upon the mentality and culture of Portuguese being long-lasting and insidious. Like an individual process of trauma, if we metaphorically ascribe the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) to the dictatorship, we can perceive the way in which it processed and affected society in general. The trauma process goes as follows:

- A) Traumatic Event.
- B) Reexperiences of the event.
- C) Numbing phenomena.
- D) Miscellaneous symptoms

The dictatorship and the war are *A*), the traumatic events that trigger the whole process, with its abuses, violence, oppressive realities and long time frame intensifying the traumatic power of the events themselves. The rest of the symptoms exist scattered through different parts, factions, individuals and cultures within the society, with both the individual and the collective components of Portuguese society experiencing both *B*) and *D*). In the novels

here analysed, the Hospital is seen as an emulation of the dictatorship, with its repressiveness being institutional and alive in some individuals within its structure (particularly in *Conhecimento do Inferno*), therefore forcing a reexperiencing of the events. The multiplicity of miscellaneous symptoms, *D*), can be found in the heavy drinking done by the doctor in *Os Cus de Judas*, the inadaptability and depression of the doctor in *Memória de Elefante* and crucially in the suicide of a patient in *Conhecimento do Inferno*. The numbing phenomena, *C*), is perhaps visible in both the collective refusal in addressing the war after it had been finished (crucially important in *Os Cus de Judas*) and the lack of purpose and the aimless perambulations of the narrator and main character in the three novels.

All of these aspects will be investigated and made clear in the second part of this thesis, where the novels will be scrutinised closely. For now, these general observations will suffice to hint at the importance of trauma (and its manifestation in PTSD) for the literature of the author.

Published in 1979 and 1980, the novels precede the official recognition of PTSD as the diagnostic we know today, which only entered the DSM in 1980<sup>264</sup>. Despite all the controversies associated with the DSM and the debates it has sparked recently, it is significant that a literary work, especially one produced in a country in which its arts had been submerged in the asphyxiating

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<sup>264</sup> ‘[...] the codification of recent scientific ideas about the nature of the traumatic experience may be traced back to the year 1980, when the diagnosis of PTSD officially entered [...] the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III), the first standardized nosology of American psychiatry and one that became the basis for all subsequent training and research in the field.’ Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy*, Chicago and London (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000) pp.231-232.

atmosphere of censorship, addresses an issue that is at the fore front of medical preoccupations of the time, when the international psychiatric community is attempting to frame the problem of trauma into a diagnosable and treatable ‘illness’.

It cannot be asserted with certainty that Lobo Antunes is purposely transposing the debates in the field of psychiatry (and of psychology) to his literature but it cannot be denied either that his background as a psychiatrist might have influenced the way he writes about trauma. Therefore, when contrasting the way in which the novels were written with the theories about trauma emerging from different sources, we can perceive that in 1979, Lobo Antunes’ literary production (with two novels published in the same year) had its finger on the pulse.

The way in which PTSD was framed<sup>265</sup> made it clear that from the very beginning ‘reexperiences were linked directly to the trauma in such a way as to imply that traumatic dreams, intrusive images, and other forms of repetition were exact relivings or replicas of the original event or situation.’<sup>266</sup> The work of authors such as Abram Kardiner (Kardiner’s book *Traumatic Neuroses of War*<sup>267</sup> was influential for the development of the concept of ‘traumatic dreams’) helped

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<sup>265</sup> ‘PTSD was originally identified in *DSM-III* as an anxiety disorder with four diagnostic criteria: A. Traumatic Event. B. Reexperiences of the event. C. Numbing phenomena. D. Miscellaneous symptoms. The traumatic event was vaguely defined as an event that is “generally outside the range of human experience” and as involving a “recognizable stressor that would evoke significant symptoms of distress in almost everyone.”’ Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy*, p.232.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.* p.233.

<sup>267</sup> Abram Kardiner, *Traumatic Neuroses of War* (Washington: Psychosomatic Medicine Monograph, II – III, 1941).

the definition of PTSD-associates symptoms as *literal*, ‘because he seemed to suggest that traumatic nightmares lacked the symbolic transposition, substituality, displacement, and fantasmatic elaboration characteristic of ordinary dreams and hence could be understood as accurate replays of the traumatic origin’.<sup>268</sup> These traits are directly contrary to the characteristics of Lobo Antunes writing and seem to indicate that he goes in a completely opposite direction than that of mainstream psychiatry. In fact, that is exactly what he does.

Kardiner’s ideas have indeed shaped the direction in which the studies of PTSD have gone. However, despite helping backing up the fixation of the DSM definition of PTSD, his ideas were not solely responsible for the evolution of such diagnosis and in fact, they needed to be played out in a clinical context to assert their validity. ‘But in the early 1980’s there were no adequate, controlled studies of people who developed repetitive nightmares after traumatic experiences’<sup>269</sup> and it was not until 1984 that this situation was addressed. In that year, Bessel Van der Kolk and his colleagues undertook the task of studying and analysing how the dreams of those affected by persistent traumatic nightmares after a combat experience differed from those who were not subjected to combat experience. Ruth Leys aptly summarises Van der Kolk’s contribution thus:

The authors started from the assumption [...] that traumatic nightmares represented a unique kind of dream [...]. Twenty-five subjects were selected for the experiment, of which fifteen individuals, all diagnosed with PTSD, belonged to the combat nightmare group, and ten belonged to the noncombat life-long nightmare sufferers group.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy*, p.233.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.* p.234.

She then describes with some detail how the experiment evolved, before rendering its conclusions to the reader:

They found that the nightmares of the noncombat nightmare sufferers had the typical characteristics of REM-anxiety dreams: they occurred late in the sleep cycle, were rarely repetitive, had ‘dreamlike content’, and were not accompanied by body movements. By contrast, the nightmares of the combat victims were more likely to occur early in the sleep cycle and ‘when they had content, they were repetitive dreams that were usually exact replicas of factual combat events’.<sup>271</sup>

However, she also points out that ‘Van der Kolk’s findings are at odds with those of another researcher in the field of dream studies’.<sup>272</sup> That researcher is Milton Kramer, who, in the same year as Van der Kolk also published an article on the topic based on a similar experiment. Despite the disparities between the two studies, both used accepted psychiatric methods and assessments therefore both have scientific validity. Kramer’s findings, however, could not be more different than Van der Kolk’s. In the article published by Kramer and his team:

the authors observed that although the patients tended to think that their dreams were entirely concerned with their combat experiences, according to the sleep-laboratory evidence military references occurred in only 50 percent of the dreams in this group, so that a large segment of dream life did not revolve around the experience of combat. ‘It is not that there is no concern about the war’ the authors remark, ‘it is just it is not the only concern that the patient has. The impression that the one might draw is that there are concerns about both areas and that, perhaps, they are interrelated’.<sup>273</sup>

At first, it seems hardly relevant how this discussion could be important to understand Lobo Antunes’ significance as a writer. If, notwithstanding, we

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<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid. p.235.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid. p.236.

consider the impact of these findings in the field of literary studies, then the picture becomes more clear. Despite the divergence on the contradictory findings, Van der Kolk's position was accepted in the field of psychiatry as the definitive answer and so, its impact (compared with Kramer's position) has been significant not only in the medical sphere, but also in the sphere of literary studies, where important authors and researchers in the field of trauma studies, such as Cathy Caruth, have relied on Van der Kolk's findings to produce their own theories.

Caruth's theory departs from what she perceives as the original meaning of trauma:

[T]he originary meaning of trauma itself [...], the Greek *trauma*, or 'wound', originally referring to an injury inflicted on a body. In its later usage, particularly in the medical and psychiatric literature [...] the term *trauma* is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind.<sup>274</sup>

She then adapts Van der Kolk findings to her literary theory, where she defends that the traumatic moment is irretrievable and therefore it cannot be recalled in its totality, as the traumatic episode 'is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor'.<sup>275</sup>

This is echoed in Lobo Antunes' literature. Like Caruth, he also departs from trauma, a departure that, in his case, is more symbolic as it also represents the departure from a medical understanding of trauma. Therefore, for him:

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<sup>274</sup> Cathy Caruth; *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) p.3.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.* p.4.

trauma seems to be much more than a pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in an attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language.<sup>276</sup>

It is then, a question of knowledge and one must note that *knowledge* (or *conhecimento*) is a word inscribed in the title of one of his novels (*Conhecimento do Inferno*). It is precisely from the intersection between the knowledge gained from different perspectives and that *unknown* region of trauma (the inaccessible but recurrent horror) that the author's literature is born. It is not surprising that that is so. Lobo Antunes' writings are innovative because they incorporate the scientific knowledge of his medical education and empirical military experiences into his literary ethos, making it the top vertex of the triangle the different perspectives in his literature form. Yet, he is not alone in using this type of dynamic, of incorporation. According to Caruth, Freud has also sought aid in literature, albeit in a completely different manner (in fact, nearly the opposite manner) from Lobo Antunes:

If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet.<sup>277</sup>

The meeting and the narrative that emerges from it is nevertheless a painful one. From an individual perspective, the trauma subject must experience and reintegrate a history, a moment of time out of time, that resists both narrative

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid. p.3.

‘structure and linear temporalities’, into narrative memory. It is then necessary for the subject to frame the traumatic experience in a more or less coherent narrative, or at least to align a set of words and sentences in order to transpose into language the traumatic experience, rescuing it from complete epistemological silence. However, such rendering into language is always insufficient, many times fragmented and often incoherent, as

trauma emerges as that which, at the very moment of its reception, registers as a non-experience, causing conventional epistemologies to falter... Trauma carries the force of a literality which renders it resistant to narrative structures and linear temporalities. Insufficiently grasped at the time of its occurrence, trauma... acts as a haunting or possessive influence.<sup>278</sup>

Still, what is here perceived as a difficulty, with the exposition of such resistances, is indeed overcome by Lobo Antunes as he makes this lack of fixed structures and linear time the trademark of his writing. For this, it is fair to consider his literature as what Whitehead classifies as *trauma fiction*.

The impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection. Trauma fiction overlaps with and borrows from both postmodern and postcolonial fiction in its self-conscious deployment of stylistic devices as modes of reflection or critique.<sup>279</sup>

Whitehead’s quote seems to illustrate perfectly the author’s literature. Indeed, Lobo Antunes’ fiction not only mimics the process and symptoms of trauma (or even more accurately, PTSD) as it also does that ‘self-conscious deployment of stylistic devices’ in order to address and critique the most profound traumas of Portuguese society, anchored in a postmodern and postcolonial narrative.

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<sup>278</sup>Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p.5.

<sup>279</sup>Ibid, p.3.

Crucially, PTSD serves as the most fitting ‘metaphor’ (if one can go as far as calling it such) for the individuals, that entire generation of men, who have been exposed to the realities of war and/or the realities of political repression and for the collective psyche of Portuguese society. It is then unavoidable that it is through trauma and PTSD that Lobo Antunes can best express himself and to reflect the incomprehensibility, the destructive and unspeakable situation(s) he and many others had been subjected to. It is a difficult and paradoxical place to be in, for on the one hand, the return to the exact moment of trauma is impossible, on the other hand, it is its haunting and compulsive appeal that propels his writing, trapping him in that in-between space, in the hostile takeover of trauma.

After all:

post-traumatic stress disorder reflects the direct imposition on the mind of the unavoidable reality of horrific events, the taking over of the mind, psychically and neurobiologically, by an event it cannot control. As such, PTSD seems to provide the most direct link between the psyche and the external violence and to be the most destructive psychic disorder [...] It is only by recognizing traumatic experiences as a paradoxical relation between destructiveness and survival that we can also recognize the legacy of incomprehensibility at the heart of catastrophic experience.<sup>280</sup>

In terms of the collective, PTSD also has a significant relevance. By rendering his experiences in the way he does, summoning the ghosts of Portuguese recent (and past) history, Lobo Antunes is perhaps indicating that history itself has been traumatised (and traumatising):

If PTSD must be understood as a pathological symptom, then it is not so much a syndrome of the unconscious, as it is a symptom of history. The traumatized [...] carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely process.<sup>281</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> Cathy Caruth; *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, p.58.

<sup>281</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.

It is that *impossible history* that seems to be carried in Lobo Antunes' novels, with their uneasiness with history marked by the subversive way they tackle the most urgent but also the least addressed issues within it. The relationship between Portuguese history and trauma is intricate and crucial, as noted by Eduardo Lourenço: 'O nosso surgimento como Estado foi do tipo *traumático* e desse traumatismo nunca na verdade nos levantámos'.<sup>282</sup> It is then very important that Lobo Antunes resuscitates that Erasmian tradition of subversive satire and criticism which Lourenço considers to have been characteristic of the Hispanic intellectual tradition and which disappearance would condemn Portugal never to confront its trauma(s) again:

Na realidade o nosso destino ético e intelectual decidiu-se num certo dia do ano de 1572 em que em Valladolid, com particular ênfase dos participantes portugueses, o *erasmismo hispânico* foi condenado e banido do nosso horizonte e com ele a disposição de espírito que está na origem do olhar crítico sobre o que nos cerca ou sobre o que fazemos.<sup>283</sup>

Lobo Antunes re-appropriation of this mode, this subversive satirizing *à la* Erasmus is of fundamental necessity for a challenging confrontation with the past, paramount condition for recovery, individual and collective. Given the historical, cultural and social conditions of post-dictatorship Portugal, it is not hard to perceive how the author's literature continues to be essential in the Portuguese and international literary scenes.

Judith Herman has highlighted the importance of this confrontation and challenging of trauma:

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<sup>282</sup> Eduardo Lourenço, *O Labirinto da Saudade* (Lisboa: Gradiva, 2012) p.24.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.* pp.53-54.

In many countries that have recently emerged from dictatorship or civil war, it has become apparent that putting an immediate stop to the violence and attending to basic survival needs of the affected populations are necessary but not sufficient conditions for social healing. In the aftermath of systematic political violence, entire communities can display symptoms of PTSD, trapped in alternating cycles of numbing and intrusion, silence and reenactment. Recovery requires remembrance and mourning [...] Like traumatized individual, traumatized countries need to remember, grieve, and atone for their wrongs in order to avoid reliving them.<sup>284</sup>

Herman's words illustrate not only the urgency of the author's literature but also the actual stylistic devices he employs to unearth the trauma(s) he wants to challenge.

Still, Lobo Antunes' effort to readdress these issues is not an easy task. The specificity of Portuguese culture offers significant resistance, even after the main oppressive forces and violent realities have been removed. The philosopher José Gil has highlighted this resistance, writing about the difficult transition that Portuguese society underwent when moving from an authoritarian dictatorship to democracy:

Em Portugal vive-se numa situação particular, de transição das sociedades 'disciplinares' para as de controlo, cada vez mais apanhada pela rede geral da globalização [...] Nas sociedades autoritárias, o medo é o 'princípio de acção' [...]. No caso português, o medo era difuso, sem objecto preciso [...], ubíquo, impregnando o espaço, invadindo os corpos e os espíritos sem que os indivíduos se apercebessem disso. (A autoridade e o objecto do medo encarnavam-se, nas ocasiões necessárias, no ditador e nas instituições repressivas.)

O estado de transição actual da sociedade portuguesa, com a passagem rápida de um regime autoritário para um regime em que a disciplina emana do sistema orgânico da funcionalidade tecnológica, cria uma situação em que o novo 'princípio de acção' surge como um prolongamento natural do medo. É também invisível e ubíquo, inelutável e único. É [...] uma certa forma transformada de terror.<sup>285</sup>

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<sup>284</sup> Judith Herman; *Trauma and Recovery, The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2015) p.242.

<sup>285</sup> José Gil, *Portugal, Hoje: O Medo de Existir* (Lisboa: Relógio D'Água Editores, 2004) pp.106-107

Thus, trauma is far from being a distant past reality. As a doctor, a soldier, a writer and quite simply, a citizen, Lobo Antunes is at the heart of it all. Witnessing, from various perspectives, that very same transition, the author absorbs the different realities across those different dimensions and, through his literature, contributes to the construction of a new and necessary collective identity. It is a fact that he is placed within the structures of control (the hospital, the army, the middle class to which he belongs), but this is nevertheless an uncomfortable existence and his literary consciousness and engagement do not permit a pandering to the master-narratives of those structures. On the contrary, his presence in and contact with the inner realities and narratives of those control structures only has sharpened his subversive appetite. Then, due to this liminal existence, his place within the construction of collective identity is an indispensable one.

However, is such reconstruction of identity necessary? The sheer presence of the collective trauma Lobo Antunes' identifies seems to indicate so, because '[f]or traumas to emerge at the level of the collectivity, social crises must become cultural crises'.<sup>286</sup> As a psychiatrist, Lobo Antunes is naturally equipped (or at least he should be) to assess the pain of the individuals he encounters in his daily practice, as will be evident particularly in *Conhecimento do Inferno*, evidencing an attentive and empathetic gaze towards the individual suffering of his patients. But he goes beyond and extends that gaze in general, becoming, as a writer, the 'psychiatrist of society'. According to Jeffrey Alexander, the kind of addressing of identity that Lobo Antunes engages with is very important as it transcends

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<sup>286</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory*, p.15.

pain and suffering, becoming an integral part of identity. ‘Trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It is the result of this acute discomfort entering into the core of the collectivity’s sense of its own identity.’<sup>287</sup>

Thus, given how deep trauma is embedded in Portuguese identity, it is not surprising how virulent and bitter Lobo Antunes’ reaction is to it, his critical voice augmented and aided by the abject dimension he employs in his literature. This seems nevertheless to have been deliberately concocted by the author, like a doctor who decides to administer a powerful antibiotic as a course of treatment. The diagnosis had, however, already been identified by Eduardo Lourenço:

Poucos países fabricaram acerca de si mesmos uma imagem tão idílica como Portugal. O anterior regime atingiu nesse domínio cumes inacessíveis, a herança é mais antiga e o seu eco perdura. [...] Os Portugueses vivem em permanente *representação*, tão obsessivo é neles o sentimento de *fragilidade* íntima inconsciente e a correspondente vontade de a compensar com o desejo de fazer *boa figura*, a título pessoal ou colectivo. A reserva e a modéstia que parece-me constituir a nossa segunda natureza escondem na maioria de nós uma vontade de *exibição* que toca as raias da paranóia, exibição *trágica*, não aquela desinibida, que é característica de sociedades em que o abismo entre o que se é e o que se deve parecer não atinge o grau patológico que existe entre nós.<sup>288</sup>

Notice the words Lourenço uses; *obsessivo*, *paranóia*, *patológico*. No wonder that Lobo Antunes feels compelled, in his double act as psychiatrist and writer, to address these very questions and issues highlighted by Lourenço. The necessity for a reconstruction of a collective identity and narrative is, then, an urgency that both authors (in their different ways) seek to do. This, as Jeffrey

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Eduardo Lourenço, *O Labirinto da Saudade*, pp.76-77.

Alexander explains, is very important sociologically for the process of recovery and identity fulfilment:

‘Experiencing trauma’ can be understood as a sociological process that defines a painful injury to the collectivity, establishes the victim, attributes responsibility, and distributes the ideal and material consequences. Insofar as traumas are so experienced, and thus imagined and represented, the collective identity will shift. This reconstruction means that there will be a searching re-remembering of the collective past, for memory is not only social and fluid but also deeply connected to the contemporary sense of the self. Identities are continuously constructed and secured not only by facing the present and future but also by reconstructing the collectivity’s earlier life.<sup>289</sup>

This reconstruction requires wide participation of various sectors of the society, but it is clear that a writer such as Lobo Antunes, who encapsulates so many different perspectives within the same body of work is not only better equipped to do so but also has the increased responsibility of raising those painful questions that haunt Portuguese society.

### **3.4. The Chronicles (Psychiatry)**

Just as his military experiences, the medical speciality to which the author has belonged to, that is, psychiatry, does inevitably and importantly make an appearance in the chronicles. Again, the first time psychiatry is mentioned it happens in a chronicle that is autobiographical, which indicates a strong degree of the *biographical* importance of these experiences.

Curiously, chronicles in which psychiatry or the hospital are the central theme go from being quite frequent to gradually being less common. Within the scope of this research, speculative exercises to try and analyse the reasons that have been behind this occurrence cannot take place, but it is interesting to bear

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<sup>289</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Trauma: A Social Theory*, p.26.

in mind that psychiatry is a recurrent topic in the author's work in the early stages of his writing career. It is not difficult to perceive that perhaps the main preoccupations of the early novels have crossed over and permeated the chronicles, reinforcing the *biographical* quality of the chronicles.

However, this *biographical* dimension does not seem to be innocuous in terms of its social impact. Lobo Antunes tells us in an interview: 'Uma vez escrevi uma crónica sobre o Hospital Miguel Bombarda que teve críticas de toda a ordem e da própria direcção do hospital [...]'<sup>290</sup>. So, the critical mode of his writing was indeed impactful and it sparked debate around and the addressing of the problems he had constantly raised in his writings.

#### **3.4.1. 'Crónica escrita em voz alta como quem passeia ao acaso'<sup>291</sup>**

This chronicle is from *Livro de Crónicas* and has a very high degree of personal insight, simultaneously being quite humoristic and ironic. In it, he are presented with the author's childhood memories of the hospital where his father worked at and to where he used to take him for Christmas parties and where he would later work, Hospital Miguel Bombarda. The title is quite nonsensical and playful. It can be divided into three distinct parts, each one imprinting another layer: Crónica escrita/ em voz alta / como quem passeia ao acaso.

The first element of the title is made of the words *Crónica* and *Escrita* – *Crónica Escrita*. These two words inform/remind the reader of the nature of the text. It is a chronicle and it was in fact written. This does not seem to hold any importance or to be particularly informative. It is only when in contrast with the

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<sup>290</sup> João Céu e Silva, *Uma Longa Viagem com António Lobo Antunes*, p.253.

<sup>291</sup> António Lobo Antunes; *Livro de Crónicas*, pp.79-81.

other two elements of the title that it becomes relevant. They (the two latter elements) constitute the *mode* ('em voz alta') and the *tone* ('como quem passeia ao acaso') of the chronicle.

The fact that it is a *written* chronicle seems obvious if the next element of the title did not claim that it was written *em voz alta*, which contradicts the very nature of the text. The reference to voice could be seen as a reference to the figurative 'voice' – that own voice of the author, the literary voice that narrates the chronicle, the artistic view upon the subject related – but in the vicinity of the adjective *alta*, what is implied is an *oral* aspect. The orality present in the nature of chronicles through the inclusion of oral testimonies is here alluded to, as if Lobo Antunes was no longer simply a writer whose only function is to record the language of the chronicle but a true raconteur engaged in the amusement of his readership, satirically, like a jester. As a *mode*, the satirical style guides the reader into a text that exposes the absurdities of the psychiatric hospital and questions the seriousness and legitimacy of psychiatry, in what can be perceived as an intertextual continuation of the novel *Conhecimento do Inferno*. The aspect of intertextuality of this chronicle highlights the importance of these for the broad understanding of the oeuvre of the author.

Tonally (*como quem passeia ao acaso*), the chronicle's title displays a sense of movement allied with randomness. The casual promenade that constitutes the tone of the chronicle, as the word *passeio* (or promenade) promises, intends to be a pleasurable 'walk' without aim, free of the constraints of a programmatic text. The prolix perambulation of this chronicle presents stylistic links not only with a Faulknerian stream-of-consciousness or a Kerouacquian free association of ideas (which is owed to Freud as well) but also

with a particular musicality which the author admits being influenced by – jazz. Its syncopathic rhythms and improvisations permeate the text, informing it with the playfulness and randomness hinted in the title.

In terms of content, the chronicle departs from the childhood memories of Hospital Miguel Bombarda and the perception that a young Lobo Antunes had of it: ‘Para mim em criança o Hospital Miguel Bombarda eram pessoas a fazerem-me chichi em cima e a cantarem o fado.’<sup>292</sup> For a child, the encounter with a psychiatric institution is a baffling and confusing experience, a small trauma borne out of unpleasantness (ironically counterpoising the pleasantness of the promenade). The image of people urinating on him taps into the fear of emasculation via castration, by invoking the phallic symbol, thus denouncing his repulse towards his passivity and subjugated status; and the early association by the child of the concept of mental institution with something unpleasant and abject – urine. The symbolic meaning of the act of urinating on the narrator and its exaggeration (in fact, actual urination on him does not occur as the hospital inmates only urinate on the car in which he is in) emphasises the abjection the child feels towards the concrete contact with madness. Further on, he admits that this contact provokes in him a sense of terror: ‘eu engrenava uma após outra as Ave Marias do terror’.<sup>293</sup>

It has been seen the fundamental role that abjection plays in the work of Lobo Antunes. Curiously, in this instance, the abject image is not only associated with the memory of the hospital but also with another thing that the author has

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<sup>292</sup> Antonio Lobo Antunes, *Livro de Crónicas*, p.79.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid.

confessed to dislike – Fado. The association between these two unpleasant things and the hospital highlights the fact that the author views it as a material continuation of the oppressiveness of the regime and the trauma it ensued, which thus lives on in the space of the hospital.

It is here that we are told of his first contact with mental patients. After the Fado performances, the patients were left to roam around, ‘*sujeitos de branco pastoreavam os olhos de vidro pelas escadas abaixo*’<sup>294</sup>, aimlessly. The description mentions the patient’s ‘glass eyes’, associating them with cattle been sent out to graze. The expression ‘*pastoreavam os olhos de vidro*’ is the fitting metaphor for the sedated look normally ascribed to mental patients under the effects of medication. This is reinforced by the strangeness the author notices in the face of the hospital director, fragmented like a Cubist painting, that he describes in a parenthesis ‘(o seu rosto eram metades completamente diferentes que se ignoravam uma à outra com absoluto desdém)’.<sup>295</sup> The image creates an overall surreal and fragmented atmosphere, illustrating the traumatic gaze in which he views the space of the hospital and the ‘creatures’ dwelling within it. However, despite the overall effectiveness of the image, it is still quite subtly described as if the author was preparing the reader for the full impact of the next description.

The chronicle then moves forward in time to find Lobo Antunes as an adult, already a doctor, having just moved from Hospital de Santa Maria to Hospital Miguel Bombarda:

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<sup>294</sup> Ibid. pp.79-80.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid. p.80.

Muitos anos depois troquei o Hospital de Santa Maria pelo Hospital Miguel Bombarda, diplomaticamente convidado a ir-me embora por ter dito que ao chefe de equipa que ele cruzava as pernas como se não tivesse nada entre elas (continuo a achar que não tinha) <sup>296</sup>.

Here, it is revealed the contempt that Lobo Antunes felt against the chief of doctors, a contempt that is ingrained not only in the rebellious nature of the author and in accordance to his authorial ethos but also as a common traumatic reaction, that of suspicion of figures of authority.

Then, in an image that has recurred in the author's interviews, he describes the conditions patients there had been subjected to. '[O] que encontrei foi uma mistura de filme de Fellini com o casarão da minha avó, cheio de infelizes a cambalearem sob a martelada das pastilhas e tantos percevejos que não se viam os médicos.'<sup>297</sup>

The image of the wandering patients comes back in full force. In the surreal atmosphere of the hospital, patients stagger unhappy and heavily medicated (in fact, the word used is 'hammered' by medication), subjected to appalling material conditions. The striking image of bedbugs engulfing the doctors is an impactful (albeit certainly exaggerated) testimony for the poor material conditions of the hospital, something that seems to be endemic if we recall the brief history of the hospital presented in this chapter.

Immediately after, almost as a knee-jerk reaction, the tone of the chronicle switches to the humorous and ironic.

Não me lembro já qual das minhas filhas me perguntou se o Hospital Miguel Bombarda se chamava Hospital Miguel Bombarda porque Miguel Bombarda tinha sido um grande maluco [...] Talvez o Miguel

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

Bombarda tenha de facto sido um grande maluco mas eu fui muito mais doido ao acreditar nos psiquiatras [...] nos antipsiquiatras, nos psicanalistas, nos psicólogos, nesse enxame de patetas enfáticos erguendo das cabeças dos outros pomposos castelos de cartas e teorias sem humor.<sup>298</sup>

The ultimate subversion is ironically made not by him, but by his daughter. Asking her father if the Hospital had been named after a famous ‘mad’ is simultaneously an act of subversion and naivety that only children are capable of. Through her, Lobo Antunes achieves the subversive reversal of roles (recurrent in his novels) when the famous doctor, the symbolic pinnacle of the institution’s power and scientific progress, is mistaken by a ‘patient’, a ‘famous mad person’. The effect is not only comedic but it also denotes the author’s own distrust of psychiatrists as the image challenges the perceptions of the authority of the hospital and question the whole purpose of psychiatry.

Indeed, this view is reinforced when the author assumes this role-reversal as being true but adding that if Miguel Bombarda was mad, he himself had to be considered even madder for believing in psychiatrists. It is interesting to reflect upon the language used in this particular instance. The two words ‘maluco’ and ‘doido’ are normally used interchangeably and with the same meaning. However, in this instance, the author seems to be applying some sort of subtle hierarchy between the two, with ‘doido’ being a worse condition than ‘maluco’, which in this context serves to highlight and ironize the author’s decision of believing in psychiatrists (to the point of becoming one). Yet, his mistrust is not aimed solely at psychiatrists but at almost all the other figures connected with the psychiatric apparatus; psychoanalysts, psychologists and even the antipsychiatrists. The author’s lack of trust is then extended to the whole medical

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<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

side of psychiatric dynamics, (thus naturally excluding patients), whom he accuses of being ‘emphatic goofs’ who build pompous but humourless houses of cards from the head of others. This striking image represents the final attack, the total rejection of psychiatry in favour, by contrast, of a world where humour, creativity and playful subversion are still possible.

These are precisely the things that he seems to be embracing in the next part of the chronicle. It then moves in time, to a ‘today’ that marks in the text a later moment, albeit an imprecise one. ‘Hoje acredito em pouca coisa. Não acredito nos psicanalistas [...] mas acredito na Isabel quando diz: Gosto muito de si pai.’<sup>299</sup> Here, he claims not to believe in much, certainly not in psychoanalysts, but in his daughter’s love for him. The rejection of psychiatry continues, although this time by embracing the ‘madness’ of childhood, in all its playfulness:

[C]ombinámos passeios de bicicleta em Agosto na Praia das Maças e aceitámos vários novos sócios para o Clube dos Maias, fundado por Saul Bellow, pela Zezinha, pela Joana e por mim. Entre outros foram admitidos o mais bonito dos feios e o mais feio dos bonitos, o mais cabelo dos carecas e o mais careca dos cabeludos.<sup>300</sup>

The author succumbs to his daughter’s plans of riding their bicycles on the beach during summer and together they have accepted new members for their fictional club, founded by no other than the North American novelist Saul Bellow and Lobo Antunes’ other daughters. The absurd newly accepted members include the prettiest of the ugliest, the ugliest of the prettiest, the hairiest of the bald and the baldest of the hairiest.

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<sup>299</sup> Ibid. p.81.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid.

Thus, the childish games he plays with his daughter become metaphor for his new attitude of embracing the madness of these games, in an expression of creativity and humour that is in direct contrast with what he has observed in the realm of psychiatry.

The concluding sentiment of the chronicle is that of trying to protect and indeed save his daughters (and himself) from the drudgery and unhappiness he associates with psychiatry; ‘de forma que nos resta [...] tentar salvá-las dos chichis, dos fados, dos psicanalistas [...] O que é mais ou menos tudo a mesma coisa’.<sup>301</sup>

### **3.4.2. A Pradaria das Caçadas Eternas<sup>302</sup>**

This is one of the most socially engaged chronicles that Lobo Antunes has written. It concerns one of his patients in the Hospital, whose particular social conditions had been extremely difficult. Of course, it has been seen the degree of discretion and concern Lobo Antunes had for his patients, so it is fair to assume a high level of fictionalisation of this patient. In any case, the man here presented as a patient in this chronicle could symbolise the social conditions of many others in that period of Portuguese history:

Não conheceu o pai e quando tinha cinco anos a mãe começou a viver com outro homem. Aos dezasseis, farto das sovas do padrasto, foi de Lisboa a Elvas pendurado numa camioneta, atravessou a fronteira a salto, chegou a Paris e depois de uns dias (ou semanas ou meses)

de fome e frio e miséria, depois de uns tempos a trabalhar de pedreiro na construção civil, depois de pedir esmola e bater a portas erradas à procura de emprego, ofereceu-se para a Legião Estrangeira:

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Livro de Crónicas*, pp.185-187.

dezoito anos em África, o posto de sargento-chefe e uma reforma de quatrocentos contos, pagos em francos, na sequência de uma operação à cabeça por via de um estilhaço de morteiro que o deixou com uma epilepsia e a vida em fanicos.<sup>303</sup>

The contextualization of the man's life story is crucial to understand the elliptical importance of this chronicle for the wider literary vision of the author. The violent childhood, the social misery and poverty of this man led him (like many people in Portugal) to emigrate to France, where he found only precarious work and no alternative other than to beg. As a solution, the man volunteered for the Foreign Legion and was sent to Africa, where he sustained wounds in the head. Here we can see the visible parallels between the man's experiences and the type of experience Lobo Antunes writes about. The traumatic background of the man encapsulates all the ingredients that we normally encounter in the novels, in particular *Conhecimento do Inferno*, where the social conditions of the patients will be addressed more explicitly. Also, it is worthy of note that the traumatic locus of the man's experience is no other than Africa, a liminal but omnipresent place from where trauma emanates. This is of course the Africa of the colonisers, the Africa that is not the continent in itself, but that metonymical place that signifies trauma, war and violence.

Conheci-o a seguir a isto, no Hospital Miguel Bombarda onde queria e não queria tratar-se da solidão, dos ataques, da raiva contra o mundo, do vinho que não parava de beber e lhe dissolvia o fígado e os nervos. Domingo sim domingo não a polícia trazia-o, algemado, à Urgência, a cara inchada após cenas de pancadaria nos bares do Intendente em que partia tudo por não lhe entenderem as desgraças. E ficámos amigos.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid. p.186.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid. pp.185-186.

Tellingly, the author describes the man's symptoms (and his reluctance) for treatment at the hospital and what it is striking about the description is the apparent lack of valid psychiatric symptoms for the treatment. Mostly, the man's complaints and ailments can directly be linked with his traumatic experiences and social environment. Thus, it seems that the author is steering away from any straightforward medical diagnosis with basis on the biological but rather on the social. In a way, Lobo Antunes is highlighting the pastoral dimension of the role of psychiatrists. It is their job to help those who, because of the unkind social and historical conditions in which they were born and experienced, now suffer and struggle to maintain and adjust to a stable existence.

At the same time, it reflects on the social dilemma that those within the arena of mental health are faced with:

If we assume a notion of perfect mental and physical health, and complete social equilibrium as a finite state beyond which resources need not be spent, then the total amount of necessary resources could theoretically be quantified as necessary to achieve this aim. The real position, though, is that a line has to be drawn in a place that falls short of this nirvana. It is a political and social decision as to who draws the line and where it is placed. Mental health is, arguably, the most complex arena in which this particular tension is played out. It is an area in which it is most difficult to draw the line between what is mental illness, poor mental health, adequate mental health, or a state which falls short of [...] 'self-actualisation'.<sup>305</sup>

Amidst all of these difficulties, it is then up to the psychiatrist and other agents of primary care to manage the present situation of their patients, a human dimension that is sometimes forgotten by the critics of psychiatry and psychiatrists. This human dimension is highlighted by Lobo Antunes, when

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<sup>305</sup> Helen Sumner, 'A Social Services' Perspective' in *Targeting in Mental Health Services: A multidisciplinary challenge*, ed. by Lesley Cotterill and Wally Barr (Ashgate, Aldershot, 2000) pp.115-122 (p.115).

describing his relationship with this patient as ‘friendship’ (‘ficámos amigos). He willingly creates this other bond with this admittedly difficult patient, a bond that transcends the doctor-patient ethical compromise and enters the realm of the private, of emotions.

‘Não quero remédios nenhuns quero estar um bocadinho consigo’<sup>306</sup> says the man at one point, further denoting the necessity for human contact and company rather than medication. In another occasion, the man turns aggressively against the psychiatrist, physically threatening him; ‘levantou o braço para me esmurrar’.<sup>307</sup> The answer he gets from the doctor for this threat is a defiant, but clever one: ‘Se eu não te falar mais quem é que te fala?’<sup>308</sup> With his answer, the doctor reminds him of the social isolation he is in and of his lonely existence. It is an ironic retort, reinforcing the importance of the human dimension of his medical practice.

Thus, the social isolation and difficulties of this patient elicit a different type of response, not solely medication or any other therapeutic procedure that the patient could normally expect when accessing the mental health services. The approach is much more of a *pastoral* nature. By highlighting this type of support rather than the others, Lobo Antunes is constructing a veiled criticism of not only the social situation of the country, but also of psychiatry and its common practices.

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<sup>306</sup> António Lobo Antunes; *Livro de Crónicas*, p.186.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid.

However, the chronicle then turns sour and no matter how much hopeful criticism and human contact the psychiatrist is able to provide, the relentless social forces that have shaped the man's mentality (and troubled psyche) always come back to haunt him, in full force. In a nasty turn of events, the man gets diagnosed with AIDS; 'o resultado de uma análise do Instituto Ricardo Jorge. Seropositivo'.<sup>309</sup>

This tragic fate is nevertheless received by the man almost as good news.

The scene is uncanny:

Na semana passada vinha eufórico. [...]  
- Que grande festa que eu fiz ontem  
trazia fato completo, gravata, um risinho de vitória  
- Que grande festa que eu fiz ontem camarada.  
Foi a primeira vez que o vi rir, um riso gigantesco, oblíquo,  
esquisito<sup>310</sup>

The overall effect is powerful discomfort, a reminder of the impotence and limits of psychiatry, of medical action and ultimately of human action when trying to help others. The happiness of the man of being diagnosed with AIDS is the irony that perhaps hides a wish for revenge upon the world that has treated him so unfairly, or perhaps a vindictive death-wish that would relieve him of the suffering of his existence. Once again, abjection makes its way through Lobo Antunes writing, culminating in the horrific actions of the patient: 'Hoje vou a Moscavide e lixo todas as gajas que puder. Festa é festa, sócio. Vai ser assim enquanto me aguentar nas pernas.'<sup>311</sup> The misogynistic turn in the man's attitude perhaps reflects that exacerbated masculinity, potentiated by the military

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<sup>309</sup> Ibid. p.187.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid. p.186.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid. p.187.

experience, heightened by a male-focused society. This murderous action of willingly infecting women is presented here as the pinnacle of a traumatic build-up for which there was no relief or solace other than death itself.

In any case, the misogynistic outburst of the man darkens the mood, leaving the doctor in a state of melancholic pensiveness. Confronted with the harsh reality that his patient forced upon him, he cannot help but notice the sadness around him: ‘O Hospital Miguel Bombarda fica num sítio triste, velho, sujo. Até a chuva é suja. E a cor das paredes. E as pessoas. E os móveis’.<sup>312</sup> Slowly, abjection seems to engulf everything, from the rain that falls outside to the furniture in the doctor’s office. The overwhelming feeling of abjection denotes the oppressive sense of impotence and impending death, all encapsulated in the symbolic meaning of Hospital Miguel Bombarda. The hospital is, on a par with Angola, another *locus horrendous* from where trauma, madness and suffering emerge, taking hold of the author’s literature.

‘Ó doutor eu no fundo não era mau rapaz pois não?’<sup>313</sup> This final question, uttered in the past tense, as if the man was already dead, is a final calling to that human dimension the doctor had been trying to save in his patient. The question came too late, as the madness of the man had taken over, completely engulfed by the abjection of his social condition and circumstances.

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

## **Part 2**

Trauma and  
Madness in the  
Trilogy of  
Learning.

## CHAPTER 4

### Memória de Elefante

António Lobo Antunes' debut novel, 'Memória de Elefante' was published in 1979, five years after the Revolution that brought to an end the dictatorial regime that ruled Portugal since 1933. The novel is the semi-autobiographical narrative of a discontented psychiatrist, living and working in post-revolution Lisbon, and follows his 'story' – his internal dilemmas, his emotions and thoughts - for an entire day. The novel marks the beginning of the relationship Lobo Antunes intends to forge with his readers, one of '[...] intensa partilha de experiências ou de comunhão pressentida de atitudes e formas de sensibilidade perante a convenção e a institucionalidade'.<sup>314</sup>

The title of the novel, as it is the norm in Lobo Antunes first novels, has a significant contribution for the understanding of it. *Memória de Elefante* is not a mere stylistic choice of title, invented by the author. The expression already existed in the Portuguese lexicon prior to the novel's publication and it is still used in everyday contexts to indicate the longevity of a person's memory. Thus, the title refers to a memory that is accurate and capable of holding a great deal of detail. Obviously, as this novel is influenced by the author's autobiography, this elephantine memory refers to the author's own memory.

By initiating his literary career with the memory trope, Lobo Antunes is simultaneously establishing a connection with a literary theme par excellence (with Proust as one of its most significant representatives) and also with a deeper, more personal dimension that will permit an exegesis of the qualia associated

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<sup>314</sup> Maria Alzira Seixo, *Os Romances de António Lobo Antunes* (Dom Quixote, Lisboa, 2002) p.16.

with madness and trauma, be it his own or that of others. Consistently, the issues of trauma and madness will reappear in all of Lobo Antunes' novels, in different realities and guises, but always present. One of the most recognizable in and relevant for Lobo Antunes' work is the trauma pertaining to the reality of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder).

'Post-traumatic stress disorder is fundamentally a disorder of memory [...] The experience of the trauma, fixed and frozen in time, refuses to be represented as past, but is perpetually reexperienced'.<sup>315</sup>

It is not a surprise, then, that *Memória de Elefante* starts an exploratory momentum through memory and trauma – perpetually reexperienced in the text(s) - via abjection, which will lead into Hell (*Conhecimento do Inferno*), the only place where Antunesian catharsis is possible.

The journey is not, however, smooth sailing. As we would expect from a writer such as Lobo Antunes, an ironic dimension is present from the start and the concept of memory does not escape this.

Going back to Proust, whose influence on Lobo Antunes is visible albeit not overpowering, we can explore an important way in which memory manifests itself through literature. Proust's 'theory of memory' has not only changed and influenced later literature by permitting a concept of a fragmented, relativistic remembrance but also questioned the infallibility of human memory. Thanks to the advances in the field of neuroscience, we now know that his conception of memory anticipated the discovery of how memory processes work:

Proust realized that the moment we finish eating the cookie, leaving behind a collection of crumbs on a porcelain plate, we begin warping the memory of the cookie to fit our own personal narrative. We bend

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<sup>315</sup> Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy*, p.2.

the facts to suit our story, as ‘our intelligence reworks the experience’.<sup>316</sup>

Settling his literary debt with Proust, Lobo Antunes follows the French writer’s exploration of memory, implementing irony, distortion and exaggeration as his own personal literary trademark. If ‘science is discovering the molecular truth behind these Proustian theories’ and it is now acknowledged that ‘[m]emory is fallible [,] [o]ur remembrance of things past is imperfect’<sup>317</sup>, then Lobo Antunes productions have been (like Proust’s) anticipating this, modifying the Proustian pleasurable act of remembrance into one that is otherwise bitter, painful and cynical. This is not, however, a mere falsification of memory. The events, characters, situations, spaces and places, as well as the general ‘feeling’ of *Memória de Elefante* are exaggerated and augmented histrionically while retaining realistic qualities of true experiences. ‘Our recollections are cynical things, designed by the brain to always *feel* true, regardless of whether or not they actually occurred.’<sup>318</sup>

The exaggerative manner of *Memória de Elefante* is precluded by the first of two epigraphs, from *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll; ‘... as large as life and twice as natural.’<sup>319</sup> The novel proceeds to develop under these ‘principles’ and it acquires a negative tone, borderlining a ranting quality that is characteristic of another of Lobo Antunes’ early influences, Céline. *Memória de Elefante* engages the reader in distorted and derisive descriptions of the young

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<sup>316</sup> Jonah Lehrer, *Proust was a Neuroscientist* (New York and Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007) p.82.

<sup>317</sup> Ibid. p.82.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid. p.83.

<sup>319</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, Epigraph.

psychiatrist reality(ies), who delves in despair and negativity. It is this negativity that will mark the writer's whole body of work, constituting the basis of an essentially pessimistic view of the world. To these, Lobo Antunes will add in later novels another subversive stylistic choice, which consists of omissions, blank spaces and unfinished sentences in the main narrative structure (or voices). As an author, he subjects his narrators (even when they are close to himself) to a process of erasure, as if their narrative voices were not fully disclosed, were censored or simply omitted, highlighting the participatory dimension of the reader. Distortion, derision and erasure<sup>320</sup> are common traces of his stylistic approach in his novels, especially the first ones. They constitute 'a very particular way of representing individuals, communities, historical events, autobiographical data, fictional direction, and also the main character, but especially the specific relation between space and time'.<sup>321</sup>

Analysing this issue in depth, Alzira Seixo points out that [...] deviation and distortion can be understood to be based, beginning with Lobo Antunes' first novels, on different modalities adopted for the conjunction of semantic and ideological concerns with rhetoric and stylistic devices<sup>322</sup>.

The second epigraph of the novel is much more enigmatic. It reads: 'Há sempre uma abébia para dar de frosque, por isso aguentem-se à bronca'.<sup>323</sup> and it is a spoken quote attributed to a certain Dédé, with no authorial reference in

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<sup>320</sup> Maria Alzira Seixo, 'Still Facts and Living Fictions: The Literary Work of António Lobo Antunes, An Introduction' in *Facts and Fictions of António Lobo Antunes*, ed. by Victor K. Mendes (Dartmouth: Tagus Press, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, 2011) pp.19-43.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid. p.24.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid. p.41.

<sup>323</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Epigraph.

the literary sphere or indeed any other source that could prove his existence. It is perhaps a metafictional inscription arising from the author's personal life or from his imagination but it would be unfruitful speculation to try and pursue the origin of this quote. Nevertheless, this quote *does* have literary significance, especially because it informs the reading of the novel it precedes. The nature of this quote is contrary to the other quote which preludes it, not belonging to the often eloquent literary discourse but to the vulgarities and slang of common usage spoken language. By presenting the novel with these two very different quotes, Lobo Antunes is revealing the nature of his first novel as aiming to be part of that higher pedigree of literature while retaining the qualities of pedestrian language, unspoiled in its roughness. He is displaying the first signs of a trait that will accompany him throughout his literary production, which is this attention to the 'minor narratives' of regular common people and those who have been marginalized or silenced. It is the first step towards an ethical concern that prevails in Lobo Antunes' literature, embodying the Foucaultian preoccupation with these otherwise voiceless marginalized narratives. The novel will unfold with these two registers being played out simultaneously thus contributing to the establishment of this attribute as trademark of Lobo Antunes writing.

The quote is also interesting for another reason. It is identified as a statement made by the mysterious Dédé when escaping from an unidentified prison. The mentioning of a prison is indicative of the comparison drawn between prisons and mental institutions that will resurface later on in the novel (and in *Conhecimento do Inferno*) and indeed helps to consolidate the anti-psychiatric mode that will be present in the text(s).

Bearing in mind that Lobo Antunes' writing is often satirical and histrionic (at least in the early novels), the reading of the passage offers yet other possibilities. It simultaneously offers the possibility of escape ('há sempre uma abébia') and yet denies the possibility of changing any of the circumstances that prompted the need for escaping in the first place ('aguenta-te à bronca'), highlighting the absurd dilemma of being told there is an escape but that it is impossible to elude fate, which has been a trait imbedded in the Portuguese psyche for centuries. One has only to think of the country's obsession with Fado, Portugal's national music, of which Lobo Antunes seems not to be a fan, with his musical preferences falling towards jazz.

'Aguenta-te à bronca' hints at a display of stoicism, albeit an ironic one. By using everyday slang, Lobo Antunes is demystifying the fatalism inherent to the Portuguese variant of stoicism, denying any glory to it, something that he will continue to do in subsequent novels, when satirizing the historical past of Portugal (with particular brilliance in *As Naus*<sup>324</sup>). This satirical stoicism manifests itself not only in the epigraph but also in the main text of *Memória de Elefante* as the protagonist reveals his rebellion against the structures of 'normalisation' of his subject. He rebels against his job, against his family, against himself: 'Putá que pariu os psiquiatras [...] putá que me pariu a mim'.<sup>325</sup> The separation from his family is, however, his ultimate gesture of rebellion, the isolation sought as the final stage of a complete detachment from the 'normalising' forces of society; like a monk retreats into a monastery or a

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<sup>324</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *As Naus* (Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 2007).

<sup>325</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, p.20.

madman who wanders in the world to which he does not pertain or is rejected by

(Foucault):

De roupa espalhada no soalho o médico aprendia qua a solidão possui o gosto azedo do álcool sem amigos [...]. As filhas e o remorso de se ter escapado uma noite, de maleta na mão, ao descer as escadas da casa que durante tanto tempo habitara, tomando consciência degrau a degrau de que abandonava muito mais do que uma mulher, duas crianças e uma complicada teia de sentimentos tempestuosos.<sup>326</sup>

The painful recollections of the doctor are intertwined with the witnessing of the suffering of others - the patients in the mental institution where he works, the people who attend the therapy session with him, his ex-wife – permitting the elephantine memory/memories to pertain both to an individual and to a shared collective sphere, including the reader to whom these memories are being presented.

Memory<sup>327</sup> is then both an individual and a collective ‘region’ in which the author inscribes, in a crescendo from novel to novel, the outer and especially inner realities of his affected subjects. Departing from a specific and individual dimension in the novel that inaugurates his literature, memory grows outwards into new physical territories such as Africa in *Os Cus de Judas*, simultaneously encompassing a multiplication of traumatic realities with the remembrance of war. In *O Conhecimento do Inferno*, memory broadens once more, this time to accommodate all the dimensions of the previous novels (the hospital, Africa, the

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<sup>326</sup> Ibid.p.22.

<sup>327</sup> In Lobo Antunes, the concept of memory comes always articulated with that of silence. Later on, we will see how silence is a major theme in the author’s work and how it relates to the different perspectives of his writing. ‘[S]ilêncio-memória; porque só à distância e no silêncio a memória se constrói.’ Maria Regina Brasil, ‘Silêncios em Memória de Elefante’ in *A Escrita e o Mundo em António Lobo Antunes*, ed. by Eunice Cabral, et al. (Lisboa: Dom Quixote, 2003) p.104.

war) permitting them to co-exist in the same literary space. Therefore, despite not being regarded as one of the most accomplished novels in the author's body of work, the importance of *Memória de Elefante* is, thus, easily perceived as it sets in motion Lobo Antunes' narrative momentum.

In the novel, we follow the main character from the moment he enters the hospital in the morning until five o'clock the next morning. Like the modernist novels *Ulysses* or *Mrs. Dalloway*, the narrative is contained within the time frame of one day and seeks to explore its tropes with the same intensity as those landmark novels. Culturally, the novel was also very significant in the historical moment it was published as its impact reaches beyond the subjective dimension. Of *Memória de Elefante* it has been said that 'um dia na vida de um psiquiatra acaba por transforma-se na confissão memorialística e psicanalítica de uma geração'.<sup>328</sup> The novel is not only a cathartic novel for a man who happens to be a psychiatrist. It is also a catharsis for an entire generation.

In the beginning of the novel, the reader is introduced to the hospital in which the character works as a doctor – Hospital Miguel Bombarda. The hospital, *locus horrendus* where part of the novel takes place, serves as the overarching background that informs the rest of the book. Like an inescapable panoptical presence, the hospital<sup>329</sup> functions as the referential point to which the character's existence is bound on many levels. The first level in which the hospital comes into play is through memory, that elephantine memory which

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<sup>328</sup> Maria Regina Brasil, 'Silêncios em Memória de Elefante' in *A Escrita e o Mundo em António Lobo Antunes*, p.104.

<sup>329</sup> Ironically, Hospital Miguel Bombarda's buildings include the 'Pavilhão Panóptico de Segurança', dating from 1896, one of the few psychiatric institutions to have a construction of this type.

seems to constitute the main literary preoccupation of Lobo Antunes at the beginning of his career. The physical place of the Hospital seems to be deeply embedded in the memory the narrator decides to explore, as if the hospital was both the starting point and the catalyst for his memory. The opening sentence of the novel evidences this: ‘O Hospital em que trabalhava era o mesmo a que muitas vezes na infância acompanhava o pai’.<sup>330</sup> In this incipit, various elements are important not only to set the tone and the momentum of the novel but also to the author’s literary output. First, it is noteworthy that the psychiatric institution in which he works is the first (ignoring the necessary article in Portuguese grammar) word in the novel – moreover, it is capitalised, giving it importance and highlighting its role in the text. Secondly, a link between the hospital and the character’s childhood is established, settling the relationship between the two (hospital and doctor) as a familiar one, as if the hospital encapsulated the doctor’s whole life, from his birth to the moment in which he now lives. It also designates an aspect of a certain traditionalism and succession, in the sense that the character’s father is also understood to have been a doctor working in the very same hospital. The significance of this ‘inheritance’ (this dynasty of doctors) is paramount for the understanding of the work of Lobo Antunes as a gesture of rebellion and rejection. It also highlights the absurdity of the situation and of the hereditary role, in an almost monarchic fashion. ‘Topa-se logo que o senhor doutor é filho do senhor doutor’<sup>331</sup> says the porter when the doctor refuses to pay the membership fee for the ‘Sociedade de Neurologia e Psiquiatria’ with

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<sup>330</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, p.13

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.* p.14.

a string of insults. The porter seems to serve as a comedic vessel for the perpetuation of the traditional mind set of succession as the expression ‘o senhor doutor é filho do senhor doutor’ serves as an absurd mechanism of repetition.

The character (like Lobo Antunes) is on the receiving end of a power, a culture, a set of moral values and traditions that he does not seem to accept. He is the last product of centuries of stratification of (imperialistic) power, the post-revolution masculine heir to the institutional throne of psychiatry. The oppressiveness inherent to this power exerts a silencing of realities that contradict the effectiveness and fallibility of that same power. Only silence can permit the continuation of master-narratives as it denies the contradictory supplied by counter-narratives:

O hospital aparece oficializado como ponto de reclusão e o psiquiatra é a autoridade moral que possui a capacidade de aprisionar quem perturba a ordem social [...] O desvio à norma, qualquer que seja a sua natureza (política, psíquica, sexual), é para ali conduzido para ser domesticado, silenciado.<sup>332</sup>

Silence is one of the most important themes of Lobo Antunes writing. He either reacts to it with an almost histrionic and spontaneous writing that takes shape as a prolix ‘stream-of-consciousness’ infused with a bitterness and sarcasm inherited from Céline, or he manipulates it, writing about and around silence and inserting it into the very fabric of his writing.

In this novel, silence takes many shapes. One of the most relevant is its’ manifestation as a reaction to political oppression. The unfolding of silence as a consequence of Salazar’s regime, permeating every aspect of the country’s

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<sup>332</sup> Maria Regina Brasil, p.106.

cultural life (‘Salazar transformara o país num seminário domesticado’<sup>333</sup>) forces the writer to explode in a full-blown narrative of resistance, in all its violence and force. ‘Memória de Elefante é, pois, uma revolta contra o princípio de um regime antidemocrático: o silêncio-repressão.’<sup>334</sup> The narrator, aware of the cultural and historical weight imposed on him, reacts accordingly to his rebellious nature:

Putá que pariu os psiquiatras organizados em esquadra de polícia, [...] puta que pariu o Grande Oriente da Psiquiatria, dos etiquetadores pomposos do sofrimento, dos chonés da única sórdida forma de maluquice que consiste em vigiar e perseguir a liberdade da loucura alheia defendidos pelo Código Penal dos tratados, puta que pariu a Arte Da Catalogação Da Angústia, puta que me pariu a mim [...]<sup>335</sup>.

This passage (which possesses the quality of a ranting) has several elements that permit a deeper reading into what constitutes some of the major points of its literary value. It starts with an insult, ‘puta que pariu’, which is repeated throughout the passage to emphasise the discontent and revolt the narrator feels primarily against the wider institution of psychiatry, represented by its individual units – the psychiatrists - and ultimately against himself. This also emphasises the anti-psychiatric dimension of the novel, which, as we have seen in the previous chapter, is of paramount importance to Lobo Antunes writing. The attack towards psychiatry does not, however, end with the insulting of the figure of psychiatrists themselves. It continues with the irony and subversive satirical power of the writer, with the insertion of the archaic expression ‘Grande Oriente

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<sup>333</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, p.58.

<sup>334</sup> Maria Regina Brasil, p.105.

<sup>335</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, p.22.

da Psichiatria'.<sup>336</sup> The capitalisation of the words in the expression has the effort of satirising psychiatry's importance in Portuguese society by exaggerating it in language, while simultaneously denouncing its inadequacy and out-of-dateness by using the archaic word 'Psichiatria'.

Similar process occurs further on in the passage, with the expression 'Arte Da Catalogação Da Angústia'. By using the same stylistic approach, Lobo Antunes criticises the act of cataloguing 'anguish' (which can be equated with mental illness in the author's literature). Moreover, the inclusion of words such as 'vigiar' and 'perseguir' in the passage, denounces the overarching attitude towards psychiatry that the novelist implements in this novel. Again, this approach positions Lobo Antunes' work in the same philosophical spectrum as Foucault, R.D Laing and Thomas Szasz, among others. His critique of psychiatry is very much in tune not only with the anti-psychiatry movement, but also with the work of those (like Foucault) who regard psychiatry as a form of social and individual control. As a novelist, Lobo Antunes seeks to write against the grain of institutions to which he himself is bound, against the master-narratives of suppressive discourses, championing the 'liberdade da loucura alheia'.

However, the rebellion the psychiatrist feels does not only manifest itself with the augmentation of the discourse to the point of hysteria. It also appears as, again, silence – the silence the psychiatrist retreats into, repressing the growing ire provoked by that other encroaching, complicit silence.irate resignation that has as only escape the mental narrative of the doctor - 'E aqui

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<sup>336</sup> Ironically, this expression resembles the name of a masonic lodge in Portugal; the 'Grande Oriente Lusitano', founded in 1802. It is not clear if Lobo Antunes is trying to criticise the freemasonry in Portugal or, more likely, to attribute its characteristics (its secrecy, rites and hierarchy) to Psychiatry.

estou eu [...] a colaborar não colaborando com a continuação disto, com a pavorosa máquina doente da Saúde Mental trituradora no ovo dos germeninhos de liberdade que em nós nascem sob a forma canhestra de um protesto inquieto'.<sup>337</sup>

Very visible is the resentment the psychiatrist has against the medical speciality he works for, which he sees as castrating and denounces as ghastly and sick. In an expression that could possibly sum up the entirety of the spirit of the novel, psychiatry is referred to as 'máquina doente', a dichotomy and apparent contradiction that nevertheless describes with great aptitude the realities the narrator experiences. It describes psychiatry as a mechanical entity, therefore of no human resemblance. Yet, the medical machine shares a very human condition with the patients it encapsulate. The machine (not the human) is ill and so is the ghost that lives inside it.

This imagery is continued elsewhere and the hospital itself (the most powerful arm of Medicine) is also described in such a mechanical metaphor - 'inumana máquina concentracionária do hospital'.<sup>338</sup> The hospital is, thus, the place where the mechanical quality of Psychiatry is materialised as an inhumane space and subtly takes the form of a concentration camp ('concentracionária'), an image that will blossom in *Conhecimento do Inferno*.

The cruel satirical scrutiny is, however, not limited to the wider institution of psychiatry and to the doctors themselves. Lobo Antunes seems not to spare

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<sup>337</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, p.43.

<sup>338</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, pp.45-46.

anyone linked with the establishment of mental institutions. The nurses are the next target in line for ‘deviation and distortion’:

A enfermeira-chefe, no seu gabinete de Dr. Mabuse, recolocava a dentadura postiça com a majestade de Napoleão coroando-se a si mesmo [...] A enfermeira-chefe, a cintilar os incisivos de saldo, pastoreava aquele rebanho artrítico enxotando-o a mãos ambas para uma saleta em que o televisor se avariara num hara-kiri solidário <sup>339</sup>

In comparative terms, this passage, with its description of the pompous head nurse as an active participant in the segregation of patients is reminiscent of the imagery of another earlier novel – *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest*, by Ken Kesey. This novel, published for the first time in 1962, some years before David Cooper coined the term ‘anti-psychiatry’, is considered to be one of the most important novels to pre-empt the social tensions between psychiatry and society at large that started to emerge during the 1960s. The novel depicts the realities of a mental institution in Oregon, USA, while serving as a study of the institutional processes and the (unnecessary) restrictions it applies to human beings, both to their physical and mental existence. In the novel, the major restrictor (and character) is Nurse Ratched, who is the embodiment of institutional (total) control:

What she dreams of [...] is a world of precision efficiency and tidiness like a pocket watch with a glass back, a place where the schedule is unbreakable and all the patients who aren’t Outside, obedient under her beam, are wheelchair Chronicles [...] Year by year she accumulates her ideal staff: doctors, all ages and types, come and rise up in front of her with ideas of their own about the way a ward should be run [...] and she fixes these doctors with dry-ice eyes day in, day out, until they retreat with unnatural chills. <sup>340</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Ibid. p.17.

<sup>340</sup> Kesey, p.26.

Ratched is depicted as a representative of the dehumanisation of institutions, with her preoccupations being chiefly centred on efficiency and the mechanisation of the *processes* of the ward, rather than on the well-being and happiness of the patients. Lobo Antunes' unnamed nurse, albeit less important as a character, evokes Kesey's nurse. The reference to Dr. Mabuse<sup>341</sup> denotes a distrust and suspicion in which the nurse is to be regarded. One has only to be reminded that Dr. Mabuse is a criminal who commits his crimes by telepathic hypnosis, to understand the full implication of Lobo Antunes' comparison. The nurse's disproportionate authority is similar in both novels and in the case of the Portuguese writer, her authority is shown in the abject act of handling her fake teeth as if she was Napoleon crowning himself – a gesture that hints at her feelings of self-importance and authority and, at the same time, at the tyrannical nature of her power.

The comparison proves that Lobo Antunes is attuned with earlier novelistic productions that reflect anti-psychiatry and seeks, with his distinctive style, to transport it to the realm of Portuguese literature. In fact, because of the fierce censorship of the regime, it would be hard to imagine a novel of such nature being published before 1974. He is, then, making a statement of artistic liberation and intellectual freedom when he chooses to criticise a system (psychiatry) which is viewed as oppressive and controlling.

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<sup>341</sup> Dr. Mabuse is a character popularised by the films of Fritz Lang; *Dr. Mabuse der Spieler* (*Dr. Mabuse, The Gambler*) (1922), *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (*The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*) (1933) and *Die Tausend Augen des Dr. Mabuse* (*The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse*) (1960). He is a master of disguise and mental manipulation, never committing his crimes in person but rather telepathically. His literary origin was in the 1921 novel *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler* (*Dr. Mabuse The Gambler*) by Norbert Jacques.

The distortion continues and the novel goes on describing the realities of the mental hospital with mixed imagery originating from different referential elements, such as symbols of the historical past and figures from previous eras – ‘mulheres que o excesso de remédios transformara em sonâmbulas infantas defuntas, convulsionadas pelos Escoriais dos seus fantasmas’.<sup>342</sup> The ghostly atmosphere of the hospital is constantly being recalled to the reader, as if the madness contained in the hospital was a haunting, inescapable reality, an intersection between the real world and a haunted realm of figments:

[...] comboiou na direcção do psiquiatra uma mulher entrada na véspera e que ele não observara ainda, ziguezagueando de injeções, de camisa a flutuar em torno do corpo como o espectro de Charlotte Brönte vogando no escuro de uma casa antiga.<sup>343</sup>

It is interesting to notice the parallel established between the two images. In both cases, the reader is presented with overmedicated women who both trigger the doctor to associate them with ghosts. The fact that the writer links the overuse of medication and ghosts seems relevant when reading Lobo Antunes in the wider spectrum of mental illness.

Ghosts are ultimately an emblem and a reminder of death and its presence in everyday realities. Medication seems to be the catalyser for an existence beyond death but, paradoxically, a death that does not signify the absence of life. A death-in-life, so to say – as if these women were condemned to live a dead existence, only feasible because of their overmedicated state.

However, with another of the peculiar traits of his writing, Lobo Antunes brings shock to the reader by shifting the narration from this ghostly dimension

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<sup>342</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, p.16.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.* p.18.

to a more concrete and painful reality. He does this by following the image of Charlotte Brontë's spectrum with a diagnosis, 'O médico leu no boletim de internamento "esquizofrenia paranóide; tentativa de suicídio"'.<sup>344</sup> The intertwining of the two realities is an instance of 'hyperreality'<sup>345</sup>, which Lobo Antunes constantly uses to provoke a sense of expanded reality in the diegetic spatial and temporal dimensions.

[A] representação constrói-se, desde os primeiros passos do romance, através de uma espécie de contínuo universo de ressonâncias verbais, que não formam propriamente uma cadeia efabulatória, mas sim uma escrita *per-fabulatória*: ou seja, é como se a palavra, a escrita como infinito ato material de constituição da palavra e do discurso tentasse, não cumprir um ato de redundância no que respeita ao que está fora do sujeito narrativo [...] mas, antes, servir e ser utilizada como instrumento [...] para *atravessar* [...] o imenso e misterioso mecanismo que, por convenção, chamamos "realidade".<sup>346</sup>

The confusion generated has the effect of blending the realities of the patients and the doctor, who realises and agrees with the situation. 'A doente (quem entre aqui para dar pastilhas, tomar pastilhas ou visitar nazarenamente as vítimas das pastilhas é doente, sentenciou o psiquiatra no interior de si mesmo)'.<sup>347</sup> The

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<sup>344</sup> Ibid. p.18.

<sup>345</sup> 'To speak of things one that one wants to connote as real, these things must seem real. The "completely real" becomes identified with the "completely fake". Absolute unreality is offered as real presence. [...] [T]he reason for this journey into hyperreality, in search of instances where the [...] imagination demands the real thing and, to attain it, must fabricate the absolute fake; where the boundaries between game and illusion are blurred, the art museum is contaminated by the freak show, and falsehood is enjoyed in a situation of "fullness", of *horror vacui*.' Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality* (San Diego, New York, London: Harvest Books, 1990) pp.7-8.

<sup>346</sup> Vincenzo Arsillo, 'Ill maré e la terra che furono: una lettura di *Memória de Elefante* di António Lobo Antunes' in *Rassegna Iberistica*, nº75-76, 2002, pp. 52-55 (repr. and trans. in Ana Paula Arnaut, *António Lobo Antunes* (Lisboa, Edições 70, 2009), pp.153-154).

<sup>347</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, pp.18-19.

doctor declares himself as having the same status as the patient, pronouncing himself as a ‘doente’. This both informs and undermines what is to follow. Next in the novel, the doctor proceeds with the consultation with the patient. The consultation takes an ironic and comical turn – the patient, who is referred throughout as Charlotte Brontë, keeps using foul language, to the despair of the nurse, who is this time compared to the queen D. Maria II, and the amusement of the doctor:

- Seu cabrão.

A D. Maria II encolheu os ombros a fim de bolear as arestas do insulto:

- Está nisto desde que veio. Se assistisse à cena que ela armou para aí com a família o senhor doutor até se benzia. De curtas e compridas tem-nos chamado de tudo.

O médico escreveu no bloco: cabrão, curtas, compridas, riscou um traço por baixo como se preparasse uma soma e acrescentou em maiúsculas Caralho.<sup>348</sup>

By inserting a foul word of his own in the notebook in which takes notes about the patient, the psychiatrist is putting himself at the same level of the patient. He is in communion with the patient, as if they shared the same language. The linguistic bond between doctor and patient is created in spite of the nurse, to whom the doctor hands the sheet of paper where he had been scribbling, with the words, arranged like a mathematical equation: ‘Caralho + Cabrão = Grande Foda’.<sup>349</sup> Not only does this equation subverts the abstract reality of mathematics (in an unveiled attack to ‘hard sciences’) by challenging the normal aspect of equations, the provocative gesture has particular impact on this nurse, who has a very strong catholic belief which reinforces the oppressiveness she

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<sup>348</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, p.19.

<sup>349</sup> Ibid.

represents. ‘Educação católica à prova de bala e virgem por tradição familiar [...]’<sup>350</sup>. Lobo Antunes is, contrary to other contemporary Portuguese writers, less incisive in his criticisms towards the Catholic Church.<sup>351</sup> He nonetheless has, given his rebellious writing, to include it in his criticisms. Catholicism has a complicated history in Portugal, serving for many centuries as an oppressive force (its pinnacle being the Inquisition) or being complicit with other oppressive forces. Its proximity with Estado Novo is still a sore point in Portuguese society and Lobo Antunes’ novel cannot leave it exempted from scrutiny.

When alone with the patient, the psychiatrist slowly retreats into his own mind, observing the world of the mental institution around him. The description assumes the comedic tone that emerges throughout the novel, intertwined with a tragic dimension, both in a crescendo that contributes to the ‘abject’ significance of the novel. One of the images the doctor sees through his window is a good example of this comicality: ‘O negro que se masturbava no pátio iniciou para edificação dos serventes contorções orgásticas desordenadas de mangueira à solta. L’arroseur arrosé.’<sup>352</sup> Once again, Lobo Antunes is using elements of different media, again from the world of cinema<sup>353</sup>, to materialise the sense of hyperreality of his writing.

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid.

<sup>351</sup> The best example is José Saramago, whose work is very beligerant towards the institution of Catholicism.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid. p.20.

<sup>353</sup> *L’Arroseur arrosé* (or *The Waterer Watered*) is an 1895 French short black-and-white silent comedy film directed and produced by Louis Lumière, first screened on June 10, 1895. It is acknowledged as the first comedy film ever made.

Comedy, however, is a satirical device used by the author simultaneously to draw attention to the poor conditions the patients have to endure and to empower the ‘mad’, attributing to them a role of subversiveness which he uses to contrast the external and internal realities of his time and place.

The constant perambulations between the semantic plane of the real (the hospital) and the hyperreal (film, literary figures), between internal and external realities, pierced here and there by dark comical images of satirical intention give form to Lobo Antunes’ literary objective of universalising the qualia of madness, rescuing it from the margins of discourse to transform it into *his* own literary discourse. In Lobo Antunes’ writing there is no *normalisation* of discourses and no suppression of unpleasant, alternative narratives as his writing encapsulates all of these elements, inviting the reader to perceive a myriad of narratives, discourses and ways of feeling and being that challenge the master-narratives of modern society:

[O] contínuo, expressivo deslocamento semântico do plano objetual para aquele artístico-literário [...] a que corresponde, na construção do texto como espaço físico e mental num mesmo tempo, feito de correspondências que revelam-se sempre como ausências, a consciência de uma espécie de doença universal, da qual ninguém é excluído<sup>354</sup>

*Memória de Elefante* is also a novel of personal catharsis and struggle to come to terms with a voluntary solitary existence. The very personal and individual dimension of the novel is a natural movement in Lobo Antunes’ literary project, as if before departing on an exploration of the narratives of others, he aims to explore the narrative of himself. The polyphonic dimension that is characteristic of Lobo Antunes’ later novels is not manifested in the novels that form the

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<sup>354</sup> Vincenzo Arsillo, p.155.

‘Trilogia da Aprendizagem’. The downwards journey that starts in *Memória* is one of loneliness and solitude: ‘De roupa espalhada no soalho o medico aprendia que a solidão possui o gosto azedo do álcool sem amigos’.<sup>355</sup>

The journey, although inevitable, is not without some solace. To counteract the sinister nurse that appears earlier on in the novel, another nurse, this time a source of consolation for the doctor’s tormented mind, appears in the text. ‘Uma enfermeira que ele estimava e cuja amizade tranquila apaziguara mais de uma vez os impulsos destrutivos das suas fúrias de maremoto’.<sup>356</sup>

Lobo Antunes sparsely populates sympathetic figures in his novels, their appearance in the text serving as a small source of the solace that his narrators find in other human beings. Along with this nurse, sympathetic figures include another doctors, in this novel, and a nurse that served in Angola with the narrator of *Os Cus de Judas*. This somewhat humanises the narrative and the fact that these sympathetic figures are from within the institutions attacked in the novels, reminds the reader of the existence of a human dimension within the institutions criticised in the text, thus emphasizing their very institutional nature.

The dialogue that ensues between the narrator and the nurse is revealing:

- Deolinda, [...] estou a tocar no fundo. [...]
- Nunca mais tem fim essa descida? [...]
- Você encontra-se [...] defronte do maior espeleólogo da depressão: oito mil metros de profundidade oceânica da tristeza, negrume de águas gelatinosas e sem vida salvo um ou outro monstro sublunar [...] o que significa, obviamente, que agonizo.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, p.22.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid. p.28.

<sup>357</sup> Ibid.

In a confessional tone, the psychiatrist unveils a deeper region of his mental and emotional states. In a metaphorical descent to the depths of the ocean, he uncovers a ‘profundidade oceânica da tristeza’ and a ‘negrume de águas gelatinosas’ that display the true psychoanalytic landscape of his mind. The abjectness of the latter image, with its black gelatinous presence, denounces a traumatic dimension dwelling in the narrator’s mental existence which, with its Kristevan conception, subtly starts to disturb the conventional identity and the cultural structures in which the doctor is inserted. The irony of such a dark region in a psychiatrist’s mind highlights the limitations and vulnerabilities of psychiatry itself. It demystifies this medical speciality, lowering it from the high place of the infallible science it seeks to be to a more human and, by extension, fallible order of affairs.

Moreover, by designating himself as an ‘espeleólogo da depressão’, the psychiatrist is accepting depression as a physical, quasi-geographical region, which cements its existence as a solid force and a concrete space in the mental life of the narrator. As we have seen earlier, Lobo Antunes seems to emulate the discourse of melancholia and depression. More developed in later novels, this discourse is here hinted, if not stylistically, at least in content.

The other two sympathetic figures (excluding some patients) that humanise the novel are a male nurse and another doctor, friend of the psychiatrist, with whom he goes out for lunch. He displays, at first, a certain animosity towards the nurse, but when the man opens up to him, the psychiatrist feels that this animosity is ill-founded and that they share the same views. ‘Pensava só cá comigo no que é que a gente faz aqui. A sério. Pode ser que venha um tempo em que esta gaita mude e se possam encarar as coisas de olhos

limpos'.<sup>358</sup> The nurse is, albeit brief, the most optimistic figure in the novel. He is hopeful of a time where the country's troubled past is forgotten and humanity could start afresh, 'de olhos limpos'. This attitude is in direct contradiction with the psychiatrist and his friend, as well as denouncing, by default, a mentality that still seems prevalent in the country, despite the fall of the dictatorship. Portugal, for them, seems stuck in the past, buried and repressed by the weight of history (like the psychiatrist's individuality) and only a decisive cut with it would facilitate a liberation. The psychiatrist's friend, during their lunch, attests to this: 'Dá-me ideia às vezes que Portugal todo é um pouco isso, o mau gosto da saudade em diminutivo e latidos enterrados debaixo de lápides pífias'.<sup>359</sup>

The scene where the lunch between the psychiatrist and his friend takes place is the one of the few where the psychiatrist is not alone. It serves as a window into his family history. The proximity between the two permits the psychiatrist, as he had done with the nurse, to open up and repeat the words 'Cheguei ao fundo [...] Ao fundo do fundo dos fundos'<sup>360</sup> thus emphasising the descent he had previously announced to the nurse. The familiarity of having lunch with his friend triggers memories of his childhood, when having meals with his mother. In this memory, comes the confession of the early tendency towards writing demonstrated by the doctor. The 'odd behaviour' natural of a child who manifests an artistic disposition in a house of scientists is not understood, especially by his mother, who views it as madness:

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid. p.47.

<sup>359</sup> Ibid. p.58.

<sup>360</sup> Ibid. p.63.

O meu filho mais velho é maluco, anunciavas às visitas para desculpar as [...] bizarras do meu comportamento, as minhas inexplicáveis melancolias, os versos que às ocultas segregava, casulos de sonetos para uma angústia informe.<sup>361</sup>

His mother's attitude is explained with the tenderness of a fond memory but denounces a wider view of suspicion towards artistic activities and the melancholic temperament normally associated with artists. The child's poetic attempts are not well received by his family, perhaps as they represent a deviation from the 'normality' his family commonly sees in the 'healthy individuals' his neurologist father is used to.

The psychiatrist's temperament, however, is lasting. Maybe exacerbated by his experiences and life, the melancholy and detachment are characteristics that still affect the doctor's psyche.

'- O quê?, perguntou o amigo.  
- O quê o quê?, perguntou o médico.  
- Mexias a boca e não ouvi um som, disse o amigo.'<sup>362</sup>

This detachment, despite the doctor's natural tendency to solitude, is not habitual. Somewhere along the line, his life had been altered. He confides in his friend: 'Tinha força: tinha mulher, tinha filhas, o projecto de escrever, coisas concretas, bóias de me aguentar à superfície [...] E de repente, caralho, voltou-se-me a vida do avesso, eis-me barata de costas a espreitar, sem apoios'.<sup>363</sup> In this evocative passage, the psychiatrist confesses his despair to his friend (who is also in the medical profession), comparing himself to the Kafkian cockroach

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<sup>361</sup> Ibid.p.60.

<sup>362</sup> Ibid. p.61.

<sup>363</sup> Ibid. p.63.

of *Metamorphosis*<sup>364</sup>, a subtle literary artifice to convey the character's moods of alienation, inadequacy and powerlessness.

The character's words point towards a state of melancholia, of depression. Not implying that the author is actually depressed (thus projecting this in his writing) for the obvious lacking of medical authority to advance such diagnosis, it is however fairly secure to realise the character's depressive state. At this stage of the novel, the reader starts to perceive the totality of the psychiatrist's detachment forced by this depression. Although the existence of a clearly defined trigger for this state is not present, there is, as we will see later, the indication that this melancholic existence surfaces upon the character's return from Angola, where he had been fighting in the Colonial War. Regardless of the cause of the trigger, its consequences start to unravel. Incapable of continuing with his marriage, the doctor abandons his wife and children. However, he seems to still nurture feelings for his wife; 'gostava muito um do outro, continua a gostar muito um do outro e os tomates desta merda é eu não conseguir pôr-me outra vez direito'.<sup>365</sup> The separation hurts the psychiatrist, who laments his inability to shake off his 'depression'. It is, in a way, a painful mourning. 'The disappearance of that essential being continues to deprive me of what is most worthwhile in me; I live it as a wound or deprivation'.<sup>366</sup> Trying to cope with the 'loss' he himself created, the psychiatrist falls into a 'zombified' existence, not quite alive and yet not quite dead, but in many ways similar to the

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<sup>364</sup> Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

<sup>365</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, p.63.

<sup>366</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun, Depression and Melancholia*, p.5.

lives of those patients who haunt the mental hospital where he works. ‘My depression points to my not knowing how to lose – I have perhaps been unable to find a valid compensation for the loss?’<sup>367</sup> By confessing his mood and state of mind to his friend, the psychiatrist is (consciously or unconsciously) emulating the act of a medical consultation. The doctor, in this instance, *is* the patient.

Lobo Antunes seems to reflect Kristeva’s assertions on the nature of melancholia by making the psychiatrist’s confession entirely bound to the realm of the amorous; ‘if there is no writing other than the amorous, there is no imagination that is not, overtly or secretly, melancholy.’<sup>368</sup> In fact, the mental existence of the psychiatrist, his memory and thoughts, seems to drift towards that gravitational force of his separation and there are several mentions of his ex-wife through the narrative, sometimes in passing or inserted in a chain of thoughts and sometimes in the second person, in a style that is as direct as it is disconcerting;<sup>369</sup> ‘São cinco horas da manhã e juro que não sinto a tua falta’.<sup>370</sup>

Moreover, the hegemonic textual presence of the psychiatrist’s self, points at another instance of the amorous problematic – narcissistic love. The novel is concentrated upon the psychiatrist’s self and it develops around it and evolves because of its successive crisis and dilemmas:

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid. p.6.

<sup>369</sup> Given the absence of reply or textual presence of his ex-wife, the narrator is really interpellating the reader, in a stylistic shift that provokes surprise (because it is unexpected) and that reminds the reader of his active, participatory, role.

<sup>370</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, p.155.

Depression is the hidden face of Narcissus, the face that is to bear him away into death, but of which he is unaware while he admires himself in a mirage. Talking about depression will again lead us into the marshy land of the Narcissus myth. This time, however, we shall not encounter the bright and fragile amatory idealization; on the contrary, we shall see the shadow cast on the fragile self, hardly dissociated from the other, precisely by the *loss* of that essential other. The shadow of despair.<sup>371</sup>

All of this denotes Lobo Antunes understanding of and empathy with the complex issue of depression. Introducing a ‘depressed psychiatrist’ as a character is the literary expression of his general preoccupations as a writer. Human suffering is not an exclusive of the sick and ill, although it is easily more perceptible in these. In his compassionate writing, Lobo Antunes shows the fragile side of medicine when in its human form, the doctor. The authority and the almost privileged situation that transpires from the institutional image of the doctor is here contradicted and, again, humanised. By presenting the psychiatrist as a patient, as a human who also suffers and who is also mentally afflicted, Lobo Antunes is cancelling any possible hierarchy of the doctor over the patient, thus eliciting compassion, understanding and empathy from both sides. It is another act of rebellion and subversion that makes his writing so compelling and important.

Humanizing the psychiatrist does not only mean to cast light on his suffering and troubles. It also means to disclose his limitations, his flaws and idiosyncrasies. The figure of the doctor is not that of a hero. ‘Sou um cagado a pedir socorro [...] A pedir mais uma vez a atenção dos outros sem dar nada em troca [...] e se calhar é só em mim que penso’.<sup>372</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun, Depression and Melancholia*, p.5.

<sup>372</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, p.65.

Realizing his apparent selfishness, the doctor becomes aware of the effects of his behaviour on others. Product of a patriarchal society, where the idea of masculinity had been exacerbated towards machismo, the psychiatrist is incapable of accommodating his feelings with the image of the ‘man’ he is supposed to conform to. His friend caveat, ‘Experimenta ser homem para variar’,<sup>373</sup> denotes this very mentality.

As we will perceive later, when analysing *Os Cus de Judas*, Lobo Antunes first three novels are written about and from an exclusively masculine perspective. This gender bound narrative could be the major criticism of his early writing, if it wasn’t the case that Lobo Antunes seems to be aware that the narrative he produces is in fact masculinised. Consequently, he introduces several instances where this is visible. The most obvious is when fantasising about a red head girl he had just met in the waiting room of the dentist, we learn that the psychiatrist ‘[n]os seus acessos de misoginia o médico costumava classificar as mulheres consoante o tabaco que usavam’.<sup>374</sup> In this humorous passage, the readers learn about the psychiatrist’s classification of women, a misogynistic gesture that is identified by the narrator himself. One of these classifications also serves another purpose, that of mocking the social movements of the time, with each brand of cigarettes corresponding to a woman and each woman to a different social group. Thus, it is interesting to note the following classification: ‘o estilo Português Suave não se pintava, cortava as unhas rentes, estudava Anti-Psiquiatria e agonizava de paixões oblíquas por

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<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid. p.78.

cantores de intervenção feios'.<sup>375</sup> The 'taxonomy' is wide-reaching and no social group is spared. The one classification in question seems to apply to a certain type, align with the radical left-wing, with the particular mention of Anti-Psychiatry being an indicator of a certain distancing the author is trying to implement towards social movements. Confirming his rebel nature, he seeks to distance himself from being aligned with any movement. It is a detachment that takes the form of irony and mockery and yet the mentioning of Wilhelm Reich and Anti-Psychiatry denote that the author is aware of the different schools, debates and tensions within the discipline of psychiatry.

Another example of the uneasiness the psychiatrist feels with the masculine problematic comes with all the force that Kristevan abjection possesses. When confronted by his friend about his masculinity, the doctor cannot suppress the desire of expulsion that had been brewing with his constant nausea. 'Conseguiu ainda alcançar os lavabos e, dobrado para a frente, principiou a expulsar aos arrancos [...] restos confusos do jantar da véspera e do pequeno-almoço'.<sup>376</sup> Once more, abjection becomes a central theme in the novel. Abject images become more frequent as the novel progresses, in a crescendo that will find a climax, as we will see, at the end of the novel. This instance of abjection, however, has particular significance because the psychiatrist's vomiting preludes the final paragraph of the chapter, an apparent rhetorical question that he asks himself in the mirror – 'é mesmo muito fodido ser homem. Não é?'<sup>377</sup> This is, however, rhetoric only in appearance. The very final question,

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<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> Ibid.p.65.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid. p.66.

that short, spoken-language question, ‘Não é?’, that closes the chapter is simultaneously directed to the image in the mirror and to the reader. The fact that the author decides to make it a sentence rather than a clause gives it a singular aspect, transforms it into an independent unit that works as a direct interpellation of the reader in order to confront him/her with his/hers own notions of masculinity and cast an ironic shadow on the psychiatrist’s declaration on how difficult it is to be a man.

This chapter, which consists mainly of the conversation between the psychiatrist and his friend, marks a shift in the novel. It becomes less about what surrounds the psychiatrist and more about his own personal struggles, more introspective. However, before proceeding into the analysis of the rest of the novel, there are other issues, such as the maternal issue and its connection with the theme of abjection, the portrait of patients and the social tensions that influence the perspective of mental illness that cannot be ignored.

Earlier in the aforementioned chapter, when reminiscing about his mother, the psychiatrist manifests a desire of returning to the womb, ‘vontade informulada de te reentrar no útero para um demorado sono mineral sem sonhos’.<sup>378</sup>

In terms of the depiction of the mentally ill, we have already seen a few examples of how the author writes it. Besides the mentioning of the patient to whom the psychiatrist refers as Charlotte Brönte and the black patient who masturbates in the courtyard, there are two other instances where the depiction of patients is important to a better understanding of the work of Lobo Antunes.

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid. p.60.

The first one, still somewhat sympathetic, comes when he is called by the authoritarian nurse to see a patient named Nélia:

‘Há que apertar a tarraxa à Nélia [...] Não se consegue aturar. Ainda agora me disse que queria ver o meu sangue a escorrer aos saltos pelo corredor da enfermaria.’<sup>379</sup>

The nurse seems more interested in controlling and oppressing the girl’s behaviour via medication than to compassionately seek a therapeutic solution. Although the image of blood spurting in every direction is indeed a disturbing one, it is also acknowledged that this is merely an empty threat. The psychiatrist, then, defends the patient against this medicalised attempt of control, alerting the nurse to the cruelty inflicted on the patient. ‘– Tem as nádegas cheias de caroços das injeccões [...] Que lhe posso fazer?’<sup>380</sup>

From this humanising caveat, the psychiatrist quickly jumps into irony, ‘a senhora não acha poética a ideia do seu sangue derramado? Um fim à César, que mais quer? [...] Talvez deem o seu nome a uma ala do hospital: no fim de contas o Miguel Bombarda<sup>381</sup> finou-se de um tiro’.<sup>382</sup> Humorously reminding the nurse of Miguel Bombarda’s fate and hinting towards a martyrdom and iconicism that violent deaths provoke, the psychiatry mocks the romanticism behind this concept. In Lobo Antunes’ writing, the humanising and ironic

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid. p.30.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Miguel Bombarda (1851-1910) was assassinated in his office, with a gunshot, by one of his patients. The then Hospital de Rilhafoles was renamed to Hospital Miguel Bombarda, in homage to the eminent psychiatrist.

<sup>382</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, p.30.

aspects always come together, complementing each other in the rebellion against the institutionalizing and oppressive forces. Humour and irony are the rebellious human traits Lobo Antunes implements in his novels, much like other writers (Erasmus, Céline, Artaud, Kesey, etc.) have done in the past. His particular strand of humour is somewhat tainted by bitterness and sarcasm, manifesting itself in the distortion and exaggeration typical of his style. It is, then, not surprising that Lobo Antunes uses this very same irony to transpose into his prose the socio-political conflicts of post-Revolution Portugal. These conflicts and the ideologies behind them come in the most varied of guises. In an ironic deconstruction of the concept of traditional family (central to the ideology of Salazarism), the psychiatrist is confronted with a family ironically referred to as *Família*, with the capital 'F' evoking undertones of the Catholic idea of traditional threefold family, with a mother (*Mãe*), a father (*Pai*) and a son, referred to as Baby Jesus: 'O Menino Jesus [...] com ar de pássaro aflito, fingia não se aperceber da sua presença fixando os prédios tristes'.<sup>383</sup> The subversiveness of Lobo Antunes writing comes quickly. The psychiatrist notices the helplessness of the youth against the authority of his parents, and mentally vows to protect him, 'Se não protejo o rapaz [...] estraçalham-no em duas dentadas'.<sup>384</sup> The parents are seen as ferocious, cannibalistic figures who will devour their son and the reason for such act seems to be the 'deviance' of his behaviour: 'Senhor doutor, disse com a pompa de uma declaração de guerra, saiba vossência que este sacana droga-se'.<sup>385</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.* p.48.

<sup>384</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>385</sup> *Ibid.*

The substance abuse the parents accuse their son of is, of course, seen as a major fault in the sixteen year old's behaviour and, perhaps not surprisingly, the parents are not seeking help or understanding, but punishment:

– O meu filho tem que ser i-me-di-a-ta-men-te internado, ordenou ela [...]. Pastilhas é o que se vê, anda-me a repetir o quarto ano, falta ao respeito aos pais, responde torto se responde, contou-me a vizinha de baixo que o viram no Rato com uma desgraçada [...]. Confesse-me cá: está de acordo? [...] Umas semanas de hospital é do que ele necessita para se endireitar [...]. Uma pouca-vergonha ninguém pôr termo nisto: desde que o Salazar morreu vamos de descalabro em descalabro.<sup>386</sup>

The mother's request for internment, for an authoritarian punishment and repression is exacerbated by the evocation of Salazar, denoting a social attitude that associates the institutional power of Psychiatry with authoritarian state control. As if the suggestion of Salazar wasn't enough, the father cements the mother's repressive views by, in a Foucaultian reference, suggesting an equivalence between a psychiatric hospital and a prison: '– Um hospital ou uma prisão'.<sup>387</sup> The disappearance of the 'father figure' of the dictatorship and the social disintegration attributed to its disappearance causes anxiety and the need for a return to a 'normalisation' is voiced by these parents.

Lobo Antunes is sensitive towards the social perceptions of the time and the tension they exert over the institution of psychiatry. However, he does not excuse the reflection of dictatorial in the mind set of some elements within the institution. A scathing comment on the regime and its consequences comes with two images that are particularly subversive when contrasted and compared with each other. It is not only with empathy that Lobo Antunes describes the reality

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<sup>386</sup> Ibid. pp.49-50.

<sup>387</sup> Ibid. p.50.

of mental patients. Madness, like every other aspect of society is not immune from the influence of a dictatorial regime. Thus, when ‘infecting’ individual mental illness, the ideology of Salazarism is destructive:

Havia um doente no hospital dele, [...] o senhor Joaquim, [...] que estava em comunicação permanente e directa com o antigo presidente do conselho [...] e de quem recebia ordens secretas para a condução de negócios públicos. Guarda-republicano numa vila perdida da planície agarrou um dia na caçadeira contra os conterrâneos [...]. De tempos a tempos o psiquiatra recebia cartas do povoado [...] pedindo para não libertar aquele apavorante emissário de um fantasma.

[...] - Senhor Joaquim o nosso professor faleceu há mais de três quinze dias. [...]

- Foi tudo a fingir, senhor doutor. Pôs lá um parecido com ele e a Oposição engoliu o isco: ainda há coisa de um quarto de hora me nomeou ministro das Finanças [...]<sup>388</sup>

The dangerousness of the patient, hinted to be a schizophrenic due to the symptomatic described, lies not only in the physical violence with which he threatens his fellow villagers with but also in the incarnation of Salazarism that haunts the country, still after Salazar’s demise. The virulent malevolence associated with the regime is not only manifested in the patients but also in those who belong to the supposedly therapeutic enterprise.

- Meu caro [...] que me diz à conspiração dos comunistas? [...]

Na semana anterior o médico vira-o procurar de cócoras microfones do KGB ocultos sob o tampo da secretária, prontos a transmitirem para Moscovo as decisivas mensagens dos seus diagnósticos.<sup>389</sup>

The suspicion of this other psychiatrist towards the communists denotes a degree of paranoia not uncommon with those whose symptoms are attributed to mental illness. This particular doctor’s paranoia puts him at the same level of

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid. p.102.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid. pp.35-36.

the schizophrenic patient, both equally contaminated by the ‘mad’ and paranoid discourse of ideology. In this respect, Lobo Antunes writing becomes subversive as it breaks down the barrier between madness and sanity, implying that ideology is separate to both and that the distinction between when ideology is the fruit of madness or when it is fruit of rational thinking is purely in the hands of those who have the power to diagnose. In this case, the ‘ideological madness’ of the doctor is not recognised and medically labelled, on the contrary to the patient. The hypocrisy of such exemption is another comment on the political power of psychiatry and on the lack of scrutiny doctors were subjected to in Post-Revolution Portugal. The apparent superior status of the class in which the doctor is included is crudely announced by himself, ‘Conte-me cá: vê-se a comer à mesa com um carpinteiro?’<sup>390</sup>. To this insidious question, the psychiatrist’s answer is ironic: ‘Porque não?’<sup>391</sup>. This answer irritates the clearly more conservative doctor, who launches himself into a tirade of criticism towards the psychiatrist. ‘Porque não? [...] você é um anarquista, um marginal, você pactua com o Leste, você aprova a entrega do Ultramar aos pretos’.<sup>392</sup>

This rant aggravates the psychiatrist and the reference to the Ultramar<sup>393</sup> (the first in the novel), as we will see, ignite the psychiatrist’s traumatic memories of Africa and the war.

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<sup>390</sup> Ibid. p.37.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid. p.38.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid.

<sup>393</sup> Colonialist designation for the Portuguese ‘overseas territory’.

In this passage, it seems that Lobo Antunes is trying to convey two different things. Firstly, he critiques the prevalent mentality of psychiatrists within the institutional machine, too cosy with the political spheres and ideologies of the country, when it should remain a therapeutic, patient-focused and politically neutral space. Lobo Antunes emphasizes, with the conservative doctor, a culture of self-entitlement and class superiority the psychiatrist's colleague exhibits. The hermetic and privileged position of institutional Psychiatry is challenged in the same way that Thomas Szasz challenged Charcot and Freud:

To Charcot and Freud, these patients are mere objects or things to be classified and manipulated. It is an utterly dehumanized view of the sick person. But then, we might recall that even today physicians often speak of 'cases' and 'clinical material' rather than of persons.<sup>394</sup>

Secondly, the author is trying to establish a genealogical link between the Portuguese dictatorial regime and narratives of madness, as if from such a regime only madness could be spawned. Both narratives, the patient's and the doctor's are born out the discourse of authoritarian ideology and, therefore, both are seen as mad. But none is spared the critical scrutiny from the author. By differentiating between the discourse of this patient, politically and ideologically charged, and the discourse from other patients, Lobo Antunes is both acknowledging the dangerousness of ideology-infused madness and trying to compassionately reason with the human dimension of the patient. The doctor, however, does not get the same sympathetic treatment. Not only does he equate the doctor's paranoia of communism with those manifested by the schizophrenic

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<sup>394</sup> Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness: Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct*, p.19.

patient, he contrasts his discourse with the psychiatrists own thoughts and even another patient's opinion.

‘Que sabe este palerma de África [...] para além dos cínicos e imbecis argumentos obstinados da Acção Nacional Popular e dos discursos de seminário das botas mentais do Salazar [...]’<sup>395</sup>, thinks the psychiatrist midway through his mental rant against the accusations of his colleague. Legitimising the language and vision of another patient, the psychiatrist borrows the image, ‘virgem sem útero mascarada de homem, filho de dois cónegos explicou-me uma ocasião uma doente’<sup>396</sup> to contrast the ideological mind-set of the doctor with the social and political consequences of that same ideology.

These consequences are something that the psychiatrist is physically aware of. Thus, the mental reaction against his colleague comes with no surprise. Unveiling the psychiatrist's involvement in the Colonial War for the first time in the novel, Lobo Antunes discloses some of the psychiatrist's traumatic memories that the mentioning of Africa activates:

Que sabe este tipo de África, [...] que sabe este caramelo de cinquenta anos da guerra de África onde não morreu nem viu morrer, que sabe este cretino dos administradores de posto que enterravam cubos de gelo no ânus dos negros que lhes desagradavam, que sabe este parvo da angústia de ter de escolher entre o exílio despaisado e a absurda estupidez dos tiros sem razão, que sabe este animal das bombas de napalm, das raparigas grávidas espancadas pela Pide, das minas a florirem sob as rodas das camionetas em cogumelos de fogo, da saudade, do medo, da raiva, da solidão, do desespero?<sup>397</sup>

The recollections of Africa are painful and traumatic. In this quasi-expressionist passage we are told of the horrors that, we suspect, the psychiatrist has been

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<sup>395</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, p.39.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.* pp.38-39.

exposed to. With this string of descriptions of atrocities and the expression of feelings such as despair, solitude and fear, the psychiatrist is acting as a shaman who channels the feelings and the traumas of an entire generation. He is speaking of fifty years of war as if he was concatenating a multiplicity of voices belonging to that generation of men that had, like him, to choose between exile and war. A damned choice, both options charged with unpleasant consequences. Political oppression in Portugal also meant that young men were sent, as conscripts, to fight in a country that was not theirs (a kind of violent exile). Witness to this individual and collective trauma, the psychiatrist (and Lobo Antunes) serve as a medium for this trauma. The theme will resurface again in the other two novels of the trilogy and in many of the author's chronicles and later novels, denoting the importance of the war and its traumatic consequences in the writer's artistic core.

In terms of writing realistically about mental illness, Lobo Antunes is undoubtedly aware of the symptoms associated with the entire spectrum of psychiatric diagnoses. However, he refuses to attribute any medical nomenclature to mental afflictions and seems to reject diagnostic jargons and labels. Instead, in a writing that explores human experience rather than scientific definitions and impositions, Lobo Antunes inscribes his texts with descriptions of human sufferings that, although corresponding with those appearing in psychiatric manuals, are not objectivised and grouped in well-structured, well-defined categories.

It is not here implied that Lobo Antunes, as a psychiatrist does not agree with the necessity of having some degree of classification of mental disorders. If his literary production informs the readers about his medical ethics and

personal conduct as a doctor, it shows a certain uneasiness with the cold, over-scientific description of mental illness and the obsession of Psychiatry with labels and definition. By rejecting to transpose medical language he is familiar with into his novels, the author is making use of his literary creativity, amongst other things, to emphasize the human dimension he feels lacking in the discipline of psychiatry. Consequently, words and expressions such as ‘depression’ or ‘post-traumatic stress disorder’ are not clearly stated in the novels but rather hinted at by way of description of the human dimension behind psychiatric definitions.

Then, instead of these medically charged words, Lobo Antunes uses other, more creative terms. Notice the inclusion of the word ‘despaisado’ in the passage. It will reappear in several of Lobo Antunes’ novels and it is present in all the novels that constitutes the corpus of this thesis. Etymologically, it derives from the French ‘dépaysement’ and its usage is uncommon in Portuguese. Lobo Antunes introduces this unusual word in his novel to convey the feeling one gets in French<sup>398</sup>: disorientation, confusion, a ‘neither here nor there’ state of mind of an individual.

The use of the word in the text does not, judging by its frequency and the discernment with which it is used, appear accidentally. Lobo Antunes is drawing attention to a sentiment that seems persistent in his novels, that of confusion and the unsettled lives of his characters. As it will become clear in the subsequent

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<sup>398</sup> ‘*Dépaysar*: Faire rompre ses habitudes à quelqu'un en le mettant dans un pays, une région très différentes de ceux où il habite par le décor, le climat, les habitudes. Troubler quelqu'un, le désorienter en le changeant de milieu et en le mettant dans une situation qui lui donne un sentiment d'étrangeté.’  
<http://www.larousse.fr/dictionnaires/francais/d%C3%A9paysar/23729?q=d%C3%A9paysar#23608> ) [Accessed 25 July 2014].

novels, this word has particular relevance when applied to the returning conscripts. ‘Despaisado’ becomes, in Lobo Antunes’ works, an umbrella term for the description of mental afflictions, whether it is referring to depression or post-traumatic stress disorder.

The chapter ends shortly after the mental tirade, but not without a surprising turn. Instead of the normally corrosive sarcastic writing, the reader is presented with a much more affective and poignant language. Coinciding with a constant shift from the first to the third person narrative, the psychiatrist’s love for his wife is evoked:

A imagem da mulher à espera dele entre as mangueiras de Marimba [...] apareceu-lhe numa guinada de saudade [...] Amo-te tanto que te não sei amar, amo tanto o teu corpo e o que em ti não é o teu corpo que não compreendo porque nos perdemos se a cada passo te encontro [...] <sup>399</sup>

The fleeting glimpse into the affective dimension of the psychiatrist’s life resurfaces every now and again in the novel, always in tenderness and with the melancholy of loss. Every time it does, it reemphasises a major problematic of the author’s novels, invariably linked with the concept of family and intrapersonal relationships – the loss/absence of affectivity

In the tension of their affects [...] they experience both their belonging to and distance from an archaic other that still eludes representation and naming, but of whose corporeal emissions, along with their automatism, they still bear the imprint. Unbelieving in language, the depressive persons are affectionate, wounded to be sure, but prisoners of affect. <sup>400</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, pp.39-40.

<sup>400</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun, Depression and Melancholia*, p.14.

Affect is, indeed, a crucial trope in the novel. As mentioned above, after the chapter<sup>401</sup> (between pages 55 and 66) where the psychiatrist meets his friend for lunch, the novel undertakes a shift. The narrative becomes more introspective when, paradoxically, the narrative voice shifts chiefly to the third person. The novel becomes more about the physical existence of the psychiatrist and his precarious mental condition rather than a diatribe against psychiatry and other oppressive forces. ‘Entre a Angola que perdera e a Lisboa que não reganhara o médico sentia-se duplamente órfão, e esta condição de despaisado continuara dolorosamente a prolongar-se porque muita coisa se alterara na sua ausência’.<sup>402</sup>

Slowly, Lobo Antunes discloses the full picture of the psychiatrist’s life, always in relation with the realities of madness. ‘Fizera da vida uma camisola de forças em que se lhe tornava impossível mover-se’.<sup>403</sup> The ever-increasing spectre of abjection also becomes more palpable in the second half of the novel, whether implied or described clearly. In a voyeuristic scene, the psychiatrist is spying his two daughters coming out of school from a hiding distance, he is mistaken by a paedophile. Inevitably, this suggestion provokes nausea, a discomfort with his own self: ‘E pela segunda vez nesse dia o psiquiatra teve vontade de se vomitar a si próprio, longamente, até ficar vazio de todo o lastro de merda que tinha’.<sup>404</sup>

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<sup>401</sup> *Memória de Elefante* does not have numbered or titled chapters. Their division is more organic and appears only marked by a blank page in between them.

<sup>402</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Memória de Elefante*, p.82.

<sup>403</sup> *Ibid.* p.88.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*p.97.

The abject dimension becomes more and more visible, not only through the abject description of the world that surrounds him, but especially through a self-projected hate that seeks abjection as the only source of solace. Before the climatic burgeoning of the abject that comes in the end of the novel, the psychiatrist is still subjected to another episode which transports the reader to the first half of the novel. The difference here is that, instead of being in the periphery looking in, he is put in the centre of the problem. In a visit to a psychotherapist, the psychiatrist, usually the rebellious ‘analysand, becomes the rebellious ‘analysed’. He no longer belongs to the sphere of those who represent the tip of the institutional apparatus, the doctors, but to those outside it, being subjected to its power, the patients who are scrutinised and analysed. The reader is then, confronted with a scene that is histrionic and unnerving, with the Antunesian familiar trait of exaggeration and humorous bitterness coming back in force. Sarcasm and vulgarity again become the language in which the psychiatrist expresses his mental woes:

Que porra de lavagem à cornadura é esta que saio daqui torcido como um velho com reumático [...], alma de rafeiro a ganir a caminho de casa, e no entanto volto, volto pontualmente dia sim dia não para receber mais [...] uma indiferença total e nenhuma resposta às minhas angústias concretas [...]: Freud da puta judia que te pariu vai levar no cu do teu Édipo.<sup>405</sup>

The animosity felt by the psychiatrist is visible, ‘em vez de declarar Merda para todos disse Boa tarde’<sup>406</sup> and is revealing about the effect of the role reversal between doctor and patient. The psychiatrist reacts negatively and with suspicion to being subjected to psychiatric group analysis, questioning the

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<sup>405</sup> Ibid. p.113.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

validity and usefulness of such procedure. With this challenging attitude towards the very discipline in which he works, the psychiatrist is validating the suspicions and negative views that the patients often have of the mental health services. If he, a product of the medical school, an element within the apparatus, feels animosity towards the system, why should not a patient feel it too? The subversiveness of the reversal further emphasises the human level of Lobo Antunes writing, as it places it outside any engagement with ideology, seeking only human understanding and compassion. In human terms, the better understanding of each other is clearly expressed by the psychiatrist: ‘Venho aqui há não sei quantos anos [...] e ainda não vos conheço bem nem aprendi a conhecer-vos, a entender o que quereis da vida, o que esperais dela’.<sup>407</sup>

Notwithstanding the violent negativity manifested against the group analysis session, the reader starts to question the reliability of the narrator when it starts to be perceived that all of the psychiatrist’s animosity and suspicion could be a self-defence mechanism. After all, it is the psychiatrist’s intimate self who that is being questioned. The projected negativity arising from this self-defence is manifested towards the figure of the analyst himself: ‘o analista, na aparência cataléptico, [...] além de ser feio veste-se cada vez pior: [...] no íntimo desejaria que o analista se vestisse segundo os seus próprios padrões de elegância, aliás discutíveis e vagos’.<sup>408</sup>

The group therapy session is not, however, a hostile place. Unlike most of the chapters in the novel, the inner life of (other) characters is here allowed to

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid. p.114.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid. p. 115.

come to the surface as a narrative presented in the dialogues with the therapist. It is easily perceived that the session is a space in which the participants are welcome to open up. Not surprisingly, the inner lives of the other participants is also troubled and disturbed. One of the participants, '[o] terceiro homem do grupo'<sup>409</sup> tells the rest of the group that 'lhe agradaria que a filha morresse para receber mais atenção da mulher'.<sup>410</sup> The shocking confession is followed by a general statement: 'Se calhar temos todos vontade de matar as pessoas de quem gostamos'.<sup>411</sup>

Despite the man's gruesome wish, the group remains a harmonious and welcoming environment. The participants are not only participants of a therapy session, but of a community which shares similar ailments and sufferings. The fact that the psychiatrist perceives the community in a more sympathetic light, actually belonging to it and no longer isolated, emphasises the positive aspect of the gathering of such community. This instance is perhaps the only one where a possibility of catharsis is hinted at, with Lobo Antunes writing the coming together of a community as an act of acceptance and deeper communication between human beings. No matter how many barriers and blocks the psychiatrist and the other participants find in between each other, the simple act of formation of a community does undoubtedly pave the way towards catharsis.

The murderous intention of the man resonates with the psychiatrist, who, motivated by the man's words, opens up to the group. His first feelings of

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<sup>409</sup> Ibid. p.116.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid.

animosity start to be replaced by calmness and the figure of the therapist appears much more sympathetic. The view into the psychiatrist's inner self unravels with tenderness and suffering, with the psychiatrist confessing to his inability of communicating with his wife and children, admitting his own fault in the process. It is then, via the therapist's words, that the masochistic dimension of the psychiatrist's suffering, something that had been hinted throughout the novel, materialises. The psychiatrist's suffering will last, according to the therapist, 'enquanto tiver necessidade de se continuar a punir'.<sup>412</sup> The psychiatrist, at first, seems to finally come to terms with his condition, starting to question himself in the therapist's terms. '[S]erá que me castigo assim, meditou, e se o faço porque diabo o faço?'<sup>413</sup> Briefly, therapy seems to be having some positive effect on the psychiatrist. His path into 'hell', the downwards road he has to follow, nevertheless continues and the brief glimpse towards his betterment is shattered by the session coming to an end. The return to his lonely reality forces, once again, his retreat to his space of trauma and abjection. '[C]ada um destes sacanas tem alguém à espera: esta última constatação fez subir dentro dele uma raiva enorme contra os outros, que se defendiam melhor do polvo gelatinoso da depressão'.<sup>414</sup>

The traumatic return to reality shakes off from the psychiatrist's mind the possibility of finding catharsis in the community. He retreats back into the (dis)comfort of his mundane activities, allied with a masochistic pleasure-

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<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

<sup>413</sup> Ibid.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid. p.120.

seeking behaviour which can only find solace in abjection. The psychiatrist's catharsis must consequently be found by himself on his own, *in* himself. 'Sozinho na noite [...] o psiquiatra apoiou as mãos no volante e começou a chorar [...]. Sentia-se muito indefeso e muito só e sem vontade [...] de chamar por ninguém porque (sabia-o) há travessias que só se podem efectuar sozinho, sem ajudas'.<sup>415</sup>

After the group therapy session, night falls and the psychiatrist finally enters that hellish Célinean night where abjection is the norm. Returning home after a squalid dinner in a sordid restaurant, the psychiatrist drives home through Lisbon while his mind wanders. In Lobo Antunes' novels, the act of driving seems to equate to a descent towards hell. In the closing novel of the trilogy, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, driving is the only *real* activity that happens for the entirety of the novel whilst the mental space of the narrator wanders through many different places, situations and times, mostly traumatic recollections of war, the psychiatric hospital and his disastrous personal life. The physical act of driving serves as a catalyst for the unleashing of the abject hell that constitutes the psychiatrist's mental narrative and existence. It is in the lost wanderings of his mind that abjection takes its most telling shape. In the short drive between the restaurant and his apartment, the psychiatrist recalls the neighbourhood in which he lives, he reactivates the geographical memory of certain parts of the city that appease him and the people who live in his apartment block, in particular Senhor Ferreira. The psychiatrist recalls not really the man himself (in fact he seems unremarkable) but a specific object belonging to the man, displayed in the flat. Using the man's telephone (the psychiatrist implies he does

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<sup>415</sup> Ibid. p.123.

not have one in his own flat), he stumbles into a curious tapestry that simultaneously arouses his curiosity and terrifies him. '[U]ma grande tapeçaria de parede representando um casal de tigres [...] a almoçarem numa repugnância de vegetarianos uma gazela semelhante a um coelho magrinho, fitando um horizonte de azinheiras na esperança lânguida de um milagre'.<sup>416</sup> The huge tapestry with the tigers has definitely an effect on him, as he 'quedava-se sempre [...] a examinar estupefacto tão abracadrabante realização'.<sup>417</sup> Such apparition is unpleasant but mesmerizing. The image of the tigers reluctantly eating the rabbit is the condensed symbol of the abjection in the psychiatrist's life. Its significance gathers strength in the fact that it permeates the psychiatrist's memory before a crucial act of abjection and in the very reaction it draws from him. The abjection the psychiatrist, like modernity, longs to repress seeps out explosively into the grotesque image of the tapestry. It is the physical manifestation of his depression and suffering. In its ridiculousness, tackiness and kitsch (like a fake substitute for a life lived in the *real*) the tapestry is the idealisation of the psychiatrist by himself. The tapestry *is* how the psychiatrist sees himself, it *is* the self-image constructed by the depressed and masochistic mind of the psychiatrist. It is terrifying, as an encounter with his double (doppelganger?) would most certainly terrify him.

In the final chapters of the novel, after the mental apparition of the tapestry, the reader sees the psychiatrist gambling in the casino and picking up a prostitute named Dóri. The final car journey to his flat, in which Dóri rides on

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<sup>416</sup> Ibid. p.132.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

the passenger seat is almost unbearably grotesque. Her conversations with the psychiatrist are trite and ridiculous, with her linguistic mannerisms being emphasised for effect. They go to a bar before going back to his flat. It is assumed that they will have sex and the abject carnivalesque scene reaches an end.

The very final chapter of the novel (also the shortest) starts with the psychiatrist getting up at five in the morning of the next day. The opening sentence, along with the temporal localisation of the narrative, brings back the memory of the psychiatrist's wife. 'São cinco horas da manhã e juro que não sinto a tua falta'.<sup>418</sup> Referring to her in the second person, the psychiatrist evokes her memory in the most direct of ways, this indicating that his wife is in the fore of his mind. The rest of the chapter (which is one page long) consists of a long passage addressed to her explaining his newly found happiness in which, paradoxically, he denies having been thinking about her. 'Palavra de honra que não penso em ti'.<sup>419</sup>

However, the announcement of his happiness – 'Sinto-me bem, alegre, livre, contente'<sup>420</sup> – is denounced as fake by both the paradox of his denial and by the presence of many grotesque elements popping up like tainted water lilies in this apparent pond of happiness. The betrayal to his wife is suggested by the many abject images present in this chapter, whether they are the prostitute's dentures ('dentadura postiça'), the birds' excrement ('dejectos endurecidos dos pássaros') or the very final image of the novel, resurfacing again with all of its

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<sup>418</sup> Ibid. p.155.

<sup>419</sup> Ibid.

<sup>420</sup> Ibid.

power, the tigers' tapestry: 'Talvez mesmo, meu amor, que compre uma tapeçaria de tigres [...]: podes achar idiota mas preciso de qualquer coisa que me ajude a existir'.<sup>421</sup>

The co-existence of these abject elements with an 'idealized' existence in which the psychiatrist is happy is the final 'schizophrenic' state that permits the psychiatrist to continue existing, the climax of abjection where only an idealised, fake existence is permitted to continue. But it is also the final 'madness' in which Lobo Antunes inscribes his psychiatrist, denying him a possibility of catharsis which cannot be attained without self-sacrifice and pain, if catharsis is indeed possible at all. The hell in which the author inscribes the psychiatrist is the lasting reminder of a humanity that, despite the abjection of its flaws, is capable of remembering and resisting. The wound is kept open so that memory, no matter how traumatic, can exist and matter, being articulated in literature and thus having an impact on the cultural and social perceptions of human experience(s). Lobo Antunes, being a writer of abjection, does not permit in his literature that narratives which exist outside the discourse of 'normalisation', outside the normative existence of sanity, are brushed under the carpet and ignored. As Kristeva aptly puts it: 'One must keep open the wound where he or she who enters into the analytic adventure is located – a wound that the professional establishment, along with the cynicism of the times and of institutions, will soon manage to close up'.<sup>422</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> Ibid.

<sup>422</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror, An Essay on Abjection*, p.27.

## CHAPTER 5

### Os Cus de Judas

‘Quando publiquei *Os Cus de Judas* tive muitos problemas porque contava algumas coisas, [...] foi um grande escândalo aqui em 1979 porque depois da Revolução toda a gente queria esquecer’.<sup>423</sup> Lobo Antunes’ second novel, *Os Cus de Judas* was published in the same year as its predecessor and whilst in *Memória de Elefante* the theme of war was present in the background, permeating the text only in an elliptical way and only occasionally referred to directly, in *Os Cus de Judas* the war comes to the fore front of the text, becoming its epicentre.

It is significant that the two novels were published in the same year. If *Memória* was about the soldier’s difficulty to reintegrate back into his family and profession, *Os Cus* is about the traumatised masculinity of the returned male subject and the painful memories of war. If the first novel was focused on the act of remembering, the latter is focused on the impossibility of forgetting. Either way, the novels are two sides of the same coin and the fact that Lobo Antunes decided to publish them in the same year only reinforces that.

The author acknowledges the importance of the publication of the novel in the Portuguese literary scene, as the ‘grande escândalo’ that his book caused clearly seems to demonstrate the wide ranging importance of the issue of war in Portuguese society of the time (and still of today). ‘[T]oda a gente queria esquecer’ and yet the novel caused controversy and catapulted its author to literary fame. Following his own artistic pathos, Lobo Antunes puts the finger in

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<sup>423</sup> Maria Luísa Blanco, p.153.

the wound that, five years after the fall of the dictatorship, still bled within society, especially for an entire generation of men who fought in the conflict. Expanding from what it is a very personal and individual experience, narrated in *Memória*, Lobo Antunes writes what seems to be an emblematic, iconic novel for an entire generation. The individual traumatic memory becomes the collective memory of a country, traumatised by its own madness of war. As the reader will perceive later, the traumatic dimension explored in the novel is of paramount importance for the understanding of Portuguese identity and culture, while also permitting a dialogue with the specific issue of PTSD as both a collective and an individual experience. Portugal's specific historical, social and literary contexts make it the perfect case-study for the intersection and concatenation of the various themes at play in the type of approach chosen in this thesis. At the same time it permits the transposition of such themes and experiences to other contexts (geographical, historical, scientific, sociological, etc.), enlightening them and contributing, even if as only an outsider looking in, to a better and broader understanding of the human experience. The novel here examined is, in my opinion, one of the best examples of world literature where all of these forces are at play and where their multifaceted consequences are visible.

The novel's structure is organized in twenty-three chapters, each one corresponding to a letter of the Portuguese alphabet (which does not possess the letters *k*, *w*, or *y*). Stylistically, despite being very similar to its predecessor, there is a crucial change in the narrative voice. In *Os Cus de Judas*, there is no longer a vacillation between the third and the first person narration, the novel being written in its entirety in the first person. This change is particularly significant.

Let us be reminded that the trilogy is called ‘Trilogia da Aprendizagem’ (‘Trilogy of Learning’) and that in this second instalment there seems to have been a decisive step towards a more definitive authorial voice. It also accentuates both the autobiographical dimension of the novel as well as the focus on the individuality of the experience and memory narrated in the novel. Lobo Antunes’ narrator is no longer in a narrative limbo, but in a concrete and solid traumatic place of his memory– the war in Angola. The shift indicates that on one hand, whilst the return to Lisbon and to his job that constitute the main plot of *Memória* was a confused, unsettled (and unsettling) experience, an ambiguous and troubling memory of an existence post-trauma, on the other hand, the memory of Angola and the war (main themes of *Os Cus*) are a well defined place of trauma, existing clearly within the inner life and memory of the narrator. His identity is less affected by uncertainty, harboured in a somewhat heightened sense of masculinity, which becomes the exclusively masculine narrative of the novel.

The action of the novel unfolds in two distinct ways, the physical and the psychological. In terms of its physical action, the novel is almost static as nearly all of it takes place in a bar, where the narrator speaks with an unnamed woman. The psychological movement is, however, much more restless. Spatial and temporal digressions between the present time in which the story is told and the past experience in the war are constantly emerging, interconnecting and intertwining, thus constituting the main body of narrative in the novel. This restless and digressive (mental) aspect denounces the need for a catharsis, something that Lobo Antunes’ first novels aim for. ‘[N]os dois primeiros romances de António Lobo Antunes encontramos a intenção directa de fazer a

“purga” da guerra, surgindo esta como móbil racional, ou, de modo mais explícito, como autobiografia “mais consciente”.<sup>424</sup>

This need to ‘purge’ the war by going through the catharsis that the first novels represent seems to be Lobo Antunes’ literary answer to a problem expounded by Eduardo Lourenço:

Treze anos de guerra colonial, derrocada abrupta desse império, pareciam acontecimentos destinados não só a criar na nossa consciência *um traumatismo profundo* [...] mas a um repensamento em profundidade da *totalidade da nossa imagem perante nós mesmos e no espelho do mundo*.<sup>425</sup>

*Os Cus de Judas* is, from the three novels that compose the trilogy, the one that addresses this issue more directly, more violently. The necessity of self scrutiny highlighted by Lourenço (a scrutiny that is not only individual but collective, national) is translated into literature by Lobo Antunes who, in an important stylistic choice, makes the narrator of the novel confide his story to an unnamed, and indeed silent, woman. She remains silent throughout the novel and her existence is only disclosed to the reader by some of the narrator remarks, normally a question or an interjection that opens the chapter: ‘Conhece Santa Margarida?’<sup>426</sup>, ‘Cá estamos. Não. Não bebi demais’.<sup>427</sup>

Feminist literary criticism would point to this silence as problematic because it denounces the text as gender biased and patriarchal. In fact, the treatment of women in Lobo Antunes’ early novels is a contentious matter: one has only to recall, in *Memória de Elefante*, the passage in which the narrator

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<sup>424</sup> Do Vale Cardoso, p.29.

<sup>425</sup> Eduardo, Lourenço, *O Labirinto da Saudade*, p.46.

<sup>426</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Os Cus de Judas*, p.19.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.* p.119.

confesses his ‘acessos de misóginia’ and the subsequent classification of women by the cigarette brands they smoke. A close reading of the novel *solely* as text, which would dismiss the wider context of Antunian writing, could justifiably point out the treatment of female characters (or for the matter, their absence) as a major limitation in his early novelistic production. However, given the autobiographical circumstances that affected the writing of these novels, it is possible to perceive that Lobo Antunes is simultaneously criticizing while still perpetuating a patriarchal view of the world. The limitations of his writing are the limitations that he himself, as a man and author is perhaps guilty of. He is a *male* product of a patriarchal society, a soldier taught to embrace an exclusively masculine view and who, due to the imposition of these values (whether by education or by an idea of masculinity based upon a conservative, misogynistic society), finds himself divorced, alone, disappointed and, most importantly, suffering:

[O] modo negativo como o masculino constrói a(s) imagem(ns) do feminino, têm, contudo, de ser necessariamente articuladas com uma outra dimensão do género (um outro retrato) que resulta da leitura do conjunto de romances que compõem o ciclo da aprendizagem [...] As mais evidentes e assumidas relações que as matérias destas narrativas mantêm com o percurso de vida de António Lobo Antunes não podem deixar de apresentar uma outra vertente, um outro retrato (o das *suas* mulheres), que [...] em tudo (ou em quase tudo), é composto a partir de traços diversos dos que caracterizam o feminino que povoa os restantes romances.<sup>428</sup>

It is, then, necessary to analyse the novel from a different perspective. In order to perceive the depth of Lobo Antunes’ text, the reader must be attentive to the dimensions of both humorous self-deprecation and ruthless self-scrutiny

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<sup>428</sup> Ana Paula Arnaut, *As Mulheres na Ficção de António Lobo Antunes: (In)Variantes do Feminino* (Lisboa: Texto Editora, 2012) p.118.

present in most of his literary creations. This self-scrutiny permits a critical approach to not only the narrator but also to the author himself. The reader knows the autobiographical charge of this novel and by developing it ironically, Lobo Antunes is inviting a reading that is ruthlessly critical, devoid of any sentimentality that his biography could elicit, the same critical sharpness he demands from the reader when in his novels he criticises the oppressive institutions and ideologies they have spawned. It is again an invitation to the participatory role of the reader, who should interpret his stylistic choices critically and transport that critical approach from the text to wider reality itself.

Analysed from this angle, the existence of this 'silent woman' permits a different, more complex, articulation of the narrator with the Other and, crucially, with himself. By confronting the reader with a misogynistic narrator, Lobo Antunes exposes the hyper-masculinity of the militarised male subject, heightened by the trauma of war and issues such as PTSD.

'Most male soldiers, having been trained into the ideals of hyper-masculinity, learn there is little place in the military family for them to raise emotions or reactions that do not accord with those ideals'.<sup>429</sup> No wonder, then, the misogynistic attitude of the narrator who, by having those ideals challenged by his experiences in Africa, is impelled to repress (and suppress) the feminine counterpart to his narrative. The feminine silence in *Os Cus de Judas* denotes the desire of the narrator to reinstate the ideals that have been put into question, by denying the existence of a narrative that does not correspond to the

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<sup>429</sup> Sandra Whitworth, 'Militarized Masculinity and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder' in *Rethinking the Wo/man Question in International Relations*, ed. by Jane Parpart and Marysia Zalewski (Zed Books, London, 2008) pp.109-164 (p.64).

expectations of this hyper-masculinity.<sup>430</sup> This suppression resonates with the realities of PTSD: ‘Male soldiers who experience PTSD discover they have not successfully obliterated the feminine other and indeed risk becoming “women”’.<sup>431</sup> ‘Felizmente que a tropa há-de torná-lo um homem’<sup>432</sup> proclaim the narrator’s aunts, in their ancient voices. They are summoned, with their ‘dentaduras postiças de indiscutível autoridade’<sup>433</sup> alongside the ‘homens da família [...] se destinavam simplesmente a discutir os méritos fofos das nádegas da criada’<sup>434</sup> in a scene that evokes centuries of ‘heroic’ history, stagnated in a family context that perpetuates imposed values of misogyny (the men discussing the servant’s behind) and of religious tradition, in a quasi-surreal atmosphere of oppression through which Portugal’s political figures manifest themselves simultaneously in ghostly forms and through various imagetic media (like photographs and paintings), haunting the sphere of the private to justify the madness of military action:

O espectro de Salazar pairava sobre as calvas pias labaredazinhas de Espírito Santo corporativo, salvando-nos da ideia tenebrosa e deletéria do socialismo. A Pide prosseguia corajosamente a sua valorosa cruzada contra a noção sinistra de democracia [...] O

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<sup>430</sup> The culture of *machismo* and the fabrication of an ideological hyper-masculinity will only exacerbate trauma. ‘[...] [A] família portuguesa da burguesia salazarista acreditava que o serviço militar valorizava a passagem à idade adulta dos mancebos [...]. A lembrança [...] agravava no narrador a revolta contra a violência que foi infligida aos jovens do seu tempo, obrigados a um combate que não escolheram [...]’ ed. by. Maria Alzira Seixo, *et al.*, *Dicionário da Obra de António Lobo Antunes (Vol.I)* (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional-Casa Da Moeda, 2008) p. 91.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>432</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Os Cus de Judas*, p.16.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.* p.17.

cardeal Cerejeira, emoldurado, garantia a perpetuidade [...] dos pobres domesticados. O desenho que representava o povo em uivos de júbilo ateu em torno de uma guilhotina libertária fora definitivamente exilado para o sótão.<sup>435</sup>

The understanding of trauma cannot therefore be separated from the wider context of society, history and politics of a country or a culture. Such intrusion in the private sphere of the family denotes a constant interference of ideology in an individual's private life, logically constructing a specific psychological existence whose trauma has the potential to emerge. In Lobo Antunes' case, trauma emerges against this oppressive and very traditional background, which only exacerbates the difficulties in understanding the full consequences of war in a traumatised, psychologically entrenched *hyper-masculinized* male subject.

Even though the political realities of Portugal in the 60s and 70s cannot be applied to most modern countries, the experience narrated in the novel can nevertheless be translated to several contemporary contexts, as the realities of war and conflict have not gone away. The traumatic consequences upon individuals who are products of hyper-masculine military ideologies can be understood and analysed against Lobo Antunes' account via his traumatised narrator, as can the interferences from politics, ideology and other collective milieus be thought upon and scrutinised on to which extent they contribute to an exacerbation of trauma on those same individuals.

However, politics and ideology are not the only intrusions on the traumatised self. The opening image of the novel is that of a black roller skating teacher in the Zoo<sup>436</sup>, for whom the narrator professes his preference amongst all

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<sup>435</sup> Ibid.

<sup>436</sup> The Jardim Zoológico in Lisbon has a skating rink. To avoid any potential confusion, I clarify that the author is referring to a black skating teacher who is performing his professional activity.

things in the Zoo. The image triggers a series of recollections about the animals he used to visit as a child, in a description that takes shape in a crossed narrative between visions of animality and other elements from the narrator life and imagination, creating a surreal picture of hyperreality:

[Q]uando nós lá íamos com o meu pai, os bichos eram mais bichos, a solidão de esparguete da girafa assemelhava-se à de um Gulliver triste [...] [A]vestruzes idênticas a professoras de ginástica solteiras, pinguins trôpegos de joanetes de contínuo, catatuas de cabeça à banda como apreciadores de quadros<sup>437</sup>

By transposing anthropomorphic qualities to the animals he is describing the narrator creates an unsettling image, where the intersection between human and animal realities gives the reader a sense of unease, of displacement. It is, indeed, a displaced image, with the domesticated wildness in the Zoo resembling human affairs, as if one reality was intruding the other.<sup>438</sup>

As the opening moment of the book, this chapter and the images contained in it, have a crucial relevance for the understanding of the novel and of Lobo Antunes' literature in general. In his characteristically subversive vein, Lobo Antunes decides to open the novel with an image that works on several levels.

The Zoo is, nonetheless its 'exoticism', an artificial place of 'wildness' within an urban space. A 'jungle' (or 'mato') in the city. Its very artificiality is hinted at by the narrator's description of the 'meninas de saias curtas e botas

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<sup>437</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Os Cus de Judas*, p.16.

<sup>438</sup> 'O Jardim Zoológico, espaço da infância despreocupada, com referências à realidade colonial – os animais selvagens, o professor preto so ringue de patinagem; [...]' ed. by. Maria Alzira Seixo, *et al.*, *Dicionário da Obra de António Lobo Antunes (Vol.I)* (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional-Casa Da Moeda, 2008) p. 94.

brancas, que [...] possuíam seguramente vozes tão de gaze como as que nos aeroportos anunciam a partida dos aviões'.<sup>439</sup> The contrast created by this artificiality (almost unsubstantial, like gauze) and the natural concreteness of the animals ('os bichos eram mais bichos'), highlights the sense of displacement, of a forced co-existence of two distinct realities. Thus, it is unsurprising that human professions are attributed to the animals in the Zoo – their domestication is, through the narrator's eyes, a complete encroachment of a fake, artificial context on their nature. The animals are, ironically, being *mobilised* to perform activities they would not normally perform. Therefore, the narrator is perhaps projecting his own displacement in his memories of the Zoo and the animals he encounters there. He too was a trapped animal in an artificial context imposed on his existence – the war in Africa – and he too was *mobilised* to perform a role that he was not meant to perform; that of a soldier. The description becomes uneasy and there are several references to abjection and decay, maybe a direct result of this unnatural intersection and the effects it has on the narrator's psyche:

[A]s cobras enrolavam-se em espirais moles de cagalhão [...] Os plátanos entre as jaulas acinzentavam-se como os nossos cabelos, e afigurava-se-me que, de certo modo, envelhecíamos juntos: o empregado de ancinho que empurrava as folhas para um balde aparentava-se, sem dúvida, ao cirurgião que me varreria as pedras da vesícula para um frasco [...]<sup>440</sup>

As we have seen previously, abjection is a constant stylistic resource used by Lobo Antunes. In this scene, abjection takes over the reality being described and it becomes insidious and expanding. 'O restaurante do Jardim, onde o odor dos animais se insinuava em farrapos diluídos no fumo do cozido, [...] conferindo à

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<sup>439</sup> Ibid. p.11.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid. p.12.

carne gostos peludos de alcatifa'.<sup>441</sup> Gradually, the scene moves into a romantic and sexual dimension, and the Zoo becomes the backdrop for the true intentions the narrator has for his silent female counterpart. 'Beijar-nos-íamos diante das grades dos leões, roídos de traça como casacos velhos [...]. Eu afago-lhe os seios à sombra oblíqua das raposas, você compra-me um gelado de pauzinho ao pé do recinto dos palhaços'.<sup>442</sup> The narrative becomes more and more intertwined with images of different natures, in an exaggerated style that bombards the reader with different stimulæ. It is curious to note how the amorous and sexual imagery associated with the woman is put against the background of animal setting (the kisses occur in front of the lion's cage and the caressing of the breasts occurs in the 'shadow of foxes'), a contrast that exarcebates the association between woman and wildness, equating the sexual nature of the woman with the wildness of animality. This furthers, by exoticising her sexuality, an objectification of the woman (strengthening my previous point on hyper-masculinity), which becomes even more evident and incisive when the narrator cannot imagine a gesture of reciprocated sexual advance, instead picturing the woman buying him an ice-cream. The narrator puts himself in an infantile position when self-referring, thus demanding of the woman a motherly role, which denotes the fragility of his self and his inability dealing with feminine figures, because the femininity within himself, or rather, what he associates with feminity, have been annihilated by the construction of his hyper-masculine self. In classic Adlerian psychology, this could be seen as a case of inferiority complex, with the narrator having a

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<sup>441</sup> Ibid.

<sup>442</sup> Ibid. p.13.

distorted view of himself and thus overcompensating his insecurity in his exacerbated masculine behaviour:

Since the feeling of inferiority is generally regarded as a sign of weakness and as soothing shameful, there is naturally a strong tendency to conceal it. Indeed, the effort of concealment may be so great that the person himself ceases to be aware of his inferiority as such, being wholly preoccupied with the consequences of the feeling and with all the objective details that subserve its concealment. So efficiently may an individual train his whole mentality for this task that the entire current of his psychic life flowing ceaselessly from below to above, that is, from the feeling of inferiority to that of superiority, occurs automatically and escapes his own notice.<sup>443</sup>

Yearning for the recovery of a childhood long gone, perhaps a defensive thought prompted by the shattering of adulthood provoked by his war experiences, the narrator recognises the difficulty of finding happiness and joy in adult life: '[T]eríamos recuperado [...] um pouco da infância que a nenhum de nós pertence, e teima em descer pelo escorrega num riso que nos chega, de longe a longe e numa espécie de raiva'.<sup>444</sup> Childhood, mediated by a laughter that reaches the narrator via a slide (a playground image) is equated with anger. Laughter cannot free itself from anger, the existence of joy and pleasure now impossibly disassociated from anger. 'O Zarathustra: he who wants to kill most thoroughly, *laughs*'.<sup>445</sup>

The suggestion of trauma is somewhat elliptical at this stage. Direct references<sup>446</sup> to the war are absent in this first chapter and what the narrator does

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<sup>443</sup> Heinz L. Ansbacher, Rowena R. Ansbacher, *The Individual Psychology of Alfred Adler* (London: Basic Books, 1956) p.119.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>445</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1993) p.329.

<sup>446</sup> By direct references, I mean textual presence of the *actual* event, spelled out *as it happened*. The war is, as we shall see, referred to in the last paragraphs of

instead when transforming his memories and thoughts (of childhood, of love, etc.) into a narrative is to hint, to tiptoe around the problematic of war and trauma by assessing his present *mental* reality, with his complexes and distortions. Memory and thoughts become the actual theme of the chapter, the mental space in which the narrative takes place. It is almost dreamlike, a narration of events *on* the mind that obey no normal narrative logic, more or less like dreams. As we have seen in the previous chapter, in the section dedicated to trauma, dreams are the chosen medium to assess traumatic memory and by emulating the narrative process of dreams, Lobo Antunes is indicating that cathartic and purging dimension of his writing, by assessing the individual trauma of the narrator, while at the same time going against the grain of mainstream psychiatric opinions, therefore making a statement concerning his artistic *ethos*.

The intrusion of Africa in the narrator's memory is a traumatic intrusion in the narrative. The traumatic experiences the narrator would go through in Angola are manifesting themselves retrospectively, invading the (happy) recollections of childhood and desire, in a pervasive intrusion that hints at the overarching destructibility of war. He then indicates that his parents house was not far from the Zoo and so he was not free from perceiving sounds coming from the Zoo, which can be seen as an intrusion on his familial space, '[a]s manhãs povoavam-se de tucanos e de íbis servidos com as carcaças do pequeno-almoço'.<sup>447</sup> Africa is there, at the breakfast table, permeating the morning with sounds from exotic birds. Nevertheless, the intrusion is not entirely bleak and

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this chapter as an end point, a destination to which the narrator is being sent to, but never recollected as an *event* in the narrator's memory.

<sup>447</sup> Ibid. p.14.

without hope. The image of the black roller skater, contrasting with the squalid and abject description of the Zoo, is one that evokes dignity and redemption, the narrator manifesting his desire of atoning: ‘Por essa época, eu alimentava a esperança insensata de rodopiar um dia espirais graciosas em torno das hipérboles majestáticas do professor preto, [...] deslizando no ruído [...] com que sempre imaginei o voo difícil dos anjos de Giotto’.<sup>448</sup> This near-religious image via the evocation of Giotto’s<sup>449</sup> angels can be read as a desire for redemption, a guilty from which the narrator cannot extricate himself in his adulthood. Still subversively and tentatively, uneasy with the catholic undertones of the image he is creating, he concedes that, perhaps, there is a possibility of redemption:

Talvez que quando eu for velho [...] conceba o meu desaparecimento não como o de um naufrago submerso por embalagens de comprimidos [...] mas sob a forma de um menino que se erguerá de mim como a alma do corpo [...] para se aproximar, em piruetas inseguras, do negro muito direito, [...] cujos beiços se curvam no sorriso enigmático e infinitamente indulgente de um buda de patins.<sup>450</sup>

However, the narrators’ impossibility of freeing himself from catholicism’s imagery seems to trigger another bitter and sarcastic turn and he returns to his usual hyper-reality torrent of subversive images; ‘Este anjo da guarda [...] substituiu dentro de mim a pagela virtuosa da Sãozinha e as suas bochechas equívocas de Mae West de sacristia, envolvida em amores místicos com um

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<sup>448</sup> Ibid. pp.14-15.

<sup>449</sup> Giotto di Bondone, or simply Giotto, was an Italian painter and architect from Florence in the late Middle Ages, whose representation of angels are striking and distinctive.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid. p.15.

Cristo de bigodinho à Fairbanks'<sup>451</sup>. The oppressiveness of the Portuguese religious traditions contrasts with the possibility of redemption represented by the black roller skater, who undoubtedly symbolises Africa (or more specifically, Angola) as a place of freedom and escape from the ideological, cultural, political and social paralysis of Portugal under the Estado Novo. This paralysis is clearly visible in the narrator's old aunts' house. The house replaces the Zoo in the narrator's recollections, expelling all the exotism and substituting it with the ghosts and spectres of the dictatorship's mythical constructions – Salazar, Cardeal Cerejeira, etc. (as seen before). This shift from the Zoo to the aunts' house indicates that the narrator's memory has denied him redemption or the solace of returning to a pleasurable existence he associates with childhood. Time has been paralysed in the inescapability of the oppressive house; 'Um pêndulo inlocalizável, perdido entre trevas de armários, pingava horas abafadas [...] onde o cadáver de Proust flutuava ainda, espalhando no ar rarefeito um hálito puído de infância'.<sup>452</sup> Angola (and what it represents) is now inaccessibly distant, in the *cus de judas* that he must return to in his memory and relive his hell.

His departure marks the climax of the chapter, the culmination of the evocation of the regime's ghosts and the final unfolding of traumatic memory itself, in a paragraph that is perhaps the most accomplished of the novel:

De modo que quando embarquei para Angola, a bordo de um navio cheio de tropas, para me tornar finalmente um homem, a tribo, agradecida ao Governo que me possibilitava, grátis, uma tal metamorfose, compareceu em peso no cais, consentindo, num arroubo de fervor patriótico, ser acotovelada por uma multidão

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<sup>451</sup> Ibid.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid. p.17.

agitada e anónima semelhante à do quadro da guilhotina, que ali vinha assistir, impotente, à sua própria morte.<sup>453</sup>

The scene encapsulates several themes and possible meanings that constitute Lobo Antunes' trademark style and the importance of this novel when read from a 'trauma' perspective. Departing to Angola is also departing from the sheltered existence of childhood, an ironic rite of passage that marks the transition to becoming a man, as if masculinity is inevitably linked with war so the masculine subject is expected to experience war to fulfil his manhood. Bearing in mind that 'war is not merely an act of policy but a true political instrument, a continuation of political intercourse, carried on with other means'<sup>454</sup> we can then realise that this particular war is the continuation of authoritarianism, of traumatic oppressiveness, into another continent, an expansionist folly that, despite eliciting the patriotic jubilation of the crowd, will have severe consequences not only for the individual men that are 'mobilised' (or in other words, forced) in the conflict, on both sides<sup>455</sup>, but for the population and society in general when having to deal with the returned traumatised soldiers. This continuation of an authoritarian branch of Estado Novo's ideology meant that oppressive and violent practices displayed by the political police (PIDE) were also implemented in the field, that all-seeing political gaze scrutinising the soldiers. It is not, in closer analysis, a true departure but rather a fake, artificial one, for going to fight

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<sup>453</sup> Ibid.

<sup>454</sup> Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) p.28.

<sup>455</sup> Although it cannot be said that the African militias were really 'mobilized', given the different political motivation for their involvement in the conflict, it has to be acknowledged that the politics of oppression of the Estado Novo would affect them, thus augmenting the traumatic effect of the war.

in Angola did not replace the trauma of political persecution with the trauma of war – it applied both. The subversiveness of the author’s writing is then, visible in the irony of describing the forced departure as a gift from the government, who provided the trip gratis, undoubtedly a poisoned gift that would only increase the level of trauma in the country’s population. What can be more traumatic for the psyche of a nation that witnessing its own death? This death is what Lobo Antunes is describing with the scene of departure, while reproducing another famous literary scene, engraved in every Portuguese person’s mind; ‘O Velho do Restelo’, from *Os Lusíadas*. By evoking Portugal’s literary past, he is reminding the reader of the Discoveries and its underlying ideology, reflecting on how much it shaped a sense of fate or destiny in the collective identity of the country, as if Portuguese people were fated (doomed?) to depart, in an attempt to juggle the political failures that traumatise its history. These political failures have, throughout history, resulted in several traumatic events; the war, mass emigration - a forced departure of hundreds of thousands of people that still affects the country today – the return of the African-born Portuguese people, the so called ‘Retornados’. Eduardo Lourenço, seemingly in agreement with what Lobo Antunes is suggesting, classifies the Discoveries’ ‘glorious fate’ ideology as ‘madness’, which in his analysis is the chronic trauma of Portuguese identity: ‘A *loucura* tinha-nos entrado pelas portas adentro ou saído barra do Tejo fora, loucura natural e gloriosa como gesta desvendadora, loucura certa com os poderes do tempo e nossa enquanto colonizadora e conquistadora, mas insidiosamente corruptora’.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> Eduardo Lourenço, *O Labirinto da Saudade*, p.43.

Susan Sontag reminds us how the idea of a departure, a voyage, has been romanticized to suit the narrative of exploration and travel as a source of benign effect, a transforming therapeutic power (the aunts are certain that the narrator ‘will become a man’ with this particular travel), a metaphor for a rather positive mental transformative experience that Lobo Antunes is keen to write against:

The metaphor of the of the psychic voyage is an extension of the romantic idea of travel [...] To be cured, the patient had to be taken out of his or her daily routine. It is not an accident that the most common metaphor for an extreme psychological experience viewed positively – whether produced by drugs or becoming psychotic – is a trip.<sup>457</sup>

It is also relevant to point out the presence of the word ‘impotente’ in the passage. Albeit being used in the first instance to qualify the powerlessness of the deluded crowd, it can’t be ignored that, in a writing that is as worked as Lobo Antunes’, its presence in a chapter and in a paragraph that explore the theme of masculinity, it undoubtedly has impact. Charging the imagery of war, of the soldier who has returned and looks for sexual escapades, with the underlying sense of frustration and traumatic failure, ‘impotente’ casts a shadow over the soldier’s sexual capacity. Subversively, by revealing the sexual trauma underlying the scene, Lobo Antunes is challenging the mainstream perception of the soldier’s virility and at the same time questions the patriarchal ideology of the regime. Africa, exoticized and eroticized by propaganda and a literary history that glorifies Portuguese sexual prowess (the episode ‘A Ilha dos Amores’, also from *Os Lusíadas*, springs to mind), will in reality unfold into a different reality, thus thwarting the mental expectations generated by such illusions, becoming precisely the opposite, a grim locus of violence, conflict and trauma.

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<sup>457</sup> Sontag, Susan, *Illness as Metaphor & Aids and its Metaphors*, p. 36.

On reaching Luanda (in the third chapter, letter C), the mental dimension of trauma give way to a physical sense of trauma: ‘princiariam a acordar em mim um sentimento esquisito de absurdo, cujo desconforto persistente vinha sentindo desde a partida de Lisboa, na cabeça ou nas tripas, sob a forma física de uma aflição inlocalizável’.<sup>458</sup>

The physical manifestations of discomfort are, like in *Memória de Elefante*, abundant and, as I pointed out elsewhere<sup>459</sup>, linked with PTSD. The physical manifestations of trauma affect the narrator in many ways, even in simple social situations, ‘o estar aqui consigo [...] um expediente de arame que me salve da maré-baixa de desespero que me ameaça, desespero de que não conheço a causa’.<sup>460</sup> He is incapable of locating the cause or origin for his despair, an impossibility of retrieving the traumatic experience which triggers feelings of discomfort and anxiety; ‘o coração acelera-se, palpo-o no pulso, as vísceras comprimem-se, a vesicular dói-me, os ouvidos zumbem, qualquer coisa de indefinível e prestes a romper palpita, tenso, no meu peito’.<sup>461</sup>

Another common affliction for PTSD sufferers (and other mental illnesses) is insomnia. ‘As madrugadas, de resto, são o meu tormento, gordurosas, geladas, azedas, repletas de amargura e de rancor.’<sup>462</sup> ‘Há quanto

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<sup>458</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Os Cus de Judas* (Alfragide, Dom Quixote, 2010) p.27.

<sup>459</sup> Ricardo Rato Rodrigues, ‘Torno, Retorno e Transtorno: Trauma e Stress Pós-Traumático nos romances de António Lobo Antunes’ in *As Humanidades e as Ciências, Disjunções e Confluências*, ed. by Ana Gabriela Macedo, et al (V.N Famalicão: Edições Húmus, 2014) pp.197-208.

<sup>460</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Os Cus de Judas*, p.38.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.* p.39.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid.* p.37.

tempo não consigo dormir? Entro na noite como um vagabundo furtivo com bilhete de segunda classe numa carruagem de primeira'.<sup>463</sup> The narrator confesses his inability to sleep, which, allied with feelings of bitterness and resentment, constitutes an unpleasant, torturous, experience that is nevertheless significant to the understanding of the full impact of trauma. Not only as a mental, but also a bodily affliction.

The significance of the inscription of insomnia in the novel cannot be downplayed. The irony is that it permits the explosion of thoughts (almost a *trance*) that make up the narrative, but it also afflicts the narrator, who complains about not being able to sleep. In fact, insomnia is one of the most dangerous symptoms for, amongst others, sufferers of depression, for instance. William Styron, in his autobiographical account, describes how insomnia played a sinister role in his battle with depression. Unable to sleep at night, he lies down in hope of a nap, which turns out to be an unsuccessful attempt:

Rational thought was usually absent from my mind at such times, hence *trance*. [...] And one of the most unendurable aspects of such an interlude was the inability to sleep. [...] [T]he disruption of normal sleep patterns is a notoriously devastating feature of depression; to the injuries of sleeplessness with which I have been afflicted each night was added to the insult of this afternoon insomnia, diminutive by comparison but all the most horrendous because it struck during the hours of the most intense misery. It had become clear that I would never be granted even a few minutes' relief from my full-time exhaustion.<sup>464</sup>

As a doctor, Lobo Antunes is clearly aware of the physical reality of the consequences of trauma and his writing of this dimension is yet another example

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<sup>463</sup> Ibid. p.69.

<sup>464</sup> William Styron, *Darkness Visible – A Memoir of Madness* (London: Vintage, 2004) pp.15-16.

of the awareness and empathy he seeks to elicit in his readers. He is, again, performing his most accomplished literary trick, the simultaneous co-existence of the double role he brings into his literature: doctor and soldier.

Moreover, this aspect gains an even bigger relevance if we consider that, alarmingly but not surprisingly, it was not until the year of 1999 that the Portuguese government considered PTSD as a valid diagnosis of mental illness.

Em 1999, o governo português publicou uma lei (decreto Lei 46/99, de 16 de Junho) que declarou a Perturbação de Stress Pós-traumático (PTSD) como uma causa legítima de deficiência, trazendo para a discussão pública o custo psicológico da guerra colonial<sup>465</sup>

No wonder that the novel caused controversy. The researchers Ângela Costa Maia, Teresa McIntyre, Graça Pereira and Eugénia Fernandes denounce the ‘lack of interest’ not only in the researching of PTSD sufferers but also in the setting up of social structures that could help them:

[P]or mais de 20 anos, os soldados ex-combatentes foram uma realidade quase desconhecida em termos de investigação, apesar de nos contextos hospitalares, especialmente psiquiátricos, serem conhecidas as dificuldades emocionais e psicológicas nesta população. [...] Tanto quanto é do nosso conhecimento, embora legislação posterior procure criar uma rede nacional de apoio [...] e defina formas de avaliação e normas de acesso a essa rede [...], nunca foi feita recomendação ou oferecido apoio para a realização de investigação no sentido de conhecer o número de ex-combatentes com perturbação psicológica.<sup>466</sup>

Thus, given the relative ignorance on the exact number of sufferers of PTSD in Portugal, one can read the novel as an early attempt to hold on to a memory that was, with the passage of time and the lack of effort Portuguese society has

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<sup>465</sup> Ângela Maia, *et al.* ‘Por baixo das pústulas da guerra: reflexões sobre um estudo com ex-combatentes da guerra colonial’ in *A guerra colonial (1961-1974)* ed. by Manuel Gama (Braga: Universidade do Minho: Centro de Estudos Lusíadas, 2006) pp. 11-28. (p.12).

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid.*

dedicated to its preservation, progressively silenced. Number and substance, as the novel fills in that silence that preceded and that followed it, constituting perhaps the most vehement and urgent (literary) attempt to restore justice to that particular traumatic memory.

The textual existence of insomnia, anxiety and other physical manifestations is crucial to understand how trauma is articulated with memory. As traumatic recollections of war cannot be fully confronted by the narrator's mind, they permeate his existence in another level, the corporeal. The corporeal language creates a dialectic of interior *versus* exterior, a dialectic of duplication.

O narrador-personagem [...] possui dois corpos, o do militar e o civil [...] 'Este último, no entanto, é quem o liberta para o retorno à metrópole [...] [S]eu distanciamento intelectual da guerra e a das pessoas que a fazem, mostrou-se abalado pelo corpo, esta porta sensorial aberta ao toque. É no corpo que reside a falha da armadura do eu. O corpo não se pode afastar do conflito, pois ele é o alvo das Kalashnikov, destroçá-lo com as minas é o objectivo do inimigo.<sup>467</sup>

The war, the traumatic event *per se*, is gone but the trauma it provokes still echoes in the body of the narrator. Therefore, trauma is also a bodily memory, a memory that stays marked and felt in the body long after the event that created it has gone away.

A instância física, a expressão da materialidade corpórea da personagem, quer feminina, quer masculina é, para além de sinónimo de insignificância reincidente, um mapa indicativo de traumas, desencontros, desamores, complexos de Édipo mal resolvidos, [...] doenças mortais.<sup>468</sup>

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<sup>467</sup> José Maurício Saldanha Alvarez, 'Duelo contra o império: o indivíduo e a busca da felicidade no romance *Os cus de Judas* de António Lobo Antunes' in *Facts and Fictions of António Lobo Antunes*, ed. by Victor K. Mendes (Tagus Press, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, 2011) pp.45-50 (p.55).

<sup>468</sup> *Dicionário da Obra de António Lobo Antunes (Vol.I)*, ed. by Maria Alzira Seixo, *et al.*, (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional-Casa Da Moeda, 2008) pp.174-175.

Lobo Antunes' writing of the body as a locus of traumatic memory is thus inserted in the general vision of his approach, necessary for the aim of his literature:

[U]m dos processos de distorção a que o corpo está sujeito pela representação em causa é a contiguidade e a interpenetração entre corpo e consciência, registadas no discurso narrativo destes romances, dando origem a uma dimensão incorpórea torturada, muitas vezes sob a forma da dissociação, quer expressa de modo directo [...], quer de modo metafórico [...]. Uma tal representação do corpo dilui, consideravelmente, a oposição tradicional entre corpo e espírito / consciência.<sup>469</sup>

The dilution of the concepts of mind and body is particularly powerful in the author's style as it permits that the transmission to the reader of his writing and the themes contained in it is much more effective. In the case of trauma, there are no two separate traumas present in the text but rather one, all-encompassing and co-existent with other themes, popping up every now and again in full force. The 'total-writing' of Lobo Antunes requires total dedication from the reader, emotional and intellectual, especially in this novel where trauma, pain and despair seem to be the major motivating forces of the narrative. There is then a sharing, or rather, a contamination, for 'a forma de ler este texto será forçosamente a de uma leitura agónica, em que o conflito exterior e interior da personagem passa inevitavelmente para o leitor'.<sup>470</sup> *Os Cus de Judas* is then the most painful of novels as the agony of the narrator also belongs to the reader, in a collective journey through the agony of war and its trauma.

The abolishment of the barrier between body and mind gives way to a fractured and displaced identity. The realization of this final departure reaches

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<sup>469</sup> Ibid. pp. 175-176.

<sup>470</sup> Maria Alzira Seixo, *Os Romances de António Lobo Antunes*, p.55

the narrator in the fourth chapter (letter D); ‘Pertença sem dúvida a outro sítio, não sei bem qual, aliás, mas suponho que tão recuado no tempo e no espaço que jamais o recuperarei’.<sup>471</sup> The narrator has lost his identitary place, not belonging to any space or time, realities as irretrievable as the event of trauma is in the processes of remembering. Trauma has pervaded time and place, taking them with it to that unnameable and inaccessible place hidden from memory. This chapter is also the recollection of a final and irreversible departure, which was also a fall, a descent into hell, the journey from Luso to Terras do Fim do Mundo<sup>472</sup>. At one point, the narrator confesses that remembering this step of his narrative still unsettles him: ‘[N]este passo da minha narrativa perturbo-me invariavelmente, [...] foi há seis anos e perturbo-me ainda’<sup>473</sup>, in a moment where he discloses the height of his trauma. The concluding passage of the chapter is ominous and hints at the horrors that are still to come, horrors which the narrator views as the approaching of an inevitable death. ‘[D]escíamos do Luso para as Terras do Fim do Mundo [...] chovia, e íamos morrer, íamos morrer e chovia, chovia, sentado na cabina da camioneta [...] iniciei a dolorosa aprendizagem da agonia.’<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>471</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Os Cus de Judas*, p.34.

<sup>472</sup> This ominous name of a place in Angola, Terras do Fim do Mundo, 2000 kilometres from Luanda, is what gives the title to the English translation of the novel, *Land at the End of Nowhere*. This is an apt choice, given the inexistence of a direct translation for the expression *cus de judas* and the fact that the appearance of this place in the text marks a significant shift in the narrator’s memory.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.* p.39.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*

It starts, this ‘dolorosa aprendizagem da agonia’. The learning of agony and pain, learning which lends itself to the title of the trilogy, a learning not only of these realities but also of literature, of witnessing a trauma and how to transport it into writing, the constant struggle to find *le mot juste* in order to do literary justice to these experiences. A learning for the reader as well, who shares the narrator’s (and the author’s) struggle, who is exposed to realities that often are not his or hers but also traumatic to a degree and who has to rationalise this torrent of emotions and thoughts that explode in the narrative with his life, country and culture, in a constant strife to find a fixed meaning. This strife is, however, always undermined by Lobo Antunes, keeping the reader on his/her toes. He does this purposely, perhaps to avoid that the reader becomes comfortably numb with the narrative, by writing a text that ‘constantemente se descentra, de forma irregular e em processo de *anamorfose*, quer através de divagações e memórias do passado, quer através da alternância regular [...] do plano passado [...] e do plano da enunciação’.<sup>475</sup>

This is another act of displacement which then forces the reader to share the narrator’s decentralised identity. Thus, the reader learns the displacing force of trauma through the style and content of the novel, where chapters, apart from being randomly organised under the letters of the alphabet, do not have a sense of intrinsic thematic cohesion and are subjected to constant spatial and temporal shifts and constant anamorphosis. The resulting fragmentation of the narrative, which only obeys temporally to the passage of *real* time (that is, the hours that

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<sup>475</sup> Maria Alzira Seixo, *Os Romances de António Lobo Antunes*, p.43.

pass by during the night the narrator spends in the company of the silent woman), creates:

a forma de significar uma perturbação do pensamento e do olhar que, contando e descrevendo, dão conta da alteração profunda sofrida pelo jovem que atravessou a Guerra, viajou pela alteridade do lugar, do tempo e de si próprio, e se desencontrou em definitivo.<sup>476</sup>

Emerging from that final departure into the Terras do Fim do Mundo is a different person, a different Other. Living a kind of schizophrenic existence, the narrator finds himself living as two separate beings in one body, an identity crisis product of the war. When contemplating his reflexion on a window, like an affected Narcissus, he discovers ‘o reflexo de um homem imóvel, de queixo nas mãos, em que me recuso a reconhecer-me, e que teima em fitar-me numa obstinação resignada. Talvez que a guerra tenha ajudado a fazer de mim o que sou hoje e que intimamente recuso’.<sup>477</sup> He has indeed fulfilled his aunts’ prophecy and became a man. However, *what* he has become is an abject Other that he refuses to accommodate in his identity, an insistent and unpleasant war-product that does not appease his intimate view of himself. The rejection is nonetheless an act of resistance, his attempt at a liberation that moves into getting rid of the fixed and oppressive identity traits imposed on his self. ‘[A] questão da identidade, que emerge constantemente em termos de personalidade, de profissão, de família, de identificação amorosa, de terra, de país, e que é constantemente alijada em função do vazio [...]’.<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> Ibid.

<sup>477</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Os Cus de Judas*, pp.59-60.

<sup>478</sup> Maria Alzira Seixo, *Os Romances de António Lobo Antunes* p.55.

It is in this emptiness that Lobo Antunes writes. In the space created by the total annihilation and rejection of pre-existing master-narratives, where he writes those marginalised Others. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the figure of the soldier is crucial and indispensable for the construction of identity that we find in Lobo Antunes' novels, with particular relevance in the novel at hand. This constitutes part of his attempt to give voice to the marginalised counter-narratives (a Foucauldian project that he also applies to the mad). The creation of an Other within the self is paramount: 'o soldado português [...] ocupa um lugar à margem na sociedade portuguesa, encontra-se numa "porta giratória" [...] ou num "dispositivo pivot" [...], movimentação identitária em tudo equivalente ao complexo barroco de Narciso, que, olhando a água, se vê numa imobilidade inquieta: Eu-Outro'.<sup>479</sup>

The experience and trauma of war is, then, necessarily articulated with the autobiographical construction in narrative. Given the porosity of the author's literature, war (with other recurrent topics) and the actual process of writing become inextricable for both writings, the author's and the reader's. Albeit not the only one theme to do so, 'a guerra passa a ser a *grafia*, construção autobiográfica do *eu*. A invenção do outro, [...] não se cinge ao(s) *outro eu* que nasce na Guerra, mas também às invenções que este *eu* faz da Guerra dentro da escrita'.<sup>480</sup> Therefore, the author writes the war as the war writes the author and as both are written by the reader, who assimilates them in the identity forged by the reading of the novel. The reader's identity is unavoidably affected by the

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<sup>479</sup> Do Vale Cardoso, p.30.

<sup>480</sup> Ibid. p.92.

novel and he/she emerges from the experience with his self now populated with several *others*, who hopefully will contribute to a self that is more tolerant, understanding and compassionate.

The polyphony of these *others* is visible in the text, not in a graphic and explicit manner as in later novels, where different voices are written singularly, but in an embryo form, the narrator serving as some kind of shaman that summons a collective voice:

O que fizeram de nós aqui sentados à espera nesta paisagem sem mar, presos por três fieiras de arame farpado numa terra que nos não pretence, a morrer de paludismo e de balas [...] lutando contra um inimigo invisível, contra os dias que não se sucedem e indefinidamente se alongam, contra a saudade, a indignação e o remorso, contra a espessura das trevas opacas tal um véu de luto <sup>481</sup>

Medium for the voices of an entire generation, it is through the narrator that the traumatised manifest their discontent and cry the horrors they have suffered, questioning the reasons of sending them to the real death or the *death in life* they inevitably encounter. It is not surprising then that dead too seem to be voiced through the narrator, also protesting, albeit only elliptically, through the silence of their absence:

Se a revolução acabou [...] é porque os mortos de África, de boca cheia de terra, não podem protestar, e hora a hora a direita os vai matando de novo, e nós, os sobreviventes, continuamos tão duvidosos de estar vivos que temos receio de, através da impossibilidade de um movimento qualquer, nos apercebemos de que não existe carne nos nossos gestos nem no som nas palavras que dizemos, nos apercebemos que estamos mortos como eles. <sup>482</sup>

Even the living are not sure if they go on living or if they are dead too, such is the overreach of trauma. Either way, they are silenced, their experience

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<sup>481</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Os Cus de Judas*, p.58.

<sup>482</sup> Ibid. p.63

minimised and ignored, which is traumatic in itself, for it denies the truth of the suffering they have experienced, rendering them futile and thus multiplying trauma by dismissing the authenticity of their narrative.

This allegory of shamanism and mediumism is not only a perfect stylistic resource for the writer to disclose the traumatic experience that is compared to near-death or death itself, but also, in his usual subversive way, to challenge the master-narratives of institutions. The narratives of politics and psychiatry are brought forward in his attack. Politics is exposed as a blocking force (the author actually specifies the political right as responsible, 'hora a hora a direita os vai matando de novo') to the possibility of recovery or catharsis, oppressing the narratives of the dead, thus killing them once more, in a double death that removes all hope. Psychiatry and psychology are, however, challenged in a more subtle way. Mediunic experiences, shamanism have been look down upon and discredited by empirical sciences<sup>483</sup>. Carl Jung goes as far as proclaiming: 'Mediums are as a rule slightly abnormal mentally'.<sup>484</sup> Nevertheless, auditory hallucinations (hearing voices) have been recognised as legitimate symptoms of mental illness, shifting what was considered a supernatural phenomenon into a medical issue:

There can be no doubt that mental illnesses play a significant part in causing belief in spirits. [...] In all ages and all over the world, insane people have been regarded as possessed by evil spirits, and this belief is supported by the patient's own hallucinations. The patients are

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<sup>483</sup> 'Among Western peoples [...] belief in spirits has been counteracted by rationalism and scientific enlightenment [...], so that among the majority of educated people today it has been suppressed along with other metaphysical beliefs.' Carl Gustav Jung, *Psychology and the Occult* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2008) p.129.

<sup>484</sup> Ibid. p.119.

tormented less by visions than by auditory hallucinations: they hear  
“voices”<sup>485</sup>.

The medium or the shaman loses its authority and validity, replaced by a medical diagnosis, the voices it mediates discarded and deemed ‘insane’. Of course, this shift has been beneficial for millions of people throughout the world, their symptoms were recognised and they were able to seek treatment. It is not being suggested that shamanism or mediums are actual things that could replace science, far from it. It has been the medicalization of this type of phenomenon that prevented atrocities such as the ones perpetrated by the Inquisition (where people were burnt alive for ‘hearing voices’). However, given the relationship of the author with psychiatry (his anti-psychiatric tendencies) and the fact that this text produced by him is not a medical treatise but a novelistic creation, the mediumism of the narrator acquires special significance. He is appropriating what is considered either supernatural non-sense or a meaningless manifestation product of illness and attributing it meaning and truth, in a challenging stance against the all-knowing scrutiny of psychiatry that has many times been translated as abuse of power. Once again, his criticism is directed towards ‘superstructure’ (in the Marxist sense), more specifically psychiatry, and not towards the base that informs and are at the same time I affected by it (patients, individuals, etc.).

In the same way some psychiatrists discard the actual content of ‘auditory hallucinations’, preferring to focus on what is causing it, so has (in the narrator’s point of view) Portuguese society discarded the traumatised narratives of its

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<sup>485</sup> Ibid. pp.132-133.

soldiers. The difference is that for the latter, the causes are known, but the symptoms (their narrative) ignored, thus removing their validity as ‘patients’.

As seen previously, Lobo Antunes’ writing can be seen as ‘performative’. Like shamanism or mediumism, his writing also possesses a performative quality and the mobilisation of a collective voice also serves a purpose. To fully appreciate how, one has to return to Jung, whose judgement of medium’s mental abilities needs now to be taken with a pinch of salt. Let us entertain the possibility (not a too farfetched one) that Lobo Antunes, in his capacity as a psychiatrist, has read Jung<sup>486</sup>. It would not be surprising that he transposed Jung’s concepts into his writing. The summoning of the collective voices is a literary device, perhaps used by the author to mimic the manifestation of a ‘collective unconscious’, a type of unconscious defined thus by Jung:

its contents are not personal but collective; that is, they do not belong to one individual alone but to a group of individuals, and generally to a whole nation [...]. It is [...] not easy to prove the existence of the collective unconscious in a normal person, but occasionally mythological ideas are represented in his dreams. These contents can be seen most clearly in cases of mental derangement, especially in schizophrenia, where mythological images often pour out in astonishing variety. Insane people frequently produce combinations of ideas and symbols that could never be accounted for by the experiences in their individual lives, but only by the history of the human mind.<sup>487</sup>

I am not arguing for any attempt at analysing the narrator’s discourse as a diagnosis of schizophrenia or other mental illness, but rather the literary

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<sup>486</sup> My hesitation comes from the fact that the author has not disclosed any formative readings other than literary ones. The type of reading he has undertaken as part of his medical education can, therefore, only be inferred. It is, however, quite safe to assume that Jung’s works were part of the curriculum.

<sup>487</sup> Jung, p.138.

appropriation of symptoms of those illnesses to subvert the apparently sane discourses of master-narratives.

The incorporation (in a literal way) of a polyphonic collective voice in the text highlights the trope of *displacement* (*despaimento*) that is one of the major preoccupations of Lobo Antunes, with particular relevance in this novel. Displacement is a form of alienation<sup>488</sup>, and thus, by contrasting a collective voice with the singularly displaced voice of the narrator, Lobo Antunes is using (and at the same time disregarding it) Jung's analysis: 'The association of a collective content with the ego always produces a state of alienation, because something is added to the individual's consciousness which ought really to remain unconscious, that is, separated from the ego'.<sup>489</sup>

Extending the Jungian analysis, we can clearly perceive the significance of this collective voice in the novel, for Jung's diagnosis for phenomena of this confirms the narrator's experiences:

these experiences occur either when something so devastating happens to the individual that his whole previous attitude to life breaks down, or when for some reason the contents of the collective unconscious accumulate [...]. [T]his happens when the life of a large social group of a nation undergoes a profound change of a political, social, or religious nature.<sup>490</sup>

It does not require a stretch of interpretation to understand that this is exactly the context in *Os Cus de Judas*. The narrator cries out with indignation, not just for the traumatic experiences that those changes imposed on Portuguese society but

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<sup>488</sup> The word is here used with intent, evoking all the echoes and resonances associated with it. Alienation of the mentally ill, the alienated.

<sup>489</sup> Jung, pp.140-141.

<sup>490</sup> *Ibid.* pp.143-144.

the lack of acknowledgement those experiences seem to have confined to. The ‘collective unconscious’ is then accumulated in a forced silence, consigned to ignorance which denies the validity and credibility of the traumatic memory and experience, assigning it to the world of fiction:

Porque camandro é que não se fala nisto? Começo a pensar que o milhão e quinhentos mil homens<sup>491</sup> que passaram por África não existiram nunca e lhe estou contando uma espécie de romance de mau gosto impossível de acreditar, uma história inventada<sup>492</sup>

The bitterness and suspicion that pervades the novel is the transposing into literature of a concrete attitude manifested by some veterans, voicing their ill feeling and revolt towards the social structures (normally associated with the government), highlighting an understandable paranoia of ‘official entities’:

[A]lguns dos que compareceram mostravam o seu desagrado por terem sido esquecidos e abandonados ao longo de todos estes anos, com uma má vontade generalizada em relação a qualquer contacto em relação às “entidades oficiais”, em que incluíam só investigadores, verbalizando frequentemente expectativas que não correspondiam àquilo que a investigação lhes poderia dar.<sup>493</sup>

As it is perceptible from the excerpt above, the neglect that the veterans have been subjected to did also generate an attitude of paranoia that impaired their ability to seek help. The failures and tardiness of the various social structures in addressing this issue has being counterproductive to the betterment of the veterans and of society in general, condemning well-meaning endeavours to be rejected by those who would benefit from it the most. The tragedy of assigning

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<sup>491</sup> It is interesting that Lobo Antunes writes this as the number of men involved in the war, when oficial numbers point towards between 800.000 and 1.000.000.

<sup>492</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Os Cus de Judas*, p.69.

<sup>493</sup> Ângela Maia, *et al.* ‘Por baixo das pústulas da guerra: reflexões sobre um estudo com ex-combatentes da guerra colonial’ in *A guerra colonial (1961-1974)* ed. by Manuel Gama (Braga: Universidade do Minho: Centro de Estudos Lusíadas, 2006) pp. 11-28. (p.15).

the veterans' experiences to silence is that it perpetuates a paranoia they have been indoctrinated in by ideology, transcending it to subsequent social apparatuses. This is the madness of war, this displaced (and misplaced) paranoia that slows down or impedes the process of betterment, doubling the punishment for those who already have being punished. The panoptical paranoia of the dictatorial regime is then transcribed to the soldier's individuality:

[E]spiados pelos mil olhos ferozes da Pide, condenados ao consumo de jornais que a censura reduzia a louvores melancólicos ao relato de sacristia de província do Estado Novo, e jogados por fim na violência paranóica da guerra, [...] combatendo, combatendo corajosamente o comunismo nos grupos de casais do prior, enquanto nós, os peixes, morríamos nos cus de Judas uns após os outros.<sup>494</sup>

The experiences and horrors the narrator has suffered cannot, however, be silenced and the narrator evokes them through his collective voice. Thus, he multiplies, echoes, relives the trauma, recalling horrific and indelible images that nevertheless contributed to the formation of his changed identity. These images are traumatically engraved in his (and by extension the reader's) memory:

Quem veio aqui não consegue voltar o mesmo, [...] cada um de nós, os vivos, tem várias pernas a menos, vários braços a menos, vários metros de intestinos a menos, quando se amputou a coxa gangrenada ao guerrilheiro do MPLA apanhado no Mussuma os soldados tiraram o retrato com ela num orgulho de troféu, a Guerra tornou-nos em bichos, percebe, bichos cruéis e estúpidos ensinados a matar.<sup>495</sup>

The transformation he denounces is the direct product of the trauma and violence of war, a transformation that occurs not only because these soldiers were the victims of such violence but also the perpetrators: 'a participação na guerra pode ser especialmente perturbadora devido ao facto de se ser simultaneamente vítima

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<sup>494</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Os Cus de Judas*, p.104.

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.* p.124.

e perpetrador de actos que podem ser de defesa, mas podem também constituir crueldades e atrocidades, nomeadamente em relação a civis'.<sup>496</sup>

Trauma also takes a corporeal meaning, with references to amputated arms, legs and shortened intestines serving as a reminder of the survival of trauma in the now incomplete bodies of the soldiers. The absurdity of a photograph taken with the severed leg of the MPLA's<sup>497</sup> soldier as if it was some kind of trophy. All of this haunting the narrator's memory, a memory that is not only of the traumatic past of the war but an ever present reminder, an embodied trauma in the space of the absence of those incomplete and shortened bodies. Body and mind are both affected, violated by history, an intrusion of the past in the corporeal reality of the present:

His writing of the past is a painful (re)inscription of a specific period in the history of Portugal, which has, in fact, violated both his body and his psyche and undermined the possibility that he will ever find a coherent and stable self and a sense of closure to his traumatic experiences.<sup>498</sup>

The dead are not the only ones to speak through the collective voice of the narrator but also the ones that go on living, forever scarred by the war. The number of 'disabled' military personnel, just on the Portuguese side totals 15507 (a statistic that ranges from amputees to the mentally ill) across the three theatres

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<sup>496</sup> Ângela Maia, *et al.* 'Por baixo das pústulas da guerra: reflexões sobre um estudo com ex-combatentes da guerra colonial' in *A guerra colonial (1961-1974)* ed. by Manuel Gama (Braga: Universidade do Minho: Centro de Estudos Lusíadas, 2006) pp. 11-28. (p.22.)

<sup>497</sup> Movimento Pela Libertação de Angola.

<sup>498</sup> José N. Ornelas, 'Negation of the Narrative Framework or the Failure of Narrative Memory: The Case of *Os Cus de Judas*' in *Facts and Fictions of António Lobo Antunes*, ed. by Victor K. Mendes (Tagus Press, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, 2011) pp.321-339 (p.323).

of operations (Angola, Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau), the reserves or those injured in training<sup>499</sup>. More specifically in Angola, there were 4684 ‘disabled’, the highest number in all the theatres of operations. Thus, it is easy to perceive the importance of the narrator’s summoning of a collective voice that can enact and represent the wound present in such staggering numbers in a whole generation of men<sup>500</sup>.

They are metamorphosed into ‘bichos’ (or animals) in a reappearance, this time more dramatic, of animality, traumatic intrusion that opens the novel. Importantly, once again it is through another animal metaphor that the narrator manifests collective revolt against silencing and forgetting

Éramos peixes, [...] peixes mudos em aquários de pano e metal, simultaneamente ferozes e mansos, treinados para morrer sem protestos, para nos estendermos sem protestos nos caixões da tropa, nos fecharem a maçarico lá dentro, nos cobrirem com a Bandeira Nacional e nos reenviarem para a Europa no porão dos navios, de medalha de identificação na boca no intuito de nos impedir a veleidade de um berro de revolta.<sup>501</sup>

Ironically, the choice of animal to convey these issues couldn’t be more apt in its subversiveness. By choosing to represent the soldiers as fish, Lobo Antunes is subtly challenging, albeit with the trademark playfulness of his writing, the

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<sup>499</sup> Statistics and other informations about the Colonial War can be obtained on the website [www.guerracolonial.org](http://www.guerracolonial.org). The specific statistics here presented can be found on: [www.guerracolonial.org/specific/guerra\\_colonial/uploaded/graficos/estatiscas/deficientes.swf](http://www.guerracolonial.org/specific/guerra_colonial/uploaded/graficos/estatiscas/deficientes.swf) (Accessed 19th December 2014).

<sup>500</sup> This is only, of course, representative of the Portuguese side. We cannot ignore that the number would be much higher if the ‘disabled’ were quantified in all the participant African countries and this is indeed ground that needs to be covered, albeit elsewhere and in another context. Due to the limitations inherent to this work, I have to focus solely on the Portuguese context, however acknowledging the incompleteness of such focus.

<sup>501</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Os Cus de Judas*, p.103.

discourses of Portuguese social superstructures and the current state of affairs. It is well known the common belief that fish have a very short memory, as it is also known that elephants have a very long one. Therefore, if in the previous novel the narrator was an elephant that could not forget due the longevity of his memory, which affected him upon return and ‘reintegration’, in the present novel he is fish that is forced, or at least expected, as it would be a fish’s nature, to forget. The irony is that he cannot. This inability of forgetting echoes a common trait and symptom of sufferers of PTSD: re-experiencing. The narrator is then using his collective voice to show the suffering of those who are afflicted with it. Society in general expects them to forget and resume their civilian lives. This is also what is expected from the narrator, who is still trapped in the reality of his military past in Angola: ‘The [...] protagonist still lives the reality of the colonial war, which precludes any possibility of a positive narrative framework that will restore meaning to his life. For him, there will never be a comforting closure to a horrific experience’.<sup>502</sup>

Notwithstanding the collective dimension of the narrator’s voice, he does not avoid his own individual dilemmas, such as his responsibility as a doctor. Whilst the collective is powerless against the horrors that are imposed to them, the doctor has the power to save, via his diagnosis, individuals from continuing in the war. In one occasion a lieutenant asks him to make up a diagnosis so he could be sent back to the reserve, that is, home. ‘Uma doença, doutor [...], anemia, leucemia, reumatismo, cancro, bócio, uma doençazeca, uma doença de

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<sup>502</sup> José N. Ornelas, ‘Negation of the Narrative Framework or the Failure of Narrative Memory: The Case of *Os Cus de Judas*’ in *Facts and Fictions of António Lobo Antunes*, ed. by Victor K. Mendes (Tagus Press, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, 2011) pp.321-339 (p.323).

merda que me passe à reserva: o que fazemos nós aqui?’<sup>503</sup>. The doctor is presented with an ethical dilemma, one that has always haunted doctors: malingering. He has the choice of allowing another man to escape the war by making up a fake illness, although such act is contrary to the principles of Medicine. For a doctor, this is probably the worst ethical dilemma: To preserve life by subverting the own codes of medicine or allowing death by sticking to the moral integrity of the medical profession? The answer is avoided by the narrator, who quickly digresses into different memories, seemingly abandoning the question. However, the ethical and moral interrogation lingers in the mind of the most attentive of readers, who has to find her own answer in her moral compass. This is the power of Lobo Antunes’ writing: its porosity permits the text to work in both sides of the roles explored in the novel, soldier and doctor, challenging simplistic perceptions and forcing the reader to come to terms with the fragmentary co-existence of opposed experiences.

The irony of challenging the reader’s choices is that the narrator himself had no choice. Faced with the impossibility of choice, the narrator assumes the role of witness (always there in Lobo Antunes’ fiction), displaying moral and physical distancing:

Diante da luta, o narrador-personagem manifestou um peculiar afastamento físico e moral. Físico, porque não foi livre para decidir, faz a guerra porque foi convocado. Seu corpo não foi livre para decidir. A sensação de afastamento corporal parece ser, também, um deslocamento moral do sujeito diante do conflito. [...] A vida e a guerra, assim, despontam em sua narrativa como uma espécie de obrigação do seu estado existencial.<sup>504</sup>

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<sup>503</sup> Ibid. p.80.

<sup>504</sup> José Maurício Saldanha Alvarez, ‘Duelo contra o império: o indivíduo e a busca da felicidade no romance *Os cus de Judas* de António Lobo Antunes’ in *Facts and Fictions of António Lobo Antunes*, ed. by Victor K. Mendes (Tagus Press, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, 2011) pp.45-50 (p.49).

This lack of choice is, in essence, very similar to those of most mental patients. In an interpretative leap, one can see the same predicament of the absence of choice in people that, due to a variety of circumstances, find themselves classified as mental patients, forced to live in constant conflict and dialogue with their illness, often being blamed for ‘choosing’ to be ill whether by being unable to conform to normative social expectations or by being ascribed a ‘risky’ lifestyle. Paradoxically, this ‘compulsory existential state’ can be successfully addressed through analytical distance whether by themselves or others. It is distance that permits a critical engagement with their conditions, permitting the construction of a narrative that makes sense of their experiences and, crucially, gives them meaning, validity, and authority.

However, the narrator exposes not only his ethical dilemmas as a doctor, but also the personal consequences of the war in his life, such as the impossibility of adjusting upon returning (something Lobo Antunes explores in his previous novel) and the sexual impotency experienced by many veterans when returning to their civilian lives. The impact of being confronted with his civilian life once more after the trauma of war is poignantly written in this passage:

[T]repei os degraus com a mala a arrastar atrás de mim [...] e uma explosão de lágrimas a inchar, enovelada, na garganta, encontrei uma mulher numa cama e uma criança num berço dormindo ambas na mesma cristação desprotegida feita da fragilidade e abandono, e fiquei parado no quarto com a cabeça cheia ainda dos ecos da Guerra, do som dos tiros e do silêncio indignado dos mortos.<sup>505</sup>

The narrator’s inadaptability, with the echoes and resonances of the war springing to his mind, does not permit a successful and happy reintegration in

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<sup>505</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Os Cus de Judas*, p.89.

his civilian life, ‘forcing’ him to abandon his family and engage in the nocturnal activities that both *Memória de Elefante* and *Os Cus de Judas* explore. In chapter M of the novel here analysed, the narrator recounts a sexual encounter with a flight attendant in which he was not able to perform sexually:

Despi as calças, desabotoei a camisa, [...] estendi-me no colchão, envergonhado do tamanho do meu pénis murcho que não crescia, não crescia, reduzido a uma tripa engelhada entre os pêlos ruivos lá de baixo, a hospedeira pegou-lhe educadamente com dois dedos [...] Entesa-te minha besta, ordenei-me eu dentro de mim, a minha filha suspendeu o biberão para arrotar e os olhos dela fitavam para dentro, desfocados, toquei a vulva da rapariga e era mole, e morna, e tenra, e molhada, [...] Pela alminha de quem lá tens entesa-te, [...] não me deixes ficar mal e entesa-te.<sup>506</sup>

He is unable to have an erection despite the erotic stimulation of his sexual organ, in a moment of impotence. The incapability of adjusting to the reality of the moment becomes even more painful when the image of his daughter appears to him as an intrusive memory, creating once again that sense of displacement that cannot be detached from traumatic memory. The displacement caused by the war is total. Not only is he not capable of adjusting to the civilian life he had before the war, he is also incapable of breaking free from it. His displacement is then all encompassing, with no possible respite or escape, denoting the deep scar that war left in his self. His trauma gushes out of him, unstoppable, compelling and compulsive:

For all its gruesome imagery, the most disturbing feature of the narrator-protagonist’s performance may be its sheer compulsiveness. Nothing, apparently, will get this man to stop talking [...]. His need to retell his experiences [...] overwhelms and, from the reader’s perspective, conceals the experience he is actually having in the narrative present. [...] Antunes’ protagonist has

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<sup>506</sup> Ibid. pp.99-100.

become memory's captive and thus history's victim. He cannot keep himself from remembering.<sup>507</sup>

His narrative is, nevertheless, not a selfish or self-centred one. Lobo Antunes' writing of the suffering Other(s) is a sensitive one, highlighting the role of witness that coexists with that of soldier and doctor in his work. Half way through the novel (Chapter N), the narrator describes the collapsing and mental desistance of one of his fellow comrade in arms.

[O] pelotão formou em bicha e reparámos na contagem que faltava o furriel dos vômitos, estava sentado ali perto em cima da G3 de mãos no queixo, chamei-o, tornei a chamá-lo, acabei por sacudi-lo pelo ombro e ele levantou para mim olhos sonâmbulos de muito longe e respondeu numa voz doce de menino Não percam tempo comigo que eu estou tão farto desta guerra que nem a tiro vou sair daqui.<sup>508</sup>

Mentally broken, his trauma not even waiting upon the return, attacking him then and there, the young soldier refuses to board a helicopter. He had been vomiting and ended up breaking the line, going to find a place to sit with his head on his hands. When approached by the narrator, he seems to have lost his mind and refuses to move, claiming that he would not move not even if shot at. The absurdity of his reply (not moving even if shot at when in fact he *had been* shot at when in combat) denounces the desperate situation of an individual whose mental resistance had finally been defeated and the madness of the situation he found himself in. He was frozen, his will resigned to immobility and his mind

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<sup>507</sup>William Deresiewicz, 'Politics and the Novel in *South of Nowhere* and *The Inquisitors' Manual*' in *Facts and Fictions of António Lobo Antunes*, ed. by Victor K. Mendes (Tagus Press, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, 2011) pp.143-150 (pp. 144-145).

<sup>508</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Os Cus de Judas*, p.109.

already in another place, in an apathy akin to a severe mood swing common in depression.

The traumatic existence of Other(s) in the narrator's mind takes its most poignant form in the memory of Sofia, a young black woman with whom he was involved romantically. Her memory is evoked in Chapter S, the trauma of her loss manifested through guilty, abjection and tenderness, in an ebullition of simultaneous yet contradictory feelings. 'Sofia, eu disse na sala Volto já, e vim aqui, e sentei-me na sanita, diante do espelho onde todas as manhãs me barbeio, para falar contigo. Falta-me o teu sorriso, as tuas mãos no meu corpo, as cócegas dos teus pés nos meus pés'.<sup>509</sup> He evokes Sofia tenderly, lovingly, but this evocation is accompanied by an abject transformation of his own body, possibly a manifestation of the guilt he feels for not being able to prevent what happened to her or the trauma her fate caused in him:

Quando ensaboo a cara, Sofia, sinto as escamas vítreas da pele nos meus dedos, os olhos tornam-se salientes e tristes como os gorazes na mesa da cozinha, nascem-me barbatanas de anjo dos sovacos. Dissolve-me, parado, na banheira cheia, como imagino que os peixes morrem, evaporados numa espumazinha viscosa à tona, como decerto os peixes morrem no rio, de órbitas apodrecidas.<sup>510</sup>

The unpleasant image of fish, recurring image that now gets undertones of abjection, is the confrontation with death that haunts the narrator's present self. He is not a man anymore, having been metamorphed into a fish, withdrawing from his present existence. However, it is not only into a fish that he has been metamorphed. In the expanding of the abject view of himself, he also sees himself as a chicken whose greatest achievement is to defecate:

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<sup>509</sup> Ibid. p.147.

<sup>510</sup> Ibid.

Sofia, instalo-me na sanita como uma galinha a ajeitar no seu choco, abanando as nádegas murchas das penas na auréola de plástico, solto um ovo de oiro que deixa na loiça um rastro ocre de merda, puxo o autoclismo, cacarejo contentamentos de poedeira, e é como se essa melancólica proeza me justificasse a existência.<sup>511</sup>

It is only by relating his life to abjection that the narrator attributes meaning to it, ignoring the reality of his present life. His identity was lost in Africa, killed in that traumatic experience of his youth and he has therefore to create a new mental image for himself. Jung has reflected upon those who cannot free themselves from their youth and carry their experiences into old age. ‘They withdraw from the life-process, at least psychologically, and consequently remain fixed like nostalgia pillars of salt, with vivid recollections of youth but no living relation to the present.’<sup>512</sup> In the case of the narrator, he has been traumatically forced to live in the memory of his youth in Africa, prevented from existing fully in the present. The outcome is that the narrator continues living in an existence that is suspended in limbo, in between life and death. ‘The negation of life’s fulfilment is synonymous with the refusal to accept its ending. Both mean not wanting to live, and not wanting to live is identical with not wanting to die’.<sup>513</sup>

Sofia represented the peace the doctor found (perhaps selfishly<sup>514</sup>) to escape the realities of war. He justifies his sexual interest on her with the excuse

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<sup>511</sup> Ibid.

<sup>512</sup> Jung, p.153.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.

<sup>514</sup> From the point of view of Post-Colonial studies this sexualising of black women, who in the novel have two voiceless representatives, Sofia and Dona Teresa, is problematic. However, this issue has already been comprehensively analysed by Luis Madureira in his article *The Discreet Seductiveness of the Crumbling Empire: Sex, Violence and Colonialism in the Fiction of António*

of looking for something that could permit a distancing from the war and his horrifying everyday experience as a doctor: ‘Eu estava farto da guerra, de me debruçar, até de madrugada, para camaradas que agonizavam, sob a lâmpada vertical da sala de operações improvisada, farto do nosso sangue tão cruelmente derramado’.<sup>515</sup>

It could then be that the abject imagery in which the narrator views himself is the direct product of the guilt for effectively using Sofia in this way and then being powerless to stop her being captured, tortured and raped by the agents from Pide, before being sent to Luanda to meet an uncertain, but undoubtedly unpleasant, fate. The trauma is here that of being simultaneously the powerless witness and the selfish perpetrator, a situation that only the madness of a war (or a similar absurd event) could make possible.

Approaching the end, the narrative starts completing the last part of its circular trajectory. It is then, on Chapter U, that the collective voice reemerges in full force:

Odiávamos o rio [...] em que as lavadeiras esfregavam na pedra limosa a nossa roupa militar, seguidas pela fome suspensa dos soldados, masturbando-se, de joelhos na terra, junto da arma que esqueciam. Trazíamos vinte e cinco meses de guerra nas tripas, vinte e cinco meses de comer merda, e beber merda, e lutar por merda, e adoecer por merda, e cair por merda, nas tripas, vinte e cinco intermináveis meses dolorosos e ridículos nas tripas, de tal jeito ridículos que, por vezes, à noite, [...] desatávamos de súbito a rir, na cara uns dos outros, gargalhadas impossíveis de estancar.<sup>516</sup>

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*Lobo Antunes* (Luso-Brazilian Review, University of Wisconsin Press, Vol. 32, No. 1 (Summer, 1995), pp. 17-30).

<sup>515</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Os Cus de Judas*, p.151.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.* p.172.

The return of the collective voice in such a powerful passage is the counteraction to that other collective voice that bid the soldiers goodbye in patriotic delirium. The ‘dangerous enthusiasm’<sup>517</sup> of ideology, the collective madness of Salazarismo that witnessed the departure of the soldiers with imperialistic expectations, is challenged by this other, abject and hysterical collective voice, that of the soldiers themselves, who after 25 months of war, cannot contain their cathartic laughter. The uncontrollable fits of laughter in face of the absurdity, abjection and horror of the war, are reminders of Erasmus’ Folly, who asserts the triumph of comedy over those very absurdities, a defiance that is the greatest strength of literary madness:

Anyone is welcome to come and compare *my* gift with the transformations performed by the rest of the gods. I don’t care to repeat what these gods do when they’re angry [...]. What I do is return an individual to life’s best and happiest time [...] My fools [...] are plump, sleek, and well groomed<sup>518</sup>.

But the irony and sarcasm also fade away; the abject laughter quickly turns sour. Already back in Lisbon, returned to his everyday life in the present night where he talks with the woman, in his flat, the narrator, now alone, without the company of his brothers in arms, he confesses not only his loneliness but also the terrible traumatic nausea he carries within himself; ‘Apetece-me vomitar na sanita o desconforto da morte diária que carrego comigo como uma pedra de ácido no estômago, se me ramifica nas veias e me desliza nos membros num fluir

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<sup>517</sup> ‘[T]he mental state of the people as a whole might well be compared to a psychosis. [...] The driving forces locked up in the unconscious are canalized into consciousness and form a new source of power, which may, however, unleash a dangerous enthusiasm.’ (Jung, pp.144-145).

<sup>518</sup> Erasmus, *Praise of Folly* (London: Alma Classics, 2013) p.18.

oleado de terror'.<sup>519</sup> This nausea is a manifestation of the traumatised identity he acquired during the war, which culminates in the act of vomiting, an abject act which holds great significance for the construction of the traumatised narrator's self, as argued by Kristeva:

Along with the sight-clouding dizziness, *nausea* [...] separates me [...] I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*. [...] During that course in which "I" become, I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit. Mute protest of the symptom, shattering violence of a convulsion that, to be sure, is inscribed in a symbolic system, but in which, without either wanting or being able to become integrated in order to answer to it, it reacts, it abreacts. It abjects.<sup>520</sup>

It is then, through the act of vomiting that the narrator establishes his new identity, a rebirth that is traumatised by war. His present existence has as its starting point the abjection of war, propelling him into a downwards spiral that takes as its symbolic representation the abject bodily secretions of *vomit* and *shit*. These two are the coordinates of his inner life, from which his new traumatised existence stems out. The repetition of the word *Merda* (in English, literally shit) in the earlier passage denounces the abject absurdity of his condition, the ironic goal to which his life (and his fellow soldiers' lives) is heading. The ultimate meaning.

Still using bodily secretions as a metaphor for trauma, the narrator denounces the inadequacy of medical exams (of medicine in general) in detecting and addressing the issue of trauma, exposing its preoccupation with the body rather than the mind, the hypocrisy of medical procedures and their obsession with physical proof: 'Trazemos o sangue limpo, Isabel: as análises não

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<sup>519</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Os Cus de Judas*, p.184.

<sup>520</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror, An Essay on Abjection*, p.3.

acusam os negros a abrirem a cova para o tiro da Pide, nem o homem enforcado pelo inspector na Chiquita'.<sup>521</sup>

The futility of the bloodwork, which comes back clean and obviously showing no trauma, illustrates both the untranslatability into medical language of the horrors of trauma and the feeble attempts to correctly address the problem. Moreover, it hints at the lack of institutional will in the Portuguese context, the *collective amnesia* and cultural forgetting Lobo Antunes exposes with this novel. This point is reinforced in the last chapter, when the circular journey is complete, the soldier(s) having returned back to Portugal and to his (theirs) civilian life (lives) and met with the country's ignorance, the traumatic experiences discarded, ignored and sent to the realm of oblivion. The ironic voice of the narrator resurfaces here, mocking and defiant:

Tudo é real, sobretudo a agonia, o enjoo do álcool, a dor de cabeça [...], os gestos lentificados por um torpor de aquário [...] Tudo é real menos a guerra que não existiu nunca: jamais houve colónias, nem fascismo, nem Salazar, nem Tarrafal, nem Pide, nem revolução, jamais houve, compreende, nada, os calendários deste país imobilizaram-se há tanto tempo que nos esquecemos deles.<sup>522</sup>

His experiences, the cause of his (and his generations') trauma are deemed as not real, a sort of hallucination or delusion that despite the visibility of its scars it is not acknowledged as ever having happened. The narrator in this novel resembles that other narrator from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, both narrating a truth that is deemed as mad, both vehement in their roar:

I've been silent so long now it's gonna roar out of me like floodwaters and you think that the guy narrating this is ranting and raving my *God*; you think it's too horrible to have really happened,

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<sup>521</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Os Cus de Judas*, p.184.

<sup>522</sup> *Ibid.* p.193.

this is too awful to be the truth! [...] But it's the truth even if it didn't happen.<sup>523</sup>

The two narrators belong to different worlds; their traumas have different origins. One, a doctor and a soldier. The other an inmate in a mental institution. But both share an overlooked truth and their experiences have been ignored and silenced by the discourse of the repressive master-narratives of different social and political forces. They share the burden of trauma and they are both willing to denounce it in the violent flow of their narratives, their particular form of resistance that humanises them.

War is then the terrible catalyst that forces horrors, traumas and inevitable ethical dilemmas upon its participants. *Os Cus de Judas* is a reenactment of the narrator's traumatic experiences, nonetheless a tragic one, with no attainable goal as Lobo Antunes seems to deny the possibility of catharsis for his protagonist:

[E]very time that the narrator [...] reenacts his traumatic experiences in which events of the past acquire a supposedly active perception in the present, which should contribute, in a sense, to their comprehension and a possible transformation of his debilitating trauma and/or obsessive reminiscences into something useful or, at least, the beginning of a personal recovery, he is never able to attain any positive therapeutic effect through the reenactment.<sup>524</sup>

His identity has been forever shattered and he, like many others, cannot achieve the closure that would permit him catharsis and relative happiness:

Even less can he use the reenactment for the construction of a self with the ability to produce closure, resolution and harmony in a life traumatized by the colonial problematics. The fundamental issue is

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<sup>523</sup> Kesey, p.8.

<sup>524</sup> José N. Ornelas, 'Negation of the Narrative Framework or the Failure of Narrative Memory: The Case of *Os Cus de Judas*' in *Facts and Fictions of António Lobo Antunes*, ed. by Victor K. Mendes (Tagus Press, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, 2011) pp.321-339 (pp.328-329).

that the narrator, in his somatic and chaotic discursive reconstruction of the past, is still the object of the “other” or “others”, that is, of those who perpetrated the violence against his body.<sup>525</sup>

However, in Lobo Antunes’ literature, it is also the *written* war that impinges (without real damage) on the reader these very same experiences, expanding the territory of the memory of trauma. If, on the one hand, the narrator cannot achieve the catharsis necessary for his recuperation, on the other hand, this is not necessarily the same for the reader. Without trying to assert its therapeutic value, the novel can be read as a cautionary tale, or an attempt to achieve communion which seems to be the author’s chosen path to attain a saner, more understanding world. The transmission of the traumatic experiences to the reader is the shared learning of a widening complexity of the concept of trauma and its ramifications in mental health. Placed within a network of contexts (social, historical, political, medical, and personal, etc.) the novel stands its ground as a useful and urgent literary testament that encourages the challenging, the dialogue and the wider and deeper understanding of traumatic realities, regardless of time or space. No matter if we are doctors, patients, veterans or simply informed citizens, the novel always allows for new and challenging perspectives. From the point of view of Health Humanities, few novels can be said to do so with such efficacy.

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<sup>525</sup> Ibid. p.329.

## CHAPTER 6

### Conhecimento do Inferno

If *Memória de Elefante* had as its main focus the doctor's troubled existence after the war and his activity as a psychiatrist, and *Os Cus de Judas* had as its main focus the war experience itself, the author's third novel, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, is a concatenation of both realities, the focus shifting from memories of the war and his professional life at Hospital Miguel Bombarda. The simultaneous presence of both realities is in itself a doubling of the traumatic dimension of the text. Indeed, this coexistence of both dimensions in the text denotes the tension between (sometimes unwilling) perpetrator and victim, embodied in the same author, something that is especially difficult to transform into a comprehensible text. Kierkegaard, reflecting on the impossible dilemma of being both perpetrator and victim, describes the moment when Abraham is told by God to sacrifice his own son, an unspeakably terrible act to test Abraham's faith:

Who gave strength to Abraham's arm? [...] He who gazes at this becomes paralyzed. Who gave strength to Abraham's soul, so that his eyes did not grow dim, so that he saw neither Isaac nor the ram? He who gazes at this becomes blind. – And yet rare enough perhaps is the man who becomes paralyzed and blind, still more rare one who worthily recounts what happened.<sup>526</sup>

The dilemma is of a blinding and paralysing force, the very description of the power and effects of trauma. Evidently, and as we have perceived from the considerations of Caruth (and her emphasis on the literality of trauma) and others, when addressing trauma one experiences a strong pull towards silence. So, to address not one but two loci of trauma is a feat in itself, an act of bravery

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<sup>526</sup> Søren Kierkegaard; *Fear and Trembling / The Sickness unto Death* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013) pp.56-57.

to immerse oneself in that horrific space of trauma, of which the only just outcome is silence. However, the compulsion to return to those loci is unavoidable. In this third novel, published in 1980, one year after the publication of the initial two, the author is compelled to repeat the themes and general motifs of the previous works, which indicates a literary interconnectedness, a quasi-obsessive and compulsive monologue that characterizes his writing.

Indeed, the compulsive nature of the author's writing has also been pinpointed by Maria Alzira Seixo:

Por escrita compulsiva poderemos aqui entender uma necessidade de expressão que alia uma fundamental elaboração (e gosto) da criação verbal à preocupação obsessiva com determinados tipos de temática experienciada (a guerra colonial, o exercício da psiquiatria, os laços familiares, a relação amorosa), e muito principalmente a recorrência de temas, motivos, situações e personagens que migram, [...] nestes três primeiros livros, de romance para romance, em retomadas sensivelmente idênticas de incidência narrativa e de textualização ficcional.<sup>527</sup>

Thus, in *Conhecimento do Inferno*, the author obsessively returns to the traumatic themes explored in his previous novels, with the difference that in this particular book, they are co-existent and appear simultaneously. It is as if the author, having explored each traumatic theme (the hospital and psychiatry) more or less on their own, decides to take them full on and at the same time, perhaps in a final attempt to achieve catharsis. It is noteworthy that this is the last novel of the inaugural tryptic of the *biographical* cycle, the final moment before a marked shift in his writing, visible in his next novel *Explicação dos Pássaros*. Not yet able to let these traumatic themes go, and unable to escape their grip, Lobo Antunes holds on to them intensely. The process is not yet finished and,

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<sup>527</sup> Maria Alzira Seixo, *Os Romances de António Lobo Antunes*, p.67

for the author, it is essential to compulsively return to these themes, painfully recalling them to his memory. This echoes Freud's reflection: 'As long as the patient is in the treatment he cannot escape from this compulsion to repeat; and in the end we understand that this is his way of remembering'.<sup>528</sup>

It is as if Lobo Antunes is emulating the process of psychological treatment in his writing. The 'descent to hell' he willingly puts himself through in the twelve chapters of the novel could ultimately have a cathartic intent, but it is clear that, even if this was not the case, the transference from those traumatic loci and their intrinsic aspects to the writing itself is unavoidable. Thus, repetition of themes and situations and the compulsiveness to return to the dimension of trauma encapsulate what Freud has observed in his clinical practice:

We soon perceive that the transference is itself only a piece of repetition, and that the repetition is a transference of the forgotten past [...] on to all the other aspects of the current situation. We must be prepared to find, therefore, that the patient yields to the compulsion to repeat, which now replaces the impulsion to remember [...] in every other activity and relationship which may occupy his life at the time [...] The part played by resistance, too, is easily recognized. The greater the resistance, the more extensively will acting out repetition replace remembering. [...] But if, as the analysis proceeds, the transference becomes hostile or unduly intense and therefore in need of repression, remembering it once gives way to acting out. From then onwards the resistances determine the sequence of the material which is to be repeated. The patient brings out of the armoury of the past the weapons with which he defends himself against the progress of the treatment, weapons which we must wrest from him one by one. We have learnt that the

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<sup>528</sup>Sigmund Freud, 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of PsychoAnalysis II)' in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XII (1911-1913): The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works* (Vintage, London, 2001) pp. 145-156 (p.150).

patient repeats instead of remembering and repeats under the conditions of resistance.<sup>529</sup>

The weapons summoned by the author, the forces of resistance of the traumatic memories, are indeed wrested one by one within the space of the novel. It is a journey, a progressive catharsis which has necessarily to encounter those forces of resistance in the descent to hell it has to undergo in order to reach full knowledge and finally be freed of them. *Hell* is also very relevant in the symbolic dimension, as it becomes a metonym for many other realities, as pointed out by Maria Alzira Seixo:

a imagística do *inferno*, correlacionada explicitamente com a doença e com a forma de a tratar, e composta de semas inumeráveis como a condenação, a irremissibilidade, o sofrimento, a destruição, a maldade sinistra e a intolerabilidade (um “inferno” que aqui é específico mas que tem também a ver com a “noite” e com várias das suas conotações assumidas nos dois primeiros livros, nomeadamente a solidão, o tenebroso, a letargia anónima e a morte, sempre convocando o outro inferno que foi a guerra colonial), mas também [...] a questão do *conhecimento*.<sup>530</sup>

Indeed, the title is the compass for understanding the novel, in terms of its traumatic dimension, in more depth. The binary Knowledge/Hell is of the utmost importance to unlock the core conceptual problematics of Lobo Antunes’ writing in this novel, at a moment when his writing has matured and the articulation of those problematics (already explored in the previous novels) is more skilfully and artistically accomplished.

The title comes from a review of George Eliot’s novel *The Mill on the Floss*, published in 1860 by *The Quarterly Review*. In it, the unnamed critic attacks Eliot’s novel, accusing it, in a puritanical tone, of unnecessarily exploring

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<sup>529</sup> Ibid. p.151.

<sup>530</sup> Maria Alzira Seixo, *Os Romances de António Lobo Antunes*, p.69.

the darker regions of life and hinting at the potential negative consequences of doing so. The paragraph lifted by Lobo Antunes' and used as the novel's epigraph reads as follows:

We do not believe any good end is to be effected by fictions which fill the mind with details of imaginary vice and distress and crime, or which teach it... instead of endeavouring after the fulfilment of simple and ordinary duty... to aim at the assurance of superiority by creating for itself fanciful and incomprehensible perplexities. Rather we believe that the effect of such fictions tends to render those who fall under their influence unfit for practical exertion... by intruding on minds which ought to be guarded from impurity the unnecessary knowledge of hell.<sup>531</sup>

The long epigraph deserves to be subjected to a closer critical engagement. It not only precludes the novel and gives it its title, the epigraph also hints at the ironic authorial pose which, by now, readers will be familiar with. By summoning the voice of an unnamed critic from another era, Lobo Antunes is also evoking the type of criticism his writing could have been subjected to by the most conservative sectors of society in general and literary criticism in particular. Moreover, it is precisely by ironically using a quote pointing out the contrary that Lobo Antunes sets out his literary ethos, a challenging attitude that reveals how much importance the author sees in the preferred topics of his writing on this stage of his career. It is as if Lobo Antunes was appropriating those criticisms to Eliot's writing as criticisms towards his own writing, finding justification for what he is trying to do in contrarian opinions. Thus, it is precisely by creating fictions which 'fill the mind with details of imaginary vice and distress' that Lobo Antunes finds the vessel for his uncomfortable themes, challenging the mainstream tendency in Portuguese society for forgetting the most traumatic episodes of its recent history. In a way, he is repeating an already

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<sup>531</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, p.11.

existing echo (silent scream) in *Os Cus de Judas*, when the question of whether society has forgotten the men that participated in the war, surfaces.

Moreover, the epigraph becomes even more relevant when we analyse its second part (starting in the second sentence) in more detail. Here, we find a warning about a pragmatic existence that has been exposed to such fictions. It is the critic's opinion that the contact between such fictions and one's real existence 'tends to render those who fall under their influence unfit for practical exertion'. This is a crucial point for the ironic approach of Lobo Antunes in the sense that it is by immersing his literature in these problematic realities that he finds his moral compass and the strength to endure in his medical praxis. Practising the opposite of what the critic is pontificating about is the way in which the author affirms the possibility of becoming a better doctor, fitter for the practical exertion of the medical profession he belongs to.

The epigraph also indicates a certain tendency to identify literature as the source of violence and trauma, as if it could contaminate the reader, who is otherwise pure, virgin and spared from the violent consequences of those realities. It is an assumption that completely disregards that those experiences might be transversal to both reader and writer, somehow blaming the writer for the 'contamination' of the minds of the readers, exculpating the actual political, historical and social circumstances for the damage caused. Again, this view goes against what the author develops in his writing, and it is through the irony of the epigraph that he can be accusatory of those other forces outside literature, while indicating the porosity of his novels. The visible porosity of his writing (biographical, socially engaged) is what permits that communion between author and reader which he is constantly seeking. So, it is by intruding on those

realities of trauma and madness that Lobo Antunes will find the ethos of his writing and, not the unnecessary, but the *necessary* knowledge of hell.

The intrusion is nevertheless of a mobile nature, taking shape in the journey the narrator undertakes. This is a return journey, whose objective ‘é essa itinerância pura de um regresso a casa, acompanhada pela itinerância de um pensamento múltiplo e inquieto’.<sup>532</sup> The journey is made by car, starting in Balaia, in the south of Portugal (Algarve) and ending in Praia das Maças, in Sintra (north of Lisbon). In terms of structure, as pointed out in Alzira Seixo’s analysis, the novel is organised thus: ‘O romance estrutura-se em doze capítulos, desenvolvendo-se no ritmo lento da viagem solitária e monótona, que dá conta das viagens mentais que as diversas correntes de pensamento que vão interferindo no espírito do narrador’.<sup>533</sup>

Chapter 1 begins with a sense of unreality and fakeness: ‘O mar do Algarve é feito de cartão como nos cenários de teatro [...]’<sup>534</sup>. The artificiality of the scenery highlights the sense of displacement and uncanniness that pervades the author’s writing when trying to convey the absurdness and meaninglessness of those material realities associated with pleasure and comfort when compared to the traumatic realities (much more vivid and real). This unpleasant artificiality seems to intrude in the totality of the narrator’s experience, an experience that is supposed to be a source of pleasure as he is in the Algarve, a popular holiday destination for tourists and Portuguese people alike, on holiday. In a way, it is

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<sup>532</sup> Maria Alzira Seixo, *Os Romances de António Lobo Antunes*, p.72.

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>534</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, p.12.

this all-embracing artificiality that prompts the journey, which now follows the contours of an escape rather than a simple journey, as the geographical and human scenery seems to be rejecting the narrator:

Safa da Quinta da Balaia na direcção de Lisboa, do aldeamento de amêndoa e clara de ovo da Balaia onde pessoas de plástico passavam férias de plástico no aborrecimento de plástico dos ricos, sob árvores semelhantes a grinaldas de papel de seda que a pupila verde da piscina reflectia no azul metileno da água.<sup>535</sup>

The persistence of the word ‘plástico’ (plastic), which is repeated three times, accentuates the sense of artificiality that seems to repulse the narrator, propelling his mind to another reality, another locus. His mind is suddenly transported elsewhere, an act of displacement that takes him back to the fecund source of his writing, a source that is both pleasurable and traumatic but which is always present – Africa. The displacement of his memory occurs in a state of insomnia, exuding an ominous presence of death and decay which hints at a darker region of memory itself, almost as if his remembrance was resisting itself, like the body resists the foreign agent of a virus:

Amanhecera algumas vezes no silêncio de uma casa imóvel, pousada como uma borboleta morta entre as sombras sem corpo da noite [...] e pensava Estou numa lavra de girassol da Baixa do Cassanje entre os morros de Dala Samba e da Chiquita, Estou de pé na planície transparente da Baixa do Cassanje voltado para o mar longínquo de Luanda, o mar gordo de Luanda da cor do óleo das traineiras e do riso livre dos negros.<sup>536</sup>

The Kafkaesque image resulting from his insomnia, with the striking metaphor of the motionless house described as a ‘dead butterfly in the bodiless night’, an image full of the eeriness of death and decay, is immediately contrasted with the

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<sup>535</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, pp.15-16.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.* p.16.

spatial memory of Africa. In an instant, the reader is confronted with the sharp shift from a material reality of decay, which could well be a metaphor for Portugal itself, to a much more luminous reality which inhabits the narrator's memories of Angola. The shift is almost spontaneous, as if all those places in Angola invoked by the narrator had barged their way into the text and its power is visible by the strong contrast between 'o mar gordo de Luanda' and 'as sombras sem corpo da noite', the concrete corporeal presence of Angola against the world of incorporeal dark shadows of the house in Algarve.

It is telling that the narrator's mind reverts so early in the novel to the very geographical source of his personal suffering and trauma, with the surprising fact that the first invocation of it is not a painful but rather a pleasant one. Perhaps this is an authorial attempt to excuse Angola from any responsibility for the horrors that have befallen it and to indict Portugal with such charges, given the unpleasant way its geography is described. Inscribed in his memory is 'o riso livre dos negros', exoticised and romanticised to heighten the contrast with the depressing reality of Portugal, a reality he had to face upon his return.

In fact, Angola emerges in the whole of the author's work as a complex, dualistic place:

Do conjunto da obra, emana uma imagística de Angola, construída a partir de uma dinâmica afectiva dual. O narrador antuniano é, consequentemente, uma personagem dividida: Angola não é só o espaço da negatividade, que afastou os narradores [...] da sua família, da sua cidade [...], onde sofreram os horrores da guerra, é igualmente o espaço da amizade, da liberdade e da beleza.<sup>537</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> *Dicionário da Obra de António Lobo Antunes (Vol.I)*, ed.by Maria Alzira Seixo, et al., (Lisboa: Imprensa Nacional-Casa Da Moeda, 2008), p.201.

The dichotomy with which Angola is regarded accentuates its status as a troubled metaphor for the colonial legacy the author is forced to deal with. It is not only because of the physical displacement provoked by his conscription, but especially because of the *mental displacement* that Angola becomes the source of questioning, of challenging and ultimately the transformative force of Lobo Antunes' *traumabourne* worldview: 'A deslocação espacial e o seu corolário, a separação emocional da família e do país, levaram os narradores [...] a reavaliar as suas emoções e a olhar de uma nova forma os espaços nacionais costumeiros'.<sup>538</sup>

His gaze was then contaminated by the knowledge he found in Africa, a knowledge that would challenge his own perception of life and of his urban existence back in Lisbon. The new light that shine through his gaze was nevertheless not a redemptive one, but one that would imprison him in a limbo between a newly-found fecund knowledge found in Africa, which he cannot fully appropriate, and the reality in which he was born and grew up. One must not forget that the narrator (and the author) is a white European and it would thus be impossible for him to claim to have the same worldview as a non-white African. It is from this in-between dimension that his gaze rests, casting a critical eye over everything it grasps. That limbo is the very place from which his literature emerges.

An example of such knowledge, apprehended from the bonds of friendship the narrator developed with some of the locals, is narrated thus: 'Foi

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<sup>538</sup> Ibid.

em África [...] que eu soube que em Lisboa não existia a noite [...] Nesse país [...] encontrei amigos entre os pobres negros da Pide, Chinóia, Camanga, Machai, Miúdo Malassa'.<sup>539</sup> One of those friends is a man called António Miúdo Catolo. It is he that informs the narrator about the absence of night in Lisbon:

Tempos antes, o governo condecorara-o com uma Cruz de Guerra e uma viagem à Europa: levaram Catolo para Luanda, meteram-no no avião, desembarcaram-no no aeroporto, compraram-lhe um fato e uma gravata num saldo [...], alugaram-lhe um quarto numa pensão manhosa [...], deram-lhe quinhentos escudos e esqueceram-se dele.<sup>540</sup>

Catolo is then subjected to the racist attitude of the inn keeper, who locks him in his room. 'A dona da pensão fechou o quarto à chave "para o palerma do preto não desatar por aí a embebedar-se e a fazer asneiras, o senhor sabe como esses macacos são'.<sup>541</sup> The cruel racist act results in Catolo being locked in the room for seventy-two hours, a traumatic incident that results in Catolo developing insomnia, baffled by the continuous hubbub of Lisbon by night.

'António Miúdo Catolo esteve setenta e duas horas em jejum, urinando-se de terror nas calças novas, com o nariz encostado à janela a que se colava um meio-dia sem fim, até a dona da pensão abrir a porta'.<sup>542</sup>

The experience leads him to conclude that there is no night in Lisbon, and leaves him horrified and repulsed by the urban realities of the coloniser country. Lisbon's absence of night is confirmed by the narrator, who confesses

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<sup>539</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, p.22.

<sup>540</sup> *Ibid.* pp.23-24.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.* p.24.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*

its fake and artificial nature, something he had hinted at before when describing the landscape of Algarve. ‘A noite em Lisboa é uma noite inventada [...] uma noite a fingir’<sup>543</sup>, he says. The fakeness of the night, in the narrator’s view, becomes a representation of the collective reality of Portugal under the dictatorship and in the early years of its aftermath. ‘Em Portugal quase tudo, de resto, é a fingir, a gente, as avenidas, as casas, os restaurantes, as lojas, a amizade, o desinteresse, a raiva. Só o medo e a miséria são autênticos’.<sup>544</sup>

Fear and misery are the two realities that the narrator associates with his life back in Portugal, a clear confession of the bitter state of mind he is left with after all his experiences. It is also clear that the night is a source of suffering. Upon confessing to Catolo his thoughts about the artificiality of life, about fear and misery, the African night starts to haunt him in a materialisation of trauma under the guise of the ghosts of dead children; ‘em breve as sombras dos primeiros defuntos, dos primeiros sobas defuntos e das primeiras crianças mortas, começariam a mover-se no capim idênticos aos ratos que se alimentavam da carne podre dos leprosos’<sup>545</sup>. The simultaneously haunting and abject image of the dead dwelling amongst the living, with the particularly striking image of the dead children, is a reminder of the guilt and trauma of having inflicted the violence of war upon the local population. It is as if the land itself is rebelling against the narrator, offering him the hallucinatory visions of dead children walking by him as a tainted gift. ‘Uma criança morta passou rente a nós sem nos

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<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.* p.25.

<sup>544</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>545</sup> *Ibid.*

ver, com as órbitas fosforecentes de apreciação idênticas às das gazelas ou dos mochos feridos'.<sup>546</sup>

At this point, we perceive that Africa also represents a deep traumatic dimension in the narrator's mind. The dead child's appearance seems only to perturb him and indeed he confesses his fear to Catolo: 'Tenho receio das crianças mortas [...] Tenho receio das crianças mortas, tenho medo da maldade perversa das crianças mortas'.<sup>547</sup> His fear indicates a darker side in his perception of Angola, the violence of war and its dead incorporated in the abject ghost of the child, with the wickedness and cruelty of war mirrored in their 'maldade perversa'. This seems to be the narrator's exclusive ghost, though. Apparently unfazed by the ghost's appearance and by his own traumatic experience, Catolo pronounces with a vitality that, in the author's work, does not seem to be shared by non-Africans: '[...] Os brancos são loucos [...] os brancos são mais loucos que os meninos'.<sup>548</sup>

Madness is indeed another important theme in this chapter (and in the whole novel). Along with Catolo's insomnia and the terror of his sleepless night, we are also presented with the narrator's own insomnia and aversion of the night. In his sleeplessness, the narrator is confronted with his childhood memories of the mad; 'E, como sempre acontecia no decurso das insónias, os malucos da infância, os ternos, humildes, indignados, esbracejantes malucos da infância

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<sup>546</sup> Ibid.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid. p.26.

princiavam a desfilar um a um pelas trevas'.<sup>549</sup> Like a procession of miserable beings, they appear to him in a torrent:

Havia os malucos de Benfica, o senhor idoso que abria de repente a gabardine à porta da escola a exhibir o trapo do sexo, o bêbedo Florentino sentado no passeio, à chuva, numa postura grandiosa, a insultar as pernas ráspidas das pessoas na veemência complicada do tinto, os doces malucos de Benfica desbotados como fotografias no álbum confuso da infância, o sineiro que tocava o Papagaio Loiro durante a Elevação de missa ao meio-dia, [...] a mulher que guardava as hóstias em casa numa caixinha na esperança de reconstruir um dia o corpo inteiro de Deus, os malucos de Benfica que à noite se uniam em matilha como os cães vadios, e gritavam na vastidão calada das quintas os latidos horríveis dos seus protestos. [...] [V]eio-lhe à ideia o homem entornado num carrinho de bebé a ler revistas de mecânica quântica na mata de Monsanto, alheio á surpresa e ao espanto das pessoas, um sujeito composto, de paletó e óculos, a ler revistas de mecânica quântica na mata de Monsanto dentro de um carrinho de bebé enferrujado.<sup>550</sup>

The parade of the mad, who could have easily been characters in a Fellini film, seems to exist as a very vivid memory from the narrator's childhood. All of those encounters with the strange world of the mad have left an indelible mark and, according to him, it has contributed heavily to his decision to become a psychiatrist. '[A]o observar a sua estranha naturalidade e estupefacção entre o riso e o alarme dos outros, decidira ser psiquiatra para entender melhor (pensava) a esquisita forma de viver dos adultos, cuja insegurança pressentia por vezes'.<sup>551</sup>

This is a curious admission on the part of the narrator. If it reflected any autobiographical dimension of Lobo Antunes, then this claim would have to be taken with a large pinch of salt, as it suffices to recall the author's confession of

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<sup>549</sup> Ibid. p.17.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid. pp.17-18.

<sup>551</sup> Ibid. p.18.

having chosen psychiatry because it permitted him to have more time for his writing. However, as I have pointed out elsewhere, the autobiographical dimension of the author's writing is a complex one and who is to say where the truth is regarding his motivations for having chosen psychiatry? Thus, it is important to highlight the *biographical* aspect of his writing as a way of understanding these apparent discrepancies. When addressing this issue as Lobo Antunes himself, he shifts the emphasis onto his writing, placing all the focus on the very act of writing. But when addressing it as the author behind the words that populate the novels, he seems to do the opposite by highlighting what seems to be an autobiographical focus of the text. It is in this biographical porosity that his writing is able to articulate so powerfully the various dimensions it stems out from.

Whatever the case, it is significant for the diegesis of the novel that such admission occurs in the very first chapter, a starting point for the novel, the journey and for the acquisition of a certain type of knowledge. Its importance is visible when reaffirmed: 'Foi nessa altura (pensou) que resolveu ser psiquiatra a fim de morar entre homens distorcidos como os que nos visitam nos sonhos e compreender as suas falas lunares e os comovidos ou rancorosos aquários dos seus cérebros, em que nadam, moribundos, os peixes do pavor'.<sup>552</sup>

Tellingly, it seems to have been a sort of tenderness and goodwill, an empathy with the mad that drove the narrator into pursuing psychiatry. Empathy is indeed what compels the narrator to try and understand those 'distorted' men. In a way, despite the different outcome from these early expectations, a certain

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<sup>552</sup> Ibid.

empathy remains, if not in the rather pessimistic tone of his writing, then in the writing itself:

Por outras palavras, os primeiros capítulos, que instauram um *processo cognitivo racional* cuja falência se racionaliza igualmente, e poderia dessa forma prosseguir na sua emenda e reconstrução, vai afinal desenvolver-se através da instalação de um *universo predominantemente mágico*, onde indignação e loucura andam a par, e dão finalmente as mãos à poesia e ao sentido cósmico primordial para que se reapelam.<sup>553</sup>

Indeed, madness is the other hell. In the first chapter's final paragraph, we encounter the narrator's confrontation with hell, materialised upon his return, a hell he has to cross and pass through, a hell that appears to him under the form of Hospital Miguel Bombarda. 'E só em 1973, quando cheguei ao Hospital Miguel Bombarda para iniciar a longa travessia do inferno, verifiquei que a noite desaparecera'.<sup>554</sup> The night (a metonymical name for anxiety and despair in Lobo Antunes' work) is confirmed as an absent dimension. However, the narrator notices that this absence is only a displacement, from the urban reality of the city into the dark realm of the Hospital. 'A noite que desaparece da cidade estava no rosto inclinado para o ombro do doente que se enforcou por detrás das garagens e cujas sapatilhas rotas oscilavam de leve à altura do meu queixo'.<sup>555</sup> The night, in all of its horror, has migrated to the space of the hospital, its darkness engulfing the painful memory of a patient who had hung himself. It is then, perhaps catalysed by the memory of the patient, that the narrator assumes his own traumatic knowledge:

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<sup>553</sup> Maria Alzira Seixo, *Os Romances de António Lobo Antunes*, p.75.

<sup>554</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, p.26.

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*

Em 1973 eu regressara da guerra e sabia de feridos, do latir de gemidos na picada, de explosões, de tiros, de minas, de ventres esquartejados pela explosão das armadilhas, sabia de prisioneiros e de bebês assassinados, sabia do sangue derramado e da saudade, mas fora-me poupado o conhecimento do inferno.<sup>556</sup>

In this poignant chapter the narrator recalls, almost like a mantra, some of the traumatic and horrific experiences he had to endure and he was witness to. These constitute the traumatic knowledge he has acquired. However, and perhaps surprisingly, the narrator somewhat minimises them when he claims, despite all the horrors experienced, to having been *spared* the knowledge of hell (‘fora-me poupado o conhecimento do inferno’). From what hell has he then been spared, if not from the horrific realities in the conflict in Angola? The answer seems to be madness, in its medicalised form, psychiatry. Hell is then the suffering brought by psychiatry to those who are already suffering. Indeed, further on in the novel (chapter 3) madness is defined as psychiatry and its whole medical apparatuses:

O inferno, pensou, são os tratados de Psiquiatria, o inferno é a invenção da loucura pelos médicos, o inferno é esta estupidez de comprimidos, esta incapacidade de amar, esta ausência de esperança, esta pulseira japonesa de esconjurar o reumatismo da alma com uma cápsula à noite, uma ampola bebível ao pequeno-almoço e a incompreensão de fora para dentro da amargura e do delírio.<sup>557</sup>

This antipsychiatric stance reminds us that, once again, Lobo Antunes seems to be deromanticizing madness, assuming it as a ‘hell’ one should not aim to attain, as well as attacking Psychiatry itself.

Hell is the incapacity of rationalizing what has happened to oneself, the hell of losing reason altogether and thus being condemned to a zombified and

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<sup>556</sup> Ibid.

<sup>557</sup> Ibid. p.56.

medicalised existence, one in which remembrance and catharsis are impossible. Therefore, the knowledge of hell is a knowledge that goes beyond what reason can retrieve, it is a knowledge acquired by the nullification of one's life, via the medicalization inflicted by that oppressive force that is psychiatry. But the narrator has been spared this knowledge. By acknowledging the exceptionality of his position, he is placing himself in the literary 'privilege' of existing in-between several dimensions and being able to witness them... and write. This is a crucial acknowledgement, as it permits him to articulate his own traumatic experiences with the madness and suffering he witnesses in others. The narrator's interstitial yet absurd position is, as we have seen, the distinctive feature of Lobo Antunes writing.

The unusual position which the narrator is in, having gone through hell but being spared the full knowledge of it, resembles that other position that has astonished Kierkegaard:

That sorrow can derange a man's mind, that we see, and it is sad enough. That there is such a thing as strength of will which is able to haul up so exceedingly close to the wind that it saves a man's reason, even though he remains a little queer, that too one sees. I have no intention of disparaging this; but to be able to lose one's reason, and therefore the finiteness of which reason is the broker, and then by virtue of the absurd to gain precisely the same finiteness – that appals my soul, but I do not for this cause say that is something lowly, since on the contrary is the only prodigy.<sup>558</sup>

With this self-detached and yet involved position having been professed, the journey continues, geographically upwards and mentally further into the *locus horrendous* that are the hospital and the places connected with the war. As the journey progresses, these places become more and more concrete, sometimes

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<sup>558</sup> Kierkegaard, p.76.

juxtaposing each other in the narrator's mind. Chapter 2 sees the narrator's car pass by Albufeira, still in the Algarve, and the narrator's mind go back to his first day at the Hospital. 'Chegou ao Hospital Miguel Bombarda com um papel no bolso, uma guia de marcha como na tropa, era em junho de 1973 [...] Estou na tropa [...] vão dar-me uma espingarda, cortar-me o cabelo, ensinar-me, disciplinadamente, a morrer'.<sup>559</sup> The simultaneity of the medical and military memories denounces the equivalence between the two as sources of suffering. The knowledge he acquires from both experiences is the 'disciplined act of dying'.

The concreteness of the hospital's abject nature bores through the text, with the collective appearance of the mad, an appearance that is unsettling and that introduces in the text the suffering and the unpleasantness associated with the hospital:

E uma chusma imperiosa, implorativa, de pijamas, rodeou-o a chinelar, a latir, a farejar-lhe o casaco, [...] grasnando  
- Um cigarro um cigarro um cigarro  
Pelos enormes bocas desdentadas e elásticas, cercadas de cerdas de pêlos, que se aproximavam e afastavam num vaivém sequioso de matilha: como em Elvas, pensou, exactamente como em Elvas, em 1970, durante a inspecção no ginásio do quartel.<sup>560</sup>

His memory is flooded by the moment when, entering the hospital for the first time, he is surrounded by a band of mental patients, who came attracted by the possibility of obtaining a cigarette. The narrator's description is close to that of a raw animality, in one moment associating them with a group of dogs; 'latir', 'farejar' and in another moment with a group of geese or ducks; 'grasnar'. They

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<sup>559</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, p.32.

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.* p. 36.

are an abject apparition, with their toothless mouths and unkempt facial hair and dressed in their pyjamas. But the apparition of the mad triggers yet another memory, specifically one from when the narrator was doing his military training in Elvas, when the soldiers were inspected at the headquarters' gym. The image is consequential to that of the patients, a clear ironic juxtaposition to indicate the similarities between the mental patients and the conscripted soldiers.

The intention is, perhaps, to place both the patients and the soldiers on the same level, that of the oppressed; with their counterparts, doctors and the higher instances of the military, being their oppressive opposite number.

This view comes from the antipsychiatric trait in Lobo Antunes' writing. Indeed, this *abjectification* of the mentally ill echoes the words of the perhaps most famous antipsychiatry advocate, Thomas Szasz, who denounces the use of a rhetoric of rejection in the ideology of mainstream psychiatry:

The mistreatment [...] of malingerers by physicians, rests on, or at least is made possible by, the names used to label such persons and groups. I propose to call this language of social discrimination *the rhetoric of rejection*. Whenever people propose to *exclude* others from their midst, they attach stigmatizing labels to them.<sup>561</sup>

In fairness, the narrator refrains from using those labels when referring to the patients, a fact that indicates the immense respect and the favourable view he holds towards them, which will become clear in the subsequent chapters of the novel. However, the abject manner in which they are described denounces that exclusion, that dehumanized state they were forced into by a psychiatric institution in which they are patients.

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<sup>561</sup> Thomas Szasz, *Ideology and Insanity*, p.56.

Such exclusion is then emphasised by the sharp contrast that he encounters when entering the hospital director's office, where confronted with the sight of plastic flowers, he deems the man's office as artificial as the Algarve's landscape, the same artificiality he attributes to the decaying Portuguese society. 'Eis-me no reino das flores de plástico, [...] no meio dos sentimentos de plástico, das emoções de plástico, da piedade de plástico, do afecto de plástico dos médicos';<sup>562</sup> he thinks, pointing out not only the material artificiality of the plastic flowers, a marker of a self-imposed unnatural separation (hence its artificiality, contrasting with the natural status of real flowers) between the director and the rest of the hospital. The bizarre presence of plastic flowers is the embodiment of the attitudes of the medical discipline itself, in a forced separation that aims to exclude, to keep at bay, in an act that reflects the abjection of patients in the eyes of doctors, 'porque nos médicos quase só o horror é genuíno, o horror e o pânico do sofrimento, da amargura, da morte',<sup>563</sup> who in order to demarcate themselves force the separation almost with repulsion. This is a separation that is not only material but also epistemological, as if it were necessary to keep the mad excluded for the survival and well-being of psychiatrists and their discipline:

Estávamos a salvo, agora, dos internados, a salvo dos rostos toscos e ávidos dos internados a flutuarem no pátio nos pijamas de algodão, a salvo dos gritos de porco na agonia do corredor do hospital, na digna atmosfera de feltro dos donos dos malucos, dos que decidem da loucura segundo o seu próprio horror do sofrimento e da morte. Quase só o horror sangra nos que se debruçam para a angústia alheia com os seus instrumentos complicados, os seus livros, os seus

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<sup>562</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, pp.39-40.

<sup>563</sup> *Ibid.*

diagnósticos cabalísticos, como eu me inclinava para os moluscos na praia, virando-os [...] para espiar, curioso, o outro lado.<sup>564</sup>

The director's office is then an ironic safe house, as if the ghostly and beastly mad outside (the narrator invokes what symbolically is perhaps the most abject animal, the pig) presented a threat to their existence. It is noteworthy to indicate the Hegelian undertones when the narrator refers to the director as the 'owner of the mad', a reminder of the attention to the dichotomy between what we have identified as master-narratives and counter-narratives. The director's ownership of the mad permits the establishment of a hierarchy that will permit the imposition of the director's will. Lobo Antunes cleverly unearths the condition of both the mad, seen as the oppressed and subjugated, reduced to their animal condition; and the privileged position of the psychiatrist, who is shielded from the abject reality of the patients by the material comfort of his office, 'na digna atmosfera de feltro', and shielded also from the epistemological challenge of the mad, by being in the decision making and authoritative position 'dos que decidem da loucura segundo o seu próprio horror do sofrimento e da morte'.

The contrasting effect is most effective when the director pronounces the claim ' – A Psiquiatria é a mais nobre das especialidades [...]'<sup>565</sup> in a pompous manner, immediately contrasted by the image of the mad asking for cigarettes, with their 'grandes bocas peludas e moles, de raros dentes castanhos plantados ao acaso na esponja podre das gengivas'.<sup>566</sup> The abjection of these mouths is intensified by the director's own mouth, otherwise clean and dignified; 'A boca

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<sup>564</sup> Ibid.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid. p.42.

<sup>566</sup> Ibid.

do director, ao contrário, era limpa e clara como as das percas',<sup>567</sup> a vision that is nevertheless seen as sinister and menacing in its aseptic brutality of predator and executioner; 'as percas fusiformes e oblíquas que devoram sem piedade os indefesos moluscos do mar com as suas asseadas goelas cor-de-rosa, uma boca que cheirava a emoform e a tabaco americano, a boca impecável de um carrasco, a boca impecável, desprovida de remorsos de um carrasco'.<sup>568</sup>

The abjectification of patients continues, with the summoning of the grotesque and horror, in the already mentioned figure of the pig-patient, in a scene that denotes the invisible condition of the patient and its confrontation with his own death, undoubtedly the death-in-life of his internment in the hospital: 'No andar de baixo [...] um homem invisível gritava a aflição dos porcos na matança, de pescoço golpeado pela grossa lâmina das facas.'<sup>569</sup>

In this novel, and specifically in this chapter, Lobo Antunes relies heavily on abjection, perhaps as the only adequate way to describe the mundane realities of madness, immersing his writing in it and also confronting the outside entities of his novels (the reader and the socio-political context they are inserted in) with what is an unpleasant and unromanticised account of those realities:

The writer, fascinated by the abject, imagines its logic, projects himself into it, introjects it, and as a consequence perverts language – style and content. But on the other hand, as the sense of abjection is both the abject's judge and accomplice, this is also true of the literature that confronts it. One might thus say that with literature

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<sup>567</sup> Ibid.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid.p.40.

there takes place a crossing over of the dichotomous categories of Pure and Impure, Prohibition and Sin, Morality and Immorality.<sup>570</sup>

In fact, a crossover does take place. Abjection expands into the other sphere that is concatenated in the novel, the military experience. When mentally transported to Elvas, the abjection that triggered that movement accompanies the narrator's mind, in what becomes a total abject identification between the mad and the soldiers. It also seems relevant to observe the contrast presented by the flowers, which instead of artificial as in Lisbon, are natural and indeed very vivid, almost humanised: 'as flores do quartel, as flores que o comandante, maternal, amparava a caniços junto ao ginásio'.<sup>571</sup> The flowers are nurtured, maternally, by the army's commander (one of the highest ranked officers), carefully placed by the gym's wall, as if they were new-borns rather than simple flowers. The care and tenderness of his gesture is indicated by the use of the verb 'amparar', creating such a delicate imagery which will only augment the power of the abjection that will follow. The image also reflects the irony of associating maternity and motherhood with not only flowers (which, like the soldiers under the commander's 'care', need nurturing) but especially with the figure of the commander himself, in a subversion of his masculinity and the bellicose nature of his military status. However, foreshadowing the reality of the soldiers, the harsh and brutal circumstances they will face and eventually auguring only the trauma and death that awaits them, the flowers also become abject in their decaying process: 'As flores do quartel apodreciam ao sol no relento de

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<sup>570</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, p.16.

<sup>571</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, p.37.

amoníaco, no relento de pus de flores que agonizam, de caules inclinados para o chão em espirais pálidas de anemia’.<sup>572</sup>

The agonizing flowers in their abject decay are mimicking the other abject decay which is simultaneously occurring inside the gym, in an atmosphere of oppression and authoritarianism:

[E]u via desfilarem diante de mim os rapazes de Elvas que o Exército convocara, chamara, arregimentara para defenderem em África os fazendeiros do café, as prostitutas e os negociantes de explosivos, os que mandavam no País em nome de ideais confusos de opressão. [V]ia [...] desfilarem diante de mim os rapazes de Elvas no ginásio fechado, que o fedor das virilhas, o excesso de pessoas e das roupas abandonadas no chão, empestava como um de um curro trágico e triste. Levantei-me [...] e saí para uma espécie de claustro onde os alferes e os aspirantes ensinavam o manejo de armas aos recrutas, auxiliados por furriéis que trotavam pelotões adentro como cães de pastor pelos rebanhos.<sup>573</sup>

The oppressiveness of the gym and of the medical inspection gives way, in a crescendo of abjection, to that grotesque animalistic dimension of the narrator’s description, as we have seen earlier in Lobo Antunes’ writing. The soldiers are now transformed into dogs.

Notwithstanding, the crescendo of abjection continues as the brutal and unmerciful nature of the training process becomes clearer, entering a hysterical mode:

Estive alguns momentos [...] a observar os exercícios da companhia, erguendo e baixando as espingardas na poeira amarela do claustro, a pensar que me tinham enviado para Elvas não para salvar pessoas mas para as enviar para a mata, mesmo os coxos, mesmo os

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<sup>572</sup> Ibid. pp.37-38.

<sup>573</sup> Ibid. p.37.

marrecos, mesmo os surdos porque o dever patriótico não excluía ninguém.<sup>574</sup>

The narrator realises that what is expected of him as a doctor is not to fulfil his medical duties and examine the soldiers, excluding those unfit for duty, but rather to consider everyone fit, even those soldiers who were obviously not in physical condition for the army. This sinister realisation triggers a virulent reaction from the narrator, who initiates a tirade of invectives against the army and the regime's propaganda; a return, in force, of abjection: '[P]orque as Parcelas Sagradas do Ultramar necessitavam do sacrifício de todos, porque O Exército É O Espelho Da Nação, porque o Soldado Português É Tão Bom Como Os Melhores, porque o caralho da cona do minete do cabrão do broche da puta que os pariu'.<sup>575</sup>

It is through this abjection that the narrator realises what he is really observing, not just soldiers, but 'os futuros heróis, os futuros mutilados, os futuros cadáveres'.<sup>576</sup> Thus, abjection turns into trauma, with the realisation that he would be responsible for approving the suitability for combat of those men, sending them to their deaths or condemning them to live mutilated and scarred forever, exerting his medical authority so that he 'os aprovasse para a morte'.<sup>577</sup> The realisation of his role in the process is so challenging that, again, abjection

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<sup>574</sup> Ibid. p.38.

<sup>575</sup> Ibid.

<sup>576</sup> Ibid.

<sup>577</sup> Ibid.

takes hold of his mind and the soldiers are once again transfigured, this time not into animals, but into the most basic indicator of their masculinity: the penis:

Não eram rostos, nem pescoços, nem ombros, nem torsos, eram dezenas e dezenas de enormes pênis murchos que se haviam acumulado ali na minha ausência, de testículos pendentes, de repulsivos pêlos escuros e comprimidos, dezenas e dezenas de pênis quase encostados aos meus olhos em pânico a ameaçarem-me com as trombas moles das suas peles. Não eram homens, eram pênis que me perseguiram, me acuavam, oscilavam diante de mim na sua inércia cega, fechei as pálpebras com força e apeteceu-me gritar de nojo e de pavor como, em criança, no decurso de um pesadelo insuportável.<sup>578</sup>

It is as if the narrator's guilt would appear to him in the form of abject penises, the phallic representation of the soldier's impaired masculinity, emasculated and castrated. The Freudian castration anxiety is here the mark of a failed masculinity, undoubtedly a consequence of the war, which the narrator considers as a castrating and emasculating force<sup>579</sup>. 'The fact that the phallus is a signifier means that it is in the place of the Other that the subject has access to it'.<sup>580</sup>

These are the men who didn't actually become men, whose impotency against their own fate is marked in their castration, in their transfiguration into grotesque, deflated penises. The transfiguration also represents lack, absence and failure. By *becoming* penises, symbols of fertility in certain cultures, these men

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<sup>578</sup> Ibid.

<sup>579</sup> 'For the phallus is a signifier, a signifier whose function, in the intrasubjective economy of the analysis, lifts the veil perhaps from the function it performed in the mysteries. For it is the signifier intended to designate as a whole the effects of the signified, in that the signifier conditions them by its presence as a signifier.' (Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: a selection* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001) p.316.

<sup>580</sup> Lacan, pp.319-320.

are ironically embracing the *infertility* of their future lives, literally the infertility brought about by death or the infertility of living a traumatised (physically and mentally) post-war existence, unfulfilled and incomplete, mangled by war. These men (and the narrator) crave and demand that vitality that was taken away from them, by means of the humiliation they have been submitted to. In the eyes of the narrator, they literally *become* what they symbolically lack. Jacques Lacan, reflecting on this problematic, has observed, as an example:

The demand for love can only suffer from a desire whose signifier is alien to it. If the desire of the mother is the phallus, the child wishes to be the phallus in order to satisfy that desire. Thus the division immanent in desire is already felt to be experienced in the desire of the Other, in that it is already opposed to the fact that the subject is content to present the Other what in reality he may *have* that corresponds to this phallus, for what he has is worth no more than what he does not have, as far as his demand for love is concerned because that demand requires that he be the phallus.<sup>581</sup>

Thus, the transformation of soldiers into penises is the abject materialisation of both the narrator's own identification and empathy towards those men and his own guilt for being part of the oppressive master-narrative entities. Indeed, by the end of the chapter, the narrator's guilt has escalated to the point where it manifests itself in one of the most recognisable images of trauma: the Holocaust. The image is triggered by the director's announcement that psychiatry is the noblest of medical specialities, ' - A Psiquiatria é a mais nobre das especialidades médicas'<sup>582</sup>:

Estou em Auschwitz, pensou, estou em Auschwitz, fardado de SS, a escutar o discurso de boas-vindas do comandante do campo enquanto os judeus rodam lá fora no arame a tropeçarem na própria fome, [...] pertenço à raça superior dos carcereiros, dos capadores, dos polícias,

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<sup>581</sup> Ibid. p.320.

<sup>582</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, p.42.

dos professores de colégio e das madrastas das histórias de crianças, e em vez de se revoltarem contra mim as pessoas aceitam-me com consideração porque a Psiquitria é a mais nobre das especialidades médicas e é necessário que existam prisões a fim de se possuir a ilusão imbecil de ser livre.<sup>583</sup>

The image is the epitome of horror, trauma and oppression and it is one that will also be taken up by Thomas Szasz in his antipsychiatric writings. But before we analyse the similarities, on the theme of antipsychiatry and especially on the view of psychiatrists as perpetrators, between Lobo Antunes' fictional writings and Szasz essays, we must advance into the next chapter, where the antipsychiatric motivation of the narrator becomes more concrete and more subversive.

In chapter 3, albeit not going away, guilt is slightly assuaged by the subversive attempts by the narrator to undermine the power of psychiatrists and to challenge the master-narrative of psychiatry. The hospital is here more clearly described, becoming less of an abstract and more of a concrete space. At this point in the journey, the narrator had left Albufeira towards Messines, still in the region of Algarve. The new geographical point in his journey also marks a new departure in the space of his mind, into a region of more concrete memories. Thus, everything becomes clearer and more palpable, as if the concreteness of the geography provoked in him a need to clarify his material existence. 'Deixou Albufeira a caminho de Messines e a cor de icterícia, a cor cancerosa, a cor amarela da terra trouxe-lhe à lembrança a do pátio do Hospital Miguel Bombarda, diante da 1ª enfermaria de homens'.<sup>584</sup> The apparition of the

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<sup>583</sup> Ibid. pp.42-43.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid. p.48.

landscape is the trigger for his mental return to the Hospital. Observing it, the narrator's description becomes medicalised, the language itself being medicalised, with the metaphorical description of the earth of Messines' yellowish colour as 'a cor de icterícia' (colour of jaundice) and 'a cor cancerosa' (the colour of cancer). The narrator's gaze is the gaze of a doctor looking at the world around him, medicalizing it. However, as we know, the use of this medicalised discourse in the writing of Lobo Antunes is a subversive appropriation of a mode of seeing so it can be overcome by irony. Indeed, Foucault has reflected on this gaze, alerting us to its reductiveness, which is precisely what Lobo Antunes is here trying to combat: '[T]he silent world of the entrails, the whole dark underside of the body lined with endless unseeing dreams, are challenged as to their objectivity by the reductive discourse of the doctor, as well as established as multiple objects meeting his positive gaze'.<sup>585</sup>

Lobo Antunes' approach in this novel is necessarily ironic. After all, he belongs, albeit not completely, amongst those whose gaze tends to be positivistic in its medicalisation. It is thanks to his commitment to writing that he can escape that gaze, the authorial dimension becoming the key that allows the subversive impact of his novels to come through.

The impact of the ill-looking landscape also triggers an involution in his thoughts. Messines is further away from the coast, and as the narrator's car travels towards the interior of Portugal, his mind also travels further to the interior of his memory, arriving at a place very close to the core of his identity. Undoubtedly shaken by the vision of illness, the narrator feels the need to assert

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<sup>585</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, p.xi.

his identity, as if by doing it, he is reassuring himself of his own self, of his own sanity. ‘Sou médico sou médico sou médico, tenho trinta anos, uma filha, cheguei da guerra, comprei um automóvel barato há dois meses, escrevo poemas e romances que não publico nunca, dói-me um siso de cima e vou ser psiquiatra’.<sup>586</sup> The repetition of the mantra ‘sou médico’ casts doubts upon the belief of the narrator in his profession. He is, perhaps, trying to convince himself of something in which he does not truly believe.

Then, seemingly clarifying his motivation for choosing psychiatry, he continues:

[V]ou ser psiquiatra, entender as pessoas, perceber o seu desespero e a sua angústia, tranquilizá-las com o meu sorriso competente de sacerdote laico manejando as hóstias das pastilhas em eucaristias químicas, vou ser finalmente uma criatura respeitável inclinada para o um bloco de receitas.<sup>587</sup>

But the confession of his motivation, seemingly an honest effort to understand the inner sufferings of human beings,<sup>588</sup> rapidly turns sour, denoting a growing disillusionment with being a psychiatrist:

vou ser finalmente uma criatura respeitável inclinada para o um bloco de receitas, numa pressa distraída de alteza, tome depois das refeições, tome antes das refeições, tome no meio das refeições, ao levantar, ao deitar com uma bebida quente, ao pequeno almoço, ao almoço, ao lanche, nada de vinho, de aguardente, de bagaço, de vermute, de anis, volte daqui a quinze dias, volte daqui a um mês,

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<sup>586</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, p.49.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.* pp.49-50.

<sup>588</sup> It is worth noticing that these are not the motivations that Lobo Antunes himself ascribes to his choice, as we have seen in Chapter 3 of this thesis. The admission of this motives in this novel makes the problematics of autobiography, biographical and fictional dimensions of his writing more complex, in a further blurring of the liminality present in his work.

telefone-me a contar como passou, eu sou normal você é doente eu sou normal você é doente eu sou normal você é doente [...].<sup>589</sup>

The prescriptive, authoritarian and castrating role of the psychiatrist becomes evident in this passage, where the narrator lists the ‘doctor’s orders’ as restrictions upon the individual’s behaviour, repeating, in the same way he has done before when reassuring himself that he was a doctor, that he was ‘normal’ and the patient was ‘ill’, a classification problem that we (and the author) are going to return to. This repetition has the same effect of the previous one as, by repeating, the narrator is casting doubt upon the statement itself. This is a subtle inscription of the subversive role-reversal between doctor and patient that Lobo Antunes explores in his writing.

The passage continues, with these traits being augmented, highlighting the criticisms of the profession. *Knowledge* comes about once again, this time as the justification for the power and prescriptive authority of the master-narrative of psychiatry:

[C]onheço a semiologia, a psicopatologia, a terapia, topo à légua a depressão, a paranóia, o excesso doentio de júbilo, os ataques epilépticos, os equivalentes orgânicos, os caracteriais, peça um electroencefalograma pela Caixa, pague à empregada, não se esqueça de pagar à empregada, livre-se de não pagar à empregada, porte-se bem ou enfio-o numa cura de sono que nem ginjas, serenelfi largatil niamid nozinan bialminal, boa tarde [...], sou médico, sou médico, sou um interno de Psiquiatria.<sup>590</sup>

The threats are clear. The doctor orders the patient to ‘behave well’, a commandment that transcends the simple therapeutic sphere of medical advice into the realm of the individual ethic of the patient. By controlling the patient’s

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<sup>589</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, p.50.

<sup>590</sup> *Ibid.*

behaviour, the doctor is here performing an act of ethical oppression upon the patient, with the added pressure of threats. In fact, the doctor threatens the patient with a ‘sleep therapy’, forcibly induced by medication. In a display of oppressive knowledge, he lists different modes of psychiatric disciplines (‘semiologia, a psicopatologia, a terapia’), different diagnoses (‘a depressão, a paranóia, o excesso doentio de júbilo, os ataques epilépticos, os equivalentes orgânicos, os caracteriais’) and finally, perhaps the most menacing threat, which permits an instrumentalisation of knowledge that is a privilege of the medical profession, different names and brands of medications (‘serenelfi largatil niamid nozinan bialminal’).

This is Lobo Antunes’ antipsychiatry at its most visible. Two points have to be made here about Lobo Antunes and Thomas Szasz. Firstly, we must address the *ethical* dimension of psychiatry as viewed by both authors and secondly, we must then address the issue of *classification*, or in other words, the classificatory power of psychiatry.

The ethical control exerted by the psychiatrist in the above passage echoes a preoccupation to which Szasz has drawn our attention:

[W]hile the ethicist is supposedly concerned only with normal (moral) behaviour, and the psychiatrist only with abnormal (emotionally disordered) behaviour, the very distinction between the two rests on ethical grounds. In other words, the assertion that a person is mentally ill involves rendering a moral judgement about him. Moreover, because of the social consequences of such a judgment, both the ‘mental patient’ and those who treat him as one become actors in a morality play, albeit one written in a medical-psychiatric jargon.<sup>591</sup>

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<sup>591</sup> Thomas Szasz, *Ideology and Insanity*, p.26.

This morality play is clearly outlined in the novel's passage, with the doctor's authority over the patient's behaviour denouncing his individual ethical abuse and the collective tendency of psychiatrists to commit such abuse.

The other aspect, that of classification, has also been reflected upon by Szasz:

Psychiatrists are both the agents of classification [...], and the objects of classification by others [...]. It should be recalled that not only did psychiatrists traditionally classify certain persons as madmen or lunatics, but that, in turn, they themselves were classified, by other physicians and the public at large, as 'not real doctors', or medical jailers.<sup>592</sup>

It is through the classificatory power of psychiatry that the doctor delimits (oppresses) the patient's behaviours, thus delimiting, through diagnosis, their epistemological place in the shackles of illness. Recalling the Holocaust image invoked by the narrator and associated by him with psychiatrists, Szasz proceeds to clarify the damage done by classification:

In Freud's day, this was true for Jews also: they could classify themselves (as God's chosen people) and others (as God's stepchildren), and could, in turn, be classified by others (as second-class citizens). Hitler changed this, by casting the Jews into a role similar to that of mental patients. This was achieved by depriving the Jews of their roles as classifiers, and by converting them into objects classified by Nazis. What has always characterized madmen or mental patients [...] is that they have been robbed of their rights and powers to classify themselves or others, and have been treated solely as the objects of classification by society, and especially by alienists, psychiatrists, and psychoanalysts.<sup>593</sup>

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<sup>592</sup> Ibid. p.53.

<sup>593</sup> Ibid. pp.53-54.

Thus, it is now clear that Lobo Antunes' writing is aiming at that point before the ethical and epistemological separation, the point where psychiatrists did not hold such oppressive powers. He challenges the status of the psychiatrists by casting doubts on their own 'normality'. In the novel, after going through the thoughts of his own authority, the narrator starts experiencing what could be seen as a symptom of madness, a textual inscription of the author's subversion:

[R]egressou à secretária, acomodou-se, régio, na cadeira, e, pelos vidros da janela, teve como numa vertigem a impressão de ver um homem a voar, um homem comum, nem idoso nem jovem, a bater as mangas do casaco no azul de julho e a voar. Pensou - Estou fodido.<sup>594</sup>

The vision is indicative of the doctor's moral conscience; it makes him doubt himself and challenges his own status as a doctor. Moreover, it also indicates the constraint of the hospital, the prison-like constraint of the hospital. The unconscious desire of the doctor is to get away from it, hence the projection of flight in his hallucination. Indeed, further on in the novel, this thought will become explicit, with the narrator recognising his own imprisonment in the hospital. 'Nunca saí do hospital [...] e apesar disso nunca entendi os internados [...]. E agora regressava a Lisboa sem nunca ter saído do hospital.'<sup>595</sup>

But he also manifests his inability to understand the patients, an epistemological lack that is the confession of his own inability to access that hell (the Luciferan knowledge) the patients had themselves access to. Albeit being amongst them, being part of the same community, the psychiatrist is incapable

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<sup>594</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, p.50.

<sup>595</sup> Ibid. pp.115-116.

of getting rid of his own role of psychiatrist, which locks him out of the patients' truths. 'Nunca ter saído do hospital equivale não apenas ao aprisionamento do médico, tanto como do doente, à engrenagem da psiquiatria defeituosamente concebida, como insinua ainda a inclusividade do médico na comunidade dos doentes'.<sup>596</sup> Therefore, it is only via literature (via writing) that an escape and a deeper understanding of the patients is possible.

It is in this chapter that the author sets the antipsychiatric basis of his writing. Throughout, there are several appeals to mistrust Psychiatry, not only by the narrator himself, but also by those emotionally close to him, like his father and his friend:

- A Psiquiatria é uma treta – afirmou o pai. – Não tem bases científicas, o diagnóstico não interessa e o tratamento é sempre o mesmo.
- Já reparaste – perguntou o amigo – que os psiquiatras são malucos sem graça?<sup>597</sup>

His friend's provocative question seems to highlight another appeal in the author's writing, that of role-reversal, where the doctor becomes the patient and the patient becomes the doctor. This is the highest point of subversion, one that abolishes the authority of the doctor, devolving *knowledge* (epistemological power) to the patient:

Nas reuniões do hospital [...] assaltava-o a impressão esquisita de que eram os doentes que tratavam os psiquiatras com a delicadeza que a aprendizagem da dor lhes traz, que os doentes fingiam ser doentes para ajudar os psiquiatras, iludir um pouco a sua triste

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<sup>596</sup> Maria Alzira Seixo, *Os Romances de António Lobo Antunes*, p.82.

<sup>597</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, pp.54-55.

condição de cadáveres que se ignoram, de mortos que se supõem vivos.<sup>598</sup>

The role reversal hints at the possibility of mutual recovery, an act of transversal solidarity in which the patients are the ones who help doctors and not the opposite. Patients are seen here as sapient beings possessing that knowledge of hell that comes through the pain of their sufferings. Lobo Antunes is then trying to re-establish a common language between the ‘mad’ and the ‘sane’ that has been long gone, a product of the superimposition of psychiatric discourse as master-narrative:

As for a common language, there is no such thing; or rather, there is no such thing any longer; the constitution of madness as a mental illness [...] affords the evidence of a broken dialogue, posits the separation as already effected, and thrusts into oblivion all those stammered, imperfect words without fixed syntax in which the exchange between madness and reason was made.<sup>599</sup>

What is here been pointed out is that the ‘mad’ are the holders of a knowledge which has been discarded by society in general, silenced by the master-discourses of positivist Medicine. This is a knowledge that is seen as dangerous, for it challenges the status quo, the established order, the ‘pillars of society’. Medicine is seen, then, as a branch of a repressive State, a continuation of its oppression.

As Lyotard has observed: ‘The question of the State becomes intimately entwined with that of scientific knowledge’.<sup>600</sup> So, it is a question of the double legitimisation of knowledge and power. Medicine (in particular psychiatry)

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<sup>598</sup> Ibid. p.55.

<sup>599</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, p.xii.

<sup>600</sup> Lyotard, p.31.

seeks to legitimise its knowledge by means of classification, diagnostics and prescriptions, in an attempt to solidify their theoretical basis and thus legitimise its claims. It is by making those means legitimate that, in extension, it also legitimises its own power as a scientific discipline, a power that mainly exerts its action over individuals' behaviours:

When we examine the current status of scientific knowledge – at a time when science seems more completely subordinated to the prevailing powers than ever before and, along with the new technologies, is in danger of becoming a major stake in their conflicts — the question of double legitimation, far from receding into the background, necessarily comes to the fore. For it appears in its most complete form, that of reversion, revealing that knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question: who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided?<sup>601</sup>

So, it is not surprising that, in this chapter, the narrator launches into a tirade of mistrust against Medicine, which he considers as a:

máquina trituradora de uma Medicina persecutória da fantasia e do sonho, repressiva, judicial, a Medicina moralista, capadora, autoritária, a Medicina dos senhores, a Medicina dos donos, que detesta desvios, odeia as diferenças, não suporta a capacidade de invenção, a Medicina morta de uma sociedade morta, cujo odor gordurento e viscoso o indignara.<sup>602</sup>

In a similar fashion, Thomas Szasz also points the finger at the promiscuity between medical agents and the political powers: 'We have seen that the purveyors of mental health care, especially when such care is provided by the government, are actually the purveyors of the moral and socioeconomic interests of the state'.<sup>603</sup>

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<sup>601</sup> Ibid. pp.8-9.

<sup>602</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, p.58.

<sup>603</sup> Thomas Szasz, *Ideology and Insanity*, p.47.

As we have seen earlier, it is also in this chapter that the concept of hell is defined by the narrator, making it perhaps one of the most important chapters in the whole novel and setting the tone for the chapters that follow. In fact, it would be fair to define the subsequent chapters, with the exception of chapter 10, as a rant-like continuous antipsychiatric call, repeated under several different guises. The attack is unrelenting, and no one is spared. The futility of psychiatric knowledge, and its variations, such as psychoanalysis, is highlighted as inadequate; ‘os psicanalistas continuam teimosamente agarrados ao antiquíssimo microscópio de Freud, que lhes permite observar um centímetro quadrado de epiderme enquanto o resto do corpo, longe deles, respira, palpita, pulsa, se sacode, protesta e movimenta’.<sup>604</sup>

Throughout the novel, as the journey proceeds, the narrator struggles to make peaceful the coexistence of his literary sensibility and the objectivity and futility of his psychiatric practice, wondering about the ‘sentido prático da vida, que fica no fundo do automatismo da inutilidade<sup>605</sup>’, finding it difficult to accept the ‘enxoval de uma ciência inútil’<sup>606</sup> that is constituted mainly by ‘pastilhas, ampolas, conceitos e interpretações’<sup>607</sup>.

So, his reaction is to laugh. Laugh at the absurdity of his situation, of the whole paraphernalia of abusive procedures and repressive authority:

Lembrei-me do nosso ridículo, do nosso pavor, da miséria da nossa pompa e comecei a rir-me. Ria um riso ao mesmo tempo pobre e alegre, o riso alegre dos carrascos. [...] [R]ia dos que curam

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<sup>604</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, p.100.

<sup>605</sup> *Ibid.*p.60.

<sup>606</sup> *Ibid.*p.105.

<sup>607</sup> *Ibid.* p.106.

homossexuais com diapositivos de rapazes nus e descargas eléctricas, [...] dos que se juntam em círculo para dissertar sobre a angústia e cujas mãos tremem como folhas de olaia [...]. Ria-me de pensar que erámos os modernos, os sofisticados polícias de agora, e também um pouco os padres, os confesores, o Santo Ofício de agora.<sup>608</sup>

Laughter is, then, the only possible reaction left for the psychiatrist to cope with his own reality, a reminder of the sarcastic and hysterical dimension of Lobo Antunes' writing. It is also a different attitude than that of Thomas Szasz. In fact, it is not that Lobo Antunes is trying to imply that psychiatry is not valid, but rather attacking *this* kind of psychiatry.

From the rest of the novel, I would like to highlight two other scenes, as they are crucial for the understanding of it and they are perhaps the best summation of the author's writing in this novel.

In chapter 4:

A rapariga, imóvel, muito direita, a apertar contra o peito o seu saco de plástico, consentia que os anjos lhe pousassem nos ombros, nos cabelos, nos braços, tal os pássaros nas estátuas dos parques, empoleirados em heróis de bronze como a roupa nos cabides. Se não agisse depressa o asilo transformar-se-ia num aviário celeste, repleto de roçar de túnicas e de zumbidos siderais, e dezenas de homens alados invadiriam a Urgência [...]  
–Porque não lhe dá uma injeção contra os anjos? – insistia a enfermeira. - Tem de haver uma injeção contra os anjos como há raticida, pó das baratas, remédio para o bicho das vinhas. Os anjos são mais fáceis de matar do que o bicho das vinhas.<sup>609</sup>

A solitary woman who claims to speak with angels is found sitting down in the center of a square in an unnamed town and at first is regarded with certain wonder by the passersby. It is not until a crowd is formed around her that they decide to call the town doctor. It is after his opinion that they decide that she is

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<sup>608</sup> Ibid. pp.106-107.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid. p.74.

mad and she is then brought to the psychiatric hospital, where she is apparently followed by the angels themselves. The narrator (the psychiatrist) seems, however, to acknowledge the presence of the angels and is prompt to decide that they need to be repressed otherwise they would spread around the emergency ward. A solution is then suggested by the nurse – to give the woman an injection against angels. She is certain that there must be such an injection, as there is rat poison. The positivistic attitude of psychiatry is metaphorically represented by this nurse, who urges the repression (and suppression) of the angelic creatures by scientific means (an injection) at the same time acknowledging that the angels are easy to kill, a knowledge given to her by the psychiatric institution she works for, always ready to restrain patients from their creative, even if hallucinatory, free expression. The image of the angels is then juxtaposed to the image of hell. The angelic apparitions are the embodiment of the hope, creativity, fantasy and imagination which the narrator claims to have been suppressed by psychiatry.

This image is strikingly important as it seems to represent the presence of a ‘counter-narrative’ within the text. The angels seem to function as a counter-element, as a symbol that everyone sees (even doctors and nurses) which those in the medical profession choose to ignore, objectifying it under their scientific language. The act of repression perpetrated by the psychiatrist and the nurse constitute a representation of the medical discourse in its form of a ‘master-narrative’ which, logically, has to repress the ‘counter-narrative’. Thus, the

otherwise ‘meaningless byproducts of a disordered brain’<sup>610</sup> become ‘psychiatric symptoms [...] depicted as meaningful elements of experience and identity’.<sup>611</sup>

The other image comes from chapter 10 of the novel. At this point in the journey, the narrator is almost back at his house in Praia das Maçãs, the final stop on the journey. Ironically, if the physical return is towards a comforting place, the mental return is towards what is really the origin of the author’s writer. The proximity of the return triggers the reemergence of the locus of his traumatic memory: Angola.

The memory that comes to him is that of when in Mangando, a small village in Angola, he witnessed the suicide of a soldier. ‘Eram cinco horas da manhã e o suicida acabara de morrer depois de muito tempo de desesperadas convulsões diante dos nossos olhos espantados. [...] O suicida acabara de morrer e jazia, tapado com um lençol, num cubículo vizinho’.<sup>612</sup> The impact of the suicide upon the narrator’s mind is almost immediate, denouncing the full traumatic significance of the event. ‘Sentíamos a presença dele como um olhar cravado nas costas, um olhar transparente, oco, repleto de indiferença e de rancor, um olhar de ódio distraído e manso, o olhar de um inimigo que nos detesta e despreza’.<sup>613</sup>

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<sup>610</sup> Jennifer H. Radden, ‘Recognition rights, mental health consumers and reconstructive cultural semantics’ *Philosophy, Ethics, and Humanities in Medicine*, 7:6 (2012) p.7 <<http://www.biomedcentral.com/content/pdf/1747-5341-7-6.pdf>> [Accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2015].

<sup>611</sup> Ibid.

<sup>612</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, pp.203-204.

<sup>613</sup> Ibid. p.204.

This is the final realisation of his own hell, with all the anger, hatred and horror projected onto the eyes of the dead soldier. The realization comes, however, after ambiguous views spelled out throughout the novel. At one point, faced with the hellish realities of the mental institution, the narrator wishes that he had been back at war; ‘tenho quase saudades da guerra porque na guerra, ao menos, as coisas são simples: trata-se de tentar não morrer, de tentar durar’.<sup>614</sup>

The black and white reality of the war seems to comfort the narrator’s mind, troubled by the complex and miserable reality of madness and of the mental hospital. However, it also denounces a maladjustment to the life post-conflict, which recalls the daily struggles of the narrator in *Memória de Elefante*. Nevertheless, the reality of war cannot be changed, its transformative power changing him (and others) forever: ‘aqueles meses de Guerra haviam-nos transformado em pessoas que não erámos antes, que nunca tínhamos sido, em pobres animais acuados repletos de maldade e terror.’<sup>615</sup>

As pointed put by Eduardo C. Gerding:

The desirable notion that a military force deployed on operations might avoid taking somatic casualties is a totally utopian one. This is also the case with psychiatric casualties. War provides an exaggerated, perhaps extreme, version of the entire range of human experience – not just fear, hate and guilt, but also excitement, love, friendship and achievement [...] There are some for whom active service remains the best thing that ever happened to them, and for whom life afterwards is dull and monochrome.<sup>616</sup>

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<sup>614</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, p.96.

<sup>615</sup> *Ibid.* p.175.

<sup>616</sup> Eduardo C. Gering, ‘The Anglo-Argentine Post-Conflict Common Ground: the Combat Veterans’ Aftermath’, in *Hors de Combat, The Falklands-Malvinas Conflict in Retrospect*, ed. by Diego F. García Quiroga and Mike Seear (Nottingham: Critical, Cultural and Communications Press, 2007) p.65.

Thus, it is visible that the mental return to Angola and to the war is problematic in itself. An attempt to escape reality that turns sour when it reveals its ugly face of trauma. This is the narrator's (and the author's) own personal hell. 'O inferno é, pois, um lugar específico, vivenciado no interior do indivíduo: África em guerra, o Hospital Miguel Bombarda que a ela se assimila, redobrando o seu horror, que assim se vive duas vezes e vai multiplicar-se pela memória da escrita'.<sup>617</sup>

The doubling of hell could potentially result in the annihilation of the self under the weight of its trauma. In fact, the narrator seems to consider it: 'Chegar daqui a nada à Praia das Maçãs, pensei eu, meter a chave à porta e encontrar-me morto na sala, de pulsos cortados, como o tipo que se suicidou com um pedaço de vidro na casa de banho da enfermaria'.<sup>618</sup> Facing his own death is the realization of his unbearable condition, trapped in two places of trauma, madness and horror.

However, he resists. The acts of resilience and resistance come to him as a destructive but regenerating force. In the silent scream of his writing, he is manifesting that desire voiced by the narrator at a certain stage of the novel:

a única coisa a fazer era destruir o hospital, destruir fisicamente o hospital, os muros leprosos, os claustros, [...] a sinistra organização concentracionária da loucura, a pesada e hedionda burocratização da angústia, e começar do princípio, noutra local, de uma outra forma, a combater o sofrimento, a ansiedade, a depressão, a mania.<sup>619</sup>

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<sup>617</sup> Maria Alzira Seixo, *As Flores do Inferno e Jardins Suspensos*, p.19.

<sup>618</sup> António Lobo Antunes, *Conhecimento do Inferno*, p.212.

<sup>619</sup> *Ibid.* p. 185.

Seeking a way out, a possibility for escape, he calls for the *actual* destruction of the mental institution, a call that is the metaphor for the ethos of Lobo Antunes' writing, which aims to destroy those epistemological barriers that prevent the betterment of the relations between people; those barriers that prevent love, care and compassion.

As for his own hell, resistance is found by internalizing that destruction and annihilation, visible in the final words of the novel, when he finally lies down in bed, wishing that his father would tuck him in bed, and in a final act of death, 'me puxar o lençol, para cima da cabeça, como um sudário'.<sup>620</sup>

The process of internalization is none other than *writing*. This is a way in which the author has regained control again. In terms of processing trauma, it is a crucial act:

In studies of trauma, PTSD, and coping with extreme stress, the personality variable, internal locus of control, has been associated with effective adaptation to stress [...]. Persons with an internal locus of control tend to exhibit less PTSD and psychopathology and have better overall adjustment than persons with an external locus of control.<sup>621</sup>

Thus, the seemingly impossibility of escape from hell is given a coping mechanism, a resilience that comes from controlling, in an internal locus, that very same hell. Escape is then a catharsis, a newly found possibility, not only for those who internalize the locus of control, resisting the maddening force of trauma, but also for those whom (having experienced it or not) write and read about it.

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<sup>620</sup> Ibid. p.250.

<sup>621</sup> Christine E. Agaibi and John P. Wilson, 'Trauma, PTSD, and Resilience: A Review of the Literature', in *Trauma Violence Abuse*, Vol.6, No.3, (2005) 195-216 (p.202).

## Conclusion

By now, this engaged scribbler trusts that the faithful reader walks in the interstitial path that Lobo Antunes has set out for us to follow.

It is nevertheless an arduous path, full of pain, conflict, trauma and madness. As we have perceived, the early António Lobo Antunes position is a very captivating one from the point of view of literary production as it places him in the in-between space of many complexities, permitting a scope and depth that makes his literature pertinent, as all great literature, for the understanding of the world around us and inseparably, ourselves.

Throughout the previous six chapters, we have been immersed in an author whose figure appears and disappears behind his words, whose identity and autobiography is diluted in the novels and chronicles he has produced, an authentic *biographical* act of writing that masterfully balances itself between the different tensions arising from the dimensions of doctor/soldier/writer. After all:

fiction, imaginative work that is, is not dropped like a pebble upon the ground, as science may be; fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible [...]. But when the web is pulled askew, hooked up at the edge, torn in the middle, one remembers that these webs are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings, and are attached to grossly material things, like health and money and the houses we live in.<sup>622</sup>

Thus, the *biographical* return of the author brings about several other realities inherent to it. In the case of Lobo Antunes, the Lusophone dimensions of the so-

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<sup>622</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London: Penguin Classics, 2011) p.38

called Colonial War, the oppressive experience of dictatorship, Portuguese medical and psychiatric history and its complexities. Despite being framed within specific cultural and historical circumstances, it is precisely by their personal mediation through the authorial gaze that they become universal:

At any rate, when a subject is highly controversial [...] one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one's audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker. Fiction here is likely to contain more truth than fact.<sup>623</sup>

Indeed, are not the realities of conflict, madness and trauma present in most, if not all, societies? Are they not, to a certain extent, a common experience for many human beings?

Of course, this universality does not minimize either the local or the individual impact of the author's literature. Again, this is a difficult balancing act that Lobo Antunes manages to achieve. In fact, we have seen the importance of his work to the field of trauma, both when articulated in relation to the collective and the individual, his literary relevance in tackling some of the hardest and urgent problems of our times and the necessity of raising understanding and empathy.

However, this comes at a cost. To achieve catharsis, the author embarks (and the readers embark with him) in a descent into the necessary knowledge of hell. The journey is through abjection, violence, traumatic memory and madness, never pleasant but always crucial.

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<sup>623</sup> Ibid., p.3.

More conservative literary critics, such as George Panichas, seem to have a problem with such kinds of endeavour through darker regions:

Violence, decadence, perversion, impiety – those most cruel and ugly emblems of the disorder of the soul – constitute our major celebratory occasion, with hardly one reference allowed to the life of excellence. [...] The path to excellence signifies purpose and effort; a measure of accomplishment, a course of action, a line of conduct, a way of life. It entails rigorous self-searching, self-discovery, and self-understanding. This path [...] is the path to edification and enlightenment. [...] Our world is burdened with an army of the agents of disarray. [...] This is a world in which gravity reigns heavily.<sup>624</sup>

However, what Panichas seems to overlook is that, on some occasions, the only path possible is that one that goes through hell. For Lobo Antunes, excellence is only achieved because of that painful contact with the truth of the traumatic realities he has experienced and observed. It is by being an *agent of disarray* that he can challenge the master-narratives which he writes against; it is by evoking the horror, abjection and violence of trauma that he aims to shake those discourses' foundations to the core unleashing his antipsychiatric mode. That is his form of excellence. This is his form of being in communion with the reader and eliciting those admirable qualities of empathy and humanity that seem so lacking around – and often in – us.

In terms of the articulation of trauma in itself, something we have seen as having a long, sometimes problematic, but always fascinating history, Lobo Antunes' contribution, through his literature, is precious as it offers an answer

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<sup>624</sup> George A. Panichas, *Growing Wings to Overcome Gravity: Criticism as the Pursuit of Virtue* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer Univeristy Press, 1999) p.36.

for the problem of the literality of trauma. The fragmented nature of his literature is crucial for writing effectively about trauma:

History is no longer available as a completed knowledge, but must be reconceived as that which perpetually escapes or eludes our understanding.... the text shifts from a reflective mode based on a position of self-awareness and self-understanding to a performative act, in which the text becomes imbricated in our attempts to perceive and understand the world around us.<sup>625</sup>

Lobo Antunes' performative act is indeed his writings themselves. It is by biographically approaching, from different sides and angles, the traumatic regions in this writing that he manages to overcome the literality of trauma, that very problematic aspect that continues to haunt trauma specialists. So, Lobo Antunes' literature overcomes literality by developing *laterality*. Creatively, he approaches trauma in an oblique way, thus restoring a path into resilience, empathy and growth:

The normal person's path has its tribulations: he bumps up against stones, gets scratched on brambles, hesitates at the dangerous places, and, in the end, makes his way nonetheless. But the traumatized person's path is broken. There is a hole, a collapse that leads to the precipice. When he stops and turns back, he makes himself a prisoner of his past, a fundamentalist, or an avenger, or he submits to the precipice that is so close to him, whereas the resilient person, when he stops, continues along a lateral course. He has to clear a new path, keeping in mind the edge of the ravine. The normal walker may become creative; the resilient person is forced to.<sup>626</sup>

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<sup>625</sup> Whitehead, p.13.

<sup>626</sup> Boris Cyrulnik, *The Whispering of Ghosts: Trauma and Resilience* (New York: Other Press, 2005) p. 100.

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