MEMORY LOSS, THE ANIMAL GAZE, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR A BIOGRAPHICAL LIFE IN *PARA AQUELA QUE ESTÁ SENTADA NO ESCURO À MINHA ESPERA* BY ANTÓNIO LOBO ANTUNES

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Resumo: Este ensaio analisa a representação da doença de Alzheimer no romance *Para Aquela que Está Sentada No Escuro à Minha Espera* (2016). Depois de algumas considerações sobre os riscos de "medicalizar" um texto literário e sobre os possíveis significados metafóricos deste mal, proponho uma leitura do romance guiada pela vertente crítica dos *Disability Studies*. Reflito também sobre as estratégias de Lobo Antunes para representar o abismo da doença de Alzheimer além da dimensão verbal. Em particular, considero a função do olhar (humano e animal) no romance.
Palavras-chave: Lobo Antunes; literatura e medicina; memória; Alzheimer; olhar animal

Abstract: This essay analyzes the representation of Alzheimer's disease in the novel *Para Aquela que Está Sentada No Escuro à Minha Espera* (2016). After some considerations about the risks of "medicalizing" a literary text and about the possible meanings of Alzheimer's disease as a metaphor, I propose a reading of the novel from a "critical Disability Studies" perspective. I reflect on strategies adopted by Lobo Antunes to represent the abyss of Alzheimer's disease that exceeds the verbal aspect. In particular, I propose a reading of the image of the human/animal gaze in the novel.
Keywords: Lobo Antunes; literature and medicine; memory; Alzheimer's disease; animal gaze

In a 1997 radio interview, journalist Eleanor Wachtel asked German author W.G. Sebald "[…] Why is memory so ineluctable and so destructive?" "It's a question of specific weight, I think" he replied,

> The older you get, in a sense, the more you forget. That is certainly true. Vast tracts of your life sort of vanish in oblivion. But that which survives in your mind acquires a very considerable degree of density, a very high degree of specific weight. And of course once you are weighed down with these kinds of weight, it's not unlikely that they will sink you. Memories of that sort do have a tendency to encumber you emotionally[1]

Sebald, a celebrated writer who obsessively shaped and reshaped figures of memory and oblivion, offers an excellent commentary on the literary works of those who – like António Lobo Antunes – elevated the fragile texture of memory, with all its contradictions, tensions, and "weight" to a primary fictional role. As numerous commentators emphasized, memory is intertwined with the act of writing in all of Lobo Antunes' novels (*Memória de Elefante* is notoriously the title of his first novel, published in 1979). Remembering is the source of Lobo Antunes' entire project;[2] it is a pervasive "act," a "struggle […] against forgetfulness" of historical traumas (Ornelas, p. 324); but also a burden for characters crippled by past mistakes. The narrators of Lobo Antunes are often – to return to the image in Sebald's interview – carrying a weight that "sinks" them. In their monologues, emotional worlds are exposed wide-openly, although somehow "carved" in a few repetitive images. The participation in a war in Africa, the scars of the decolonization process in former Portuguese colonies, the attempts to escape the post-traumatic consequences of having been an agent to or a witness of violence are strong themes in Lobo Antunes' work. Nevertheless, memory is neither only a burden nor only relatable to war and its aftermath. In a novel published in 2016 with the long and lyrical title of *Para Aquela Que Está Sentada No Escuro à Minha Espera*,[3] memory functions as a guiding light against the loss of personal identity.

This novel, which has so far received limited critical attention with the exception of a handful of reviews, pertains to the series of urban societal, familial, and psychological portraitures that have characterized Lobo Antunes' writing in the last few years. Page after page, Lobo Antunes' recent

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[1] Now available in the book *The Emergence of Memory: Conversations with W.G.Sebald*, edited by Lynne Sharon Schwartz. New York, Seven Stories Press, 2007 ("Ghost Hunter"), p. 54.

[2] In Lobo Antunes' *crónica* "The Road to Benfica" (translated by Margaret Jull Costa), the author describes the birth of a literary project in these words: "[…] vague images and memories appear and disappear, tiny meaningless scraps, rather like what happens before I start writing a novel, when filaments of characters start to crystallize into filaments of words and the plan of the book slowly comes into being, things start to connect." (146).

[3] From now on I will refer to this work as *Para aquela.*

writing offers a gallery of characters who inflict on themselves an excruciating mental review of all the wounds, the mistakes, and the lost opportunities that sum up their lives as ordinary people of a peripherical European country. Bitterness and belligerence between husbands and wives, employers and employees, rich and poor, all fighting for a personal revenge against destiny, fate, money and social condition, are all omnipresent themes in Lobo Antunes' writing, and *Para aquela* makes no exception. Nevertheless, in *Para aquela* the focus is not on obsessions, fury, and emotional drives of defeated characters, rather on the cognitive impairment of its main protagonist. The novel represents the extreme moments in the life of an old lady, a former stage actress who used to perform supporting roles in a dusty theater in Lisbon, now sick and confined in her house with a caregiver and a cat. Loosely an exercise of introspection, the novel switches between different temporalities in the lady's life: childhood and old age, two stages of vulnerability and dependence (on her loving parents as a child and on disaffected caregivers in old age) with long sketches of her life as a twice married woman.

In *Para aquela*, readers are prompted to delve into the psyche of the old lady and are then surprised by sudden changes in perspective or by metafictional comments by the "maker" of the story they're reading. As scholar Felipe Cammaert put it, Lobo Antunes's strategy often involves in "plac[ing] himself as the receptor of" his character's 'intimate confessions'" (p. 279) and in "allow[ing] the emergence of the character's memory which, based on the mnemonic model, will produce fiction" (p. 280).[4] The "intrusion" of the author in the narrative is exemplified by abrupt comments such as "se eu não tivesse interrompido este capítulo uma manhã inteira exprimia-me melhor." (p. 76). Apart from these metafictional interventions and the short appearances of other voices entering the narrative, the novel is largely constituted of the old lady's mental monologue. If the present is collapsing, long-term memories survive in her mind, mixed up with hallucinations. In particular, there are images, themes, synesthetic associations which "encumber" (Sebald) the old lady's mind: a shaking crucifix on top of a bed representing her years of marriage with two equally uninteresting husbands, an imaginary dog visiting her or escaping out of her reach, a hand-less clock strangely inhabited by furious birds. The pathology of the lady remains unspoken: "Alzheimer's disease" is conjectural and, I propose, based on details and fragmentary comments dispersed in the narrative.

[4] In "'You Don't Invent Anything': Memory and the Patterns of Fiction in Lobo Antunes' Works," Felipe Cammaert has convincingly studied crucial aspects in all of Lobo Antunes's *oeuvre*: the intricate juxtaposition of points of view ("a confusion of identities regarding the creation of fiction") that complicate the identification of the authorial voice(s): "*who is the producer of fiction?*" (p. 271).

In naming the lady's disease, I am aware of the criticism against a too "literal" or "empirical" reading of works of literature. Is the act of naming a condition that the author leaves unspoken a way to "medicalize" a literary text? And, if so, are we missing a larger literary point? Certainly, attempts to medicalize literature can, at times, be *involuntarily* self-parodying, as in the case of American psychiatrist and critic Peter Kramer who, after attending a Lincoln Center production of Anton Chekhov's *Ivanon,* reviewed it in the *New York Times* as a "straightforward case of clinical, or medical model, depression" (Lewis, p. 50). In *Para aquela*, the description of the progressive decline of the old lady's cognitive abilities ("[…] de há tempos para cá, começo agora a notar, escapam-me episódios, pessoas, até o meu nome palavra, acontecimentos de ontem, o que disse ele e quem é ele […]", p. 39) and the comments made by her doctor ("– Problemas da memória recente os da memória remota hão-de chegar mais tarde" p. 26;"– Não estou seguro que se lembre de mim conforme lhe disse isto vai avançando", p. 42; "– À medida que a memória recente se esfuma choram sem saber a causa riem sem motivo", p. 51) seem to support this identification. As opposed to Chekhov's example, it is not the commentator but the author himself who fills the text with references to this brain pathology. Given Lobo Antunes' medical background, some readers might expect a more detailed exploration of the compromised condition of the protagonist's brain. Nevertheless, the professional knowledge of Lobo Antunes is hardly relevant: no scientific jargon or professional expertise is displayed. In general, when depicting the wounded mental condition of his characters, Lobo Antunes seems to always prefer establishing a dialogue with literary antecedents[5] than recurring to his medical education.[6] Lobo

[5] In the characterization of the perception of the old lady in *Para aquela,* I recognize echoes of Benji, the narrator of the first section of William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. For example, in his mental monologues, Benji sometimes gives agency to the kitchen utensils: "The spoon came up to my mouth." […], "The spoon came up and I ate, then I cried again" […] "The bowl went away" (Faulkner 896); the old lady of Lobo Antunes shares similar perceptions: "[…] os garfos que se vão complicando com o tempo como tudo se complica com o tempo" (*Para aquela* 156), "[…] sempre papas, estou farta de papas, da colher a ir e a vir […]" (327). The literary influences of Lobo Antunes sometimes appear at a micro-level.

[6] The medical background of Lobo Antunes is often mentioned in book reviews or introductions, especially in foreign press: see, for example, "Doctor and Patient" by Peter Conrad (*The New Yorker*, 2009). The role that medicine (and more particularly psychiatry) played in Lobo Antunes' writing is relevant but not at obvious levels. In Lobo Antunes' novels, diseases of the body (cancer) and mental suffering are recurrent themes. Nevertheless, the experience of medicine (as George Steiner has suggested as well in his Cambridge encounter with the Portuguese author) is perhaps relevant in Lobo Antunes' capacity of listening to and reproducing the pain of others. Lobo Antunes often mentioned in interviews some formative episodes in his medical career which shaped his understanding of the human condition and predicament. The links between medicine and Portuguese literature deserve further attention. In 1926, Virginia Woolf wrote in *On Being Ill*: "Considering how common illness is,

Antunes' choice of dementia has *literary* reasons. Meaning(s) and representational challenges are also what I aim to explore in this essay.

How can we approach *Para aquela* and its representation of mental dissolution critically? What does "memory loss" mean in this novel? Is it a figure of speech? Could forgetfulness and vulnerability represent the lack of a societal, civilizational, or merely economic direction in recent Portuguese ("lembro-me das ruínas ao longe mas onde não há ruínas neste país a começar por mim", p. 69) or European history? The crux of the novel could be not the disease itself but the condition of precariousness, vertigo, and abandonment that inhabits its text. While it is true that precarious work – a sign of our times – obsessively recurs in this novel (the interrupted career of the forgetful actress, the unemployment feared by her nephew-in-law, the challenges of the caretaker who fears that the sick lady – her source of income – could die), it is worth mentioning that Lobo Antunes' narrative resists (as per tradition in his work) an exact identification with *our* time. We have the impression (as it often happens in Lobo Antunes' texts) of visiting a territory in which old Portuguese norms of conduct and behaviors intersect with aspects of our modernity. The author seems more interested in the *emotional* exploration beyond the constrictions of periodization. Time is continuously deconstructed in the book as fluid; the ways to measure the hours are always unreliable ("quantos tempos sem relação uns com os outros existirão neste planeta e em qual deles vivemos," p. 264, wonders the old lady). The identification of a specific *contemporary* meaning does not seem too convincing. If Alzheimer's works as a metaphor in this novel, its significance is broader, perhaps located in the battlefield of memories which "build" our human identities: we are what we remember

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how tremendous the spiritual change that it brings, how astonishing, when the lights of health go down, the undiscovered countries that are then disclosed […] it becomes strange indeed that illness has not taken its place with love, battle, and jealousy among the prime themes of literature." (p. 32). Not only the literature produced in Portugal since the Middle Ages to the last decades contradicts Woolf – as the anthology *A Caneta que Escreve e a que Prescreve* (2012) organized by Clara Rocha clearly shows – but some among the most established writers (to name a few: Miguel Torga, Fernando Namora, Jorge de Sousa Braga) were/are physicians. The representation of clinical mental deterioration has a notable non-fictional antecedent in Portuguese contemporary literature: José Cardoso Pires' *De Profundis, Valsa Lenta* (1997), which explores a cerebrovascular accident suffered by the author and in which the struggle to keep memory functions is placed center stage. In *Ouvir com outros olhos*, neurosurgeon João Lobo Antunes described *De Profundis, Valsa lenta* as "relato autopatográfico, ou seja, a biografia de uma doença contada na primeira pessoa" (128-9). Degenerative memory loss has also been the theme of novel *Cair para dentro* by Valério Romão in 2018, an admirer of António Lobo Antunes' universe (see "Manual de sobrevivência a Lobo Antunes" by Valério Romão, 2016).

as much as what we forget about ourselves. Oblivion does not carry us "away", but it is unpredictable, uncontrolled, though constitutive.

Italian literary scholar Stefano Tani observed that Alzheimer's is one of the main metaphors of our times. In the book *Lo Schermo, l'Alzheimer, lo Zombie* (2014; "The screen, the Alzheimer's, the zombie"), Tani argued that, despite Susan Sontag's criticism of the stigmatization of the ill through figures of speech, Alzheimer's syndrome inspires numerous metaphorical associations today (pp. 66-69). If in the '80 and '90 HIV infection was considered a figure of "invasion," as Tani put it (p. 66), Alzheimer's can manifest in the collective imagination as a metaphor of "evacuation of the 'I' from a body bombarded for a lifetime by extraordinary quantities of information and demands" (Tani, p. 66)[7]. Tani recognizes a peculiarly "literary" fascination with this syndrome that "attacks [the human being] in its most intimate, personal and morbidly adaptable for story-telling parts" (p. 79). Tani goes further, affirming that narratives on Alzheimer's disease became a "*moda*," a trend (p.78) in today's global cinema and literature. Some scholars and activists of "critical Disability Studies" often expressed concern about the metaphoric use of Alzheimer's for "misrepresenting disability and attracting attention away from material concerns" (Alice Hall 2016). These concerns are – it is important to underline – not consensual among scholars.

From a critical Disability Studies perspective, *Para aquela* seems interesting for (at least) three reasons. The most apparent one has to do with strategies of avoidance that accompany the lives of the sick. The relatives fear becoming contaminated by the irrevocable sadness of the sick as Tolstoy so incisively depicted in *The Death of Ivan Illych*. The Alzheimer's patient of Lobo Antunes' novel is contained in a safe but rigidly delimited space, as rigid and limited as the language used by her caregiver, a language deprived of affection and continuously reinforcing the identity between protagonist and disease without any alternative associations. The second reason relates to the economic calculus about the material inheritance that the sick lady will leave and to the language used by the other characters to define and reduce her life into merely a burden or a source of income. While the lady's nephew-in-law is waiting to sell her apartment ("Se comprassem o andar internava-a já," p. 215), her caretaker is secretly threatening and beating her ("[. . .] a senhora de idade bateu-me, a mão dela na minha cara com força 'Se me estragas a vida mato-te não me fazes perder este emprego'" p. 99). Most importantly, a third reason is directly connected to the invention of a "language" to represent Alzheimer's disease. Lobo Antunes tries to find a way to capture the long tunnel which connects thoughts and words in

[7] All translations from Tani 2014 are mine.

dementia. The protagonist engages in an inner fight in which words – personified – are either crashing against a wall or have the compact density of a piece of food that she cannot expulsed from her mouth.

> [. . .] tanta distância entre a cabeça e a voz, ia perdendo tudo pelo caminho […][8] ;
>
> [. . .] não compreendia o motivo de não ser capaz de me exprimir, as palavras existiam cá dentro mas não saíam nem à mão de Deus padre […][9];
>
> [. . .] o que não sei porquê se passa é que há alturas em que as palavras me faltam, algumas reaparecem quando já não necessito delas […][10];
>
> [. . .] não sou capaz de uma sílaba, quer dizer tento mas onde estão as palavras, se calhar deixaram de existir, não as encontro ou encontro-as na minha cabeça porém entre a cabeça e a língua um muro que as impede de virem de forma que já me esqueci delas […][11];
>
> [. . .] sem conseguir que as palavras me saíssem da boca, ou seja chegavam quase aos lábios mas não lograva expulsá-las […][12]

The language of Alzheimer's is hence a never-ending struggle to formulate words capable of meaning. Proper names are gone (people are referred to according to their family role "my husband's nephew" or their age: the caretaker is simply "the elderly woman"). Not only are the lady's words at an embryonic stage or truncated, but the novel in its entirety seems to mimic the disease's reduction of qualifications, to get to the essential, to the bone: nouns and verbs with a few spare adjectives.

Throughout the novel, Lobo Antunes records the thoughts of the lady in the incipient but soon aborted effort of shaping them into understandable phonemes. This seems a particularly delicate point since it ventures into the realm of the conjectural. While in other disability writing, the text could be subjected to an informed judgement by a reader who experienced a particular illness or impairment first-hand, this is of course quite difficult to imagine in the case of a patient with an advanced case of Alzheimer's. Readers of the novel are similarly conjecturing about the accuracy of Lobo Antunes' strategies in representing this catastrophic condition. But, in this case, accuracy and realism are neither pertinent nor valuable criteria. What seems relevant is the attempt to translate and *mediate a frontier* from which no direct testimony seems attainable. As critical disability studies scholars David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder put it,

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[8] António Lobo Antunes, *Para aquela.* p. 62
[9] *Idem.* p. 97.
[10] *Idem.* p. 128.
[11] *Idem.* p. 146-7.
[12] *Idem.* p.176.

> To represent disability is to engage oneself in an encounter with that which is believed to be off the map of "recognizable" human experiences. Making comprehensible that which appears to be inherently unknowable situates narrative in the powerful position of mediator between two separate worlds.[13]

Lobo Antunes' "mediation" attempts to go beyond the conjectural verbal translation aspect. In addition to the "two separate worlds" mentioned by Mitchell and Snyder, the world of the mentally able and the world of foggy and disorganized minds, we find a third element, a sort of intermediate bridge between "logic" and the collapse of rationality: the animal. In fact, Lobo Antunes obsessively punctuates the old lady's monologues with redundant descriptions of her cat, crouching at the foot of her bed. The mental associations of the old lady are often interrupted by the sudden appearances of her pet. This omnipresent cat is at times a protective presence and at others a sinister "uncanny" (Freud). It often appears as an automaton: the lady thinks she hears an internal engine – a "motorzinho lá dentro" (p. 11) – activating her cat. Lobo Antunes is a master at embroidering scenes of "estrangement" (Skhlovsky): the cat is seen as though for the first time ever. Obsessively mentioned is also a dog – a greyhound – drawn on an apron in the kitchen, with the hallucinatory ability to bark and run. But these pets are also "humanized": the cat's paw ("escutei a pata compridíssima segredar") can say "Olá" and "Podes ficar descansada que não torno a ir-me embora" (p. 222). Delirious projections into the non-human, confirm the lesson learnt by Lewis Carroll, an author that Lobo Antunes studied extensively at the beginning of his career as a psychiatrist (Lobo Antunes co-wrote an academic essay with his psychiatrist colleague Daniel Sampaio on *Alice in Wonderland* in which the cat – the "mad" Cheshire cat – is described as "o ser mais enigmático e fascinante do livro" (p. 29). [14]

Representing the core of a mental dissolution, Lobo Antunes shows that the task of "understanding others" by writing is a slippery challenge that defies the limits of the verbal. A symbiotic bond is established between the old lady and the cat in the novel's three-page prologue through the act of staring (and in other passages throughout the novel: "o gato levantava-se quando eu me levantava," p. 227). Once this bond is clearly established, it is tempting to read the invention of the cat as an agent to represent the "language" of Alzheimer's disease without recurring to explicit verbal communication. The unnamed feelings and desires of the lady are represented *by proxy* in the

[13] Mitchell and Snyder, quoted in Alice Hall. p. 35

[14] António Lobo Antunes, Daniel Sampaio. "*Alice no país das maravilhas* ou a esquizofrenia esconjurada." On the importance of the book of Lewis Carroll for Lobo Antunes' career, see the article "Lobo Antunes, the Psychiatrist" by António Carlos Trigo de Bettencourt.

numerous variations of the cat's behavior. In particular, the paw of the cat is (almost autonomously) at times aggressive ("uma pata compridíssima toda unhas e as outras pequenas", p. 17) and, at other times, protective, representing a sort of prosthetic tool of that agency – practically unattainable – but wished for by the patient. If the old lady is in fact imprisoned in her apartment, the cat can, on the other hand, be free from the caretaker, the house and even from this version of life all together.

The first line of the prologue is: "Ao acordar o gato estava deitado como de costume aos pés da cama **olhando para mim sem me ver**" (p. 11, my emphasis). Circularly, the end of the prologue returns to the image of the cat. This time it is the old lady who is staring *at us*, the readers.

> dá ideia que [o tempo] se altera mas é o mesmo sempre e é no interior desse tempo que continuo a esmorecer devagar com o motor do gato até ao fim da cauda, calando-se consoante me calo **a olhar-vos**[15]

Through the description of these gazes, the animal one, turned inward[16] – a gaze coming from an inaccessible interior – and that of the lady's looking at the readers, Lobo Antunes establishes a connection between *three* elements: the animal, the cognitive disabled, and then us, in state of becoming. A question arises: how distant are readers from these "others"? Aren't we, the readers, equally mute, isolated, and waiting to be reshaped by old age, disease, and corruption into a minor version of ourselves? "O livro ideal seria aquele em que todas as páginas fossem espelhos," wrote Lobo Antunes a few years ago in a chronicle titled "Receita para me lerem" (*Segundo livro de crónicas*).

There seems to be more to say about this enigmatic gaze. The cat looks at the lady without really *seeing* her. And then the old lady – meta-fictionally – stares at us, an unachievable and ever-changeable entity. And we obviously cannot reciprocate this gaze. Is Lobo Antunes suggesting that the text tries to *formally* represent a state of confinement in a closed and unachievable human state? Lacking reciprocity and therefore recognition from other eyes, the old lady remains mono-dimensionally the radical "other", the buried alive and almost dead. In a 2009 essay titled "Why Look at Animals?" English writer John Berger suggested that "The eyes of an animal when they consider a man are attentive and wary. The same animal may well look at other species in the same way. He does not reserve a special look for man. But by no other species except man will the animal's look be

[15] *Para aquela.* p. 13 (my emphasis)

[16] Norberto do Vale Cardoso interpreted the cat's gaze as a "símbolo heterogéneo da ligação entre o terreno e o além" in his review in *Jornal de Letras* (2016). The cat is indeed presented as a figure between dimensions: a contemporary version of the Psychopomp, the cat could facilitate the transition towards death ("se ao menos a pata interminável do gato que já não há me filasse o pescoço e me levasse daqui," p. 305).

recognized as familiar. Other animals are held by the look. Man becomes aware of himself returning the look" (pp. 4-5). Although very personal and unprovable, John Berger's (impressionistic) ideas offer hints to interpret the cat's blank gaze in Lobo Antunes' prologue. At times a magical agent of her will by proxy and, at other times, a vertiginous and menacing other that refuses to recognize and confirm the human identity of the one who is *biologically* a human, the cat in Lobo Antunes represents a figure of attraction and repulsion with its ambivalence. In another passage of the novel, the old lady notices that her cat is ignoring her because "bichos dão conta, vão-se afastando da gente, *acham que deixámos de ser nós*, evitam-nos" (p. 244). The character of the lady is therefore caught in the liminal space between the human and non-human condition. To the cat, as I noticed, the lady is less than human and even less than an animal: her presence is unremarkable, objectified, undeserving attention, *not there*. For the lady is therefore impossible to return that gaze, establishing a frontier and confirming the difference of her identity. She cannot help but "look" at the readers to ask for that recognition. Similarly, her turbulent collections of memories and thoughts – the essence of the entire novel – could be read as a fight to protect a state of humanity, her *Bios*, her biographical life, against the fall into the mere biological life (or *Zoê*), comparable to that of her pet. In questioning the borders of sanity and disease, humanity and animality, past and present, Lobo Antunes asks his readers to accompany the lady in the battle-zone of identity. Writing of Alzheimer's disease is therefore an occasion for Lobo Antunes to explore a core issue of his: the figure of the border. It is not by chance that, as I previously noticed, interspersed in the novel, a voice (not the lady's, not that of another character) cracks the narratives to ask "quem pensa este livro, quem pensa o que digo" (p. 193) or "e serei eu realmente quem escreve este livro" (p. 194).

As I have tried to show, the meaning of Alzheimer's – or dementia, or pathological memory loss – in Lobo Antunes is not easily identifiable. As Portuguese literary critic Silvina Rodrigues Lopes put it in her book *Literatura, Defesa do Atrito* (2017), one of the characteristics of the *literary* is "o desencadear de um movimento do pensamento sem assunto ou tema pré-determinado" (p. 10). In our case, what Silvina Rodrigues Lopes calls the antagonism between the "limited" (in our case, the naturalistic representation of a disease) and the "unlimited" (the *metaphor* of Alzheimer's) is unresolved. Not confined to represent a literary metaphor, nor chosen merely as a complicated literary representational challenge, the patient with Alzheimer's in Lobo Antunes emerges as a vicarious figure of creation, able to hyperbolically evoke key issues of the *ars poetica* of this author: the nature of time; the fluidity of personal identity; the clash of interpretations about what the world is – what we perceive it to be, what other people believe it is, and what happens to our perception of it *in time*. In his earlier

novel, *A Ordem Natural das Coisas* (1992), Lobo Antunes had already suggested a relationship between old age and creation and between disease and (decentered forms of) knowledge. In that novel, an old and terminally ill woman with a brain tumor, "uma mulher de silêncio morando no silêncio" (285), creates the plots and the characters we are reading in the novel. In Lobo Antunes, the marginalized, the fragmented, and the unstable subject can see otherwise. They are called to represent what literature has the ambition to be: a yarn of precarious words to grasp the unknown, the submerged, the hidden. We could then conclude by saying that the old lady with Alzheimer's of Lobo Antunes' novel, discovering the world for the first time and incessantly questioning it, is – for lack of a better expression – the literary act *tourt court*.

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