

"You Don't Invent Anything": Memory and the Patterns of Fiction in Lobo Antunes's Works

Felipe Cammaert

Abstract: The main purpose of this article is to study the evolution of the concept of *fiction* through different stages of Lobo Antunes's writings. The argument stems from the idea that these stages are built on a structured logic of memory. Imagination, which is considered as the specificity that distinguishes fiction from history or facts, has a fundamental role in these "memory narratives." The article seeks to review the relationship between fiction, imagination, and memory in order to define the configuration of Antunes's fictional universe. The analysis of the fictional universe that is stated here suggests three principal variants: an autobiographical pattern; a polyphonic pattern; and a poetic pattern. As a result, the article hopes to achieve the distinction of fiction in the works of Lobo Antunes.

[...] e então soltar os cães das palavras na esperança que alguma delas, vibrando a cauda de uma consonante alegre, vos descubra vivos [...]
Que farei quando tudo arde?

When describing the arising of a fictional universe, the term *invention* identifies the foundational act accomplished by the writer to distinguish his work from other types of literature. Yet, for António Lobo Antunes's works, the creative process denotes a more complex procedure involving memory and its

correlation with imagination. As a result of this concern, the fictional status of his works is explored in this paper in order to define what can be understood as the configuration of fiction.

The study of Antunes's fictional works does not fit exactly with the predominant issues underlined by the multiple theories of fiction, concerned mainly with providing an answer to the question *What is fiction?* As a matter of fact, the significance of this author's works does not necessarily stand in their nature—that is to say, in the appreciation of whether their contents belong to a fictional world or to a historical or factual order; rather, it responds to the issue of the articulation of fiction itself. Lobo Antunes's works have unquestionably been considered as literary constructions, and more precisely as novels, in spite of the fact that they differentiate themselves in many aspects from the genre's traditional models.¹ Thus, this paper does not pretend to question the fictional status of Antunes's works (i.e., it does not attempt to answer the question: *are Lobo Antunes's works fictional?*), but to develop the issue of the *configuration of fiction* in his novels. What seems truly relevant at this time is to explore the different patterns of fiction in Lobo Antunes's works.

However, the common literary meaning of fiction points to an element that will appear fundamental for the analysis of Antunes's production. Fiction is often defined as the “narrative writing drawn from the imagination rather than from history or fact” (Harmon and Holman 195). Margaret Macdonald observes that this opposition between facts and fictions, identified with the opposition imaginary-reality, often leads to an ambiguous situation since it defines what is fictional as well as the work containing a fictional situation. However that may be, one can observe an established distinction based on the object of the narratives. This distinction places on one side the ones emerging from imagination, and on the other side the ones that materialize from recognized and verifiable events (facts). To achieve an analysis applied to the configuration of the different patterns in Lobo Antunes's works, the definition of fiction cited above must be confronted with the author's own perception of the act of writing.

1. Memory, Fiction and Imagination

The Antunian universe appears to be one of the most accurate examples of contemporary literature regarding the incidence of memory on the development of a fictional universe. Therefore, this examination of Lobo Antunes's configuration of fiction will proceed from a premise concerning the role of

memory in the building of the fictional field. The mnemonic nature that identifies the novels determines entirely his conception of fiction. Hence, memory is more than the inherent basis of any writing act; it is above all the principle that rules the disposition of events in the frameworks. Lobo Antunes's works could be considered "memory narratives," a category of fictional texts "[...] *that maintain a perfectly conventional narrative presentation but that follow an order determined not by biographical chronology but by associative memory,*" according to Dorrit Cohn's definition (182).

Memory plays a fundamental role when creating a fictional universe. All events employed to generate fiction derive from a mnemonic act. This assertion acquires a decisive significance in the case of Lobo Antunes's novels. The Portuguese author has been quite restrained when asked about the specificities of his writing process. However, in an interview with the Spanish journalist Maria Luisa Blanco, he states:

pienso que todos los libros son autobiográficos, sobre todo *Robinson Crusoe* [...]. *Porque tú no inventas nada, la imaginación es la manera como arreglas tu memoria.* Todo tiene que ver con la memoria. [...] *Si no tienes memoria, no puedes tener imaginación.* Creo que la memoria no tiene que ver solamente con el pasado; también tiene que ver con el presente y quizá con el futuro. (109; italics added)²

Antunes's assertion involves a paradox that can be named, for the purposes of this study, "the mnemonic paradox." This concept suggests that the imaginative faculty, applied to the production of a work of fiction, draws solely from mnemonic activities. Hence the literary distinction between facts and fiction is clearly undermined. Imagination no longer determines the fictional quality of a text, but it is now associated to the individual perception of past time.³ The mnemonic paradox illustrates the key role assumed by memory in the definition of fiction: for Lobo Antunes, all the imaginary events that build his texts not only involve an implied memory action, but also refer explicitly to the writer's own past. Invention, which is considered as the intellectual process that gives birth to fictions, is thus only possible in terms of remembering past actions.

This paper seeks to review different patterns of fiction throughout Antunes's literary career. The core idea shows that the configuration of fiction transforms itself as the novels' production grows, despite the fact that one could not reasonably identify clear periods in the writer's production. As Maria Alzira Seixo argues:

É difícil estabelecer fases na obra de Lobo Antunes, ainda neste início da segunda década das suas publicações, não só porque cada um dos seus romances emerge isoladamente como um mundo específico e coeso, mas também porque, em compensação, todos os seus livros apresentam elos que os ligam entre si, seja pela concepção da vida, seja por um conjunto de atitudes estilísticas, seja ainda por problemáticas e ambientes que de um para outro migram ou se mantêm. (195)

Although Seixo proposes a thematic classification, she recognizes that this one is susceptible to fluctuate depending on the chosen approach. As an alternative for the study of the distinction of fiction, it seems preferable to concentrate on the permanent patterns of fiction that emerge from the works. Those patterns reflect somehow the major steps of the Antunian narrative progression, without being strictly attached to a chronological order. They can be described as follows.

The first pattern is the *autobiographical fiction*, in which narration is seen as the quest of a voice to deal with the personal remembrances of the author, particularly the ones referring to the Angolan independence war and the conditions of the psychiatric practice in Portugal.⁴ The autobiographical fiction is particularly visible in the first works of the author, namely *Memória de elefante* (1979), *Os cus de Judas* (1979, translated as *South of Nowhere*) and *Conhecimento do inferno* (1980). Other texts such as *Fado alexandrino* (1983) and *Auto dos danados* (1985, *Act of the Damned*) could also be mentioned as novels developing an autobiographical fiction, but due to their composite structure they rather symbolize the evolution period that will lead to the next pattern.

The second variant of fiction, described here as *polyphonic fiction*, corresponds to a period of writing defined by the maturity of its narrative techniques. In this period, the framework constructs itself by the accumulation of a multiplicity of narrative voices. Five novels can be included here: *A ordem natural das coisas* (1992, *The Natural Order of Things*), *A morte de Carlos Gardel* (1994), *O manual dos inquisidores* (1996, *The Inquisitors' Manual*), *O esplendor de Portugal* (1997) and *Exortação aos crocodilos* (1998). The consolidation of the polyphonic fiction is accomplished progressively, but as time passes there is an extension of the viewpoints, which leads to an enhancement of the plot, and which will end up with the instauration of a situation in which a broad spectrum of voices cohabitates to define the fictional universe.

The third pattern, *poetic fiction*, is achieved by superposing the structural challenges brought by autobiographical and polyphonic narration. The pattern

illustrates the independence that the narrators have reached within the fiction in the previous period. Antunes's last two novels, *Não entres tão depressa nessa noite escura*, published in 2000, and *Que farei quando tudo arde?*, published in 2001, develop the poetic fiction.⁵ As a consequence of the polyphonic situation, the internal link between the author and the narrator appears destabilized because the latter tends to play the role normally attributed to his creator.

The study of the three narrative features mentioned above stems from the idea that, throughout Antunes's career, fictional activity fluctuates between the author's consciousness and the character-narrators created by him. This is a direct consequence of the importance given to memory in the constitution of the fictional universe. As a result, in the autobiographical pattern, the creation of fiction corresponds to the author himself (even if it is all about an authorial representation inside the plot). In the polyphonic fiction, however, the characters develop an individual discourse from where the past emerges (although, strictly speaking, the author is still in command). As for the poetic fiction, there is a confusion of entities regarding the creation of fiction as a result of the preponderant role of the characters issued from the polyphonic pattern (thus, the fictive character behaves as if he were the author). Moreover, due to the complexity to intend a detailed "history of fiction," the emphasis will be made on the major mutations of the act of invention as it appears in the mnemonic paradox. In other words, the considerations of the multiple figures of invention and its consequent effects on fiction require one to answer the following question: *who is the producer of fiction?*

Along with these observations of the multiple patterns of fiction, the question of factuality also emerges. As the mnemonic paradox states, imagination, which is conceived of as the source of fiction, only comes from the ordering of memory. At that moment, one can guess that the facts brought back by memory will have to be subject to radical transformations to accomplish their inventive role of creating fiction. Thus, in the same way that Lobo Antunes's works evolve, the referential autobiographical universe acquires a progressively more fictional dimension, which conversely will never underestimate the significance of memory.

2. Autobiographical Fiction: Fictionalization of the Past

António Lobo Antunes's first novels are undeniably marked by an autobiographical trait. The major themes of this period are Portugal's contemporary history (the fall of dictatorship, as well as the independence wars of the African

Portuguese colonies) and the conflicts of the psychiatric world. Both themes occupy a foremost place in Antunes's life, as he draws from his personal experience as a medical soldier in the Angolan war, and his early career years as a psychiatrist in Lisbon. Writing therefore seems to accomplish a cathartic role in the author's life.⁶

In spite of the important autobiographical contents of his early prose, one cannot forget the distinction, nowadays common in literature, between the author and the narrator: António Lobo Antunes is definitely not the *narrator* of these novels, he is just the *author*. As such, the narrator put in place by Antunes bears many resemblances to the author. The fictional narrator, modeled in the image of his creator, brings to the fictional world some of the events that belong to Lobo Antunes' own past. This procedure constitutes in and of itself an act of fiction. Within this context, Margit Sutrop argues:

we are able to recognize that a text counts as fiction if we notice that the narrator is not identical with the author, that the latter is only playing a part of a narrator. To play a part of somebody else, one has to imagine being this person. Reporting on the events that he imagines knowing about, the author imagines being the person who has this knowledge. Hence, performing fictional speech acts the author is expressing his imagination. (128)

The first trace of imagination appears with the creation of fictional characters who will show up in a fictional world and transpose the author's perceptions of past events. Even if the Antunian narrator imagined by the author is particularly attentive to his creators' effective past, the fictional situation compels the surviving memories to be forecast into the plot.

Thus, the novels belonging to the autobiographical feature present a high degree of imagination according to the mnemonic paradox, given that the assembling of fictional situations comes from the ordering of memory. The process of invention can be then seen as the fictionalization of the past. However, this act of fictionalization reflects the willingness to elaborate a narrative situation according to a mnemonic rhythm rather than a chronological arrangement. Events will then be brought into fiction as they survive in the author's consciousness, conserving the simultaneity and the apparent lack of logic they possess before passing through the filter of rational language. Maria Alzira Seixo, studying the narrative structure of *South of Nowhere*, refers to a situation where an effect of anguish is produced in the reader due to "o

modo de leitura, quase em simultâneo dos vários planos da memória e do presente, e da situação enunciativa que se vai através deles pulverizando em fragmentações da memória ao mesmo tempo que se recolhe e reencontra em versões niilistas nesse vazio dos corpos e das palavras” (55). In this sense, the kind of invention one can find inside the autobiographical pattern involves the act of transposing personal thoughts to the fictional universe with no loss whatsoever of their mnemonic presentation. Hence, the ruling principle of the memory narratives defined by Dorrit Cohn remains intact.

Additionally, the Antunian action of transforming his memories into literature reveals the search of a narrative voice to accomplish this act in the best possible way. The fictionalization of past events remains evident, in spite of the fact that the autobiographical pattern oscillates between a first-person and a third-person narrative order. The autobiographical quality depends more on the contents of the narration than on the form chosen to describe it. As Maria Alzira Seixo points out, “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 se lhe seguem” (485). However, one could suppose that the first-person structure articulates more accurately the author’s wish to transpose into the fictional world his deepest feelings that, after all, constitute the foundation of the writing act.

Memória de elefante, the first novel to be published in 1979, can be seen as the interior conflict of the author to express, through the narrator’s speech, his personal universe. There is a third-person narrator who is constantly “interrupted” by a first-person narrator. This variation of the traditional narrative mode occurs systematically when the narration tends to describe a hurting memory. In one of the passages of the novel, the narrator, a psychiatrist, argues with a colleague who regrets the loss of the African colonies. The third-person narrator reveals the irritation of the psychiatrist, who had endured the conflict in Angola. As the anger grows in the psychiatrist’s mind, the narration switches progressively into a first-person confession:

Que sabe este tipo de África, *interrogou-se* o psiquiatra à medida que o outro, padeira de Aljubarrota do patriotismo à Legião, se afastava em gritinhos indignados [...] *que sei eu* que durante vinte e sete meses *morei* na angústia do arame farpado por conta das multinacionais, *vi* a minha mulher a quase morrer do falciparum, *assisti* ao vagaroso fluir do Dondo, *fiz* uma filha na Malanje dos diamantes, *contornei* os morros nus de Dala-Samba povoados no topo pelos tufos de palmeiras

dos túmulos dos reis Gingas, *parti e regressei* com a casca de um uniforme imposta no corpo, *que sei eu* de África? (42-44; italics added)

It all happens as if the third-person narrator did not have the authority to stop the character's speech from exceeding the principles of the direct discourse. The sudden appearance of first-person narrations in the text symbolizes the author's impossibility to maintain his distance from the third-person narrative form. This is especially true when dealing with personally painful, sensitive memories. Thus, the emergence of a first-person narrator symbolizes the irruption of the mnemonic present on the logic of narration, as well as the inclusion of the author's intimacy in the fictional sphere.

In *Os cus de Judas* [*South of Nowhere*], the first-person narrator monopolizes the use of speech in spite of the presence of an interlocutor participating in the scene, which denies at once the hypothesis of a monologue. The novel can be seen as a touching and intimate declaration from a narrator who seeks desperately to purge the memories of the Angolan war, along with his loneliness and despair. He does this by confessing his intimacies to a woman in a bar. Here is the incipit of chapter I:

Porque camandro é que não se fala nisto? Começo a pensar que o milhão e quinhentos mil homens que passaram por África não existiram nunca e lhe estou contando uma espécie de romance de mau gosto impossível de acreditar, uma história inventada com que a comovo a fim de conseguir mais depressa (um terço de paleio, um terço de álcool, um terço de ternura, sabe como é?) que você veja nascer comigo a manhã na claridade azul pálida que fura as persianas e sobe dos lençóis, revela a curva adormecida de uma nádega, um perfil de braços no colchão, os nossos corpos confundidos num torpor sem mistério. (79)⁷

The woman's voice remains unknown, buried by the narrator's speech. Her questions are submerged by the "almighty narrator," who goes over them "in a loud voice" to remind the reader that there is a second, yet silent, character within the plot. The fact that the reader only knows about the woman's voice through the allusions of the narrator creates a particular situation in terms of the fictional universe, since the former tends to fill the vacuum left by the latter (i.e., the absent woman). As a result, one can expect an indirect form of dialogue between the author and the reader, in which the autobiographical pattern is transmitted within a fictional atmosphere. By placing the reader in

the seat of the seduced woman, Lobo Antunes intends to persuade him about the sincerity of his assertions while complaining about the dreadful reality of the colonial wars. Moreover, the allusion to the cheap, implausible novel (“uma espécie de romance de mau gosto impossível de acreditar”) consolidates the idea of an imaginary conversation between the reader and the author, since the narrator’s speech can be identified with the author’s writing act.

A deliberate use of first-person narration also serves as a constant reminder of the close relationship between the narrative and factual worlds. This is what Michal Glowinski calls “formal mimetics”:

The first-person narration [...] is the domain of *formal mimetics*: an imitation, by means of a given form, of other forms of literary, paraliterary, and extraliterary discourse, as well as—what is a common enough phenomenon—ordinary language. It is a form of appeal resorting to the socially fixed norms of expression, usually firmly rooted in a given culture. (106)

In a movement that supposes a constant actualization of the different stages of memory, the facts belonging to the narrator’s memory are represented in fiction as closely as they occurred in the author’s own mind. This is seen in the autobiographical fiction, where the mnemonic nature of Antunes’s writing is actually strengthened. Invention therefore corresponds to the fictionalization of past events in terms of the mnemonic paradox, conceiving imagination as the arrangement of memory.

3. Polyphonic Fiction: Mnemonic Invention Transferred to the Characters’ Minds

It is possible to identify a clear evolution in the narration of Lobo Antunes from a wholly personal narration to a shared narration that includes multiple viewpoints, which tend to consolidate in the polyphonic pattern. This progression passes however through a period where novels are structured around a third-narrator plot, as in the cases of *An Explanation of the Birds* (1981), *Fado Alexandrino* (1983), and *The Act of the Damned* (1985). Bit by bit, Antunes’s production broadens the narrative perspective, presenting thus many narrators that appear in the story to tell their memories.⁸ As Maria Alzira Seixo suggests (147), it is all about an evolution, from a multiplication of viewpoints to a multiplicity of voices. Hence, first-person narration establishes itself progressively in the text, and introduces the interaction of a wide range of characters that occupy the space left behind by the autobiographical narrator.

One can therefore observe the consolidation of a polyphonic situation, analogous to the one stated in Bakhtin's interpretation of Dostoevsky's works, and defined as follows:

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event." (Bakhtin, *Problems* 6)

What appears to be distinctive in the Portuguese universe compared to the Russian one is the plurality of narrators constituting many voices that conclude in a polyphonic configuration of the novel. The polyphonic fiction sets up a situation in which the novel's entire framework is the result of the addition of all first-person discourses; each narrator develops a personal mnemonic universe from which he or she digs out the remembrances that end up building the fiction.

Opposed to the autobiographical narrator, the polyphonic narrator (both individually considered and as a whole, as the sum of narrators) clearly leaves behind the author's referential universe. In that sense, one could say that the polyphonic fiction reflects a more fictional (and fictive) referent than the autobiographical fiction: memories brought up by the polyphonic narrator do not openly correspond to the author's own memories, which seem to vanish dimly. Therefore, little by little, the experiences of the author leave the scene and allow other consciences to grow progressively. Characters start to conquer their own "independence" as products of fiction. Nevertheless, the autobiographical narrator remains as fictional as the polyphonic narrator: the only difference being the purely fictional, non-referential nature of the second pattern. Alternatively, the factual events lived by Antunes form the source of fiction in the autobiographical situation.

Regarding the mnemonic paradox developed and confirmed in the autobiographical pattern, there is a transfer of the inventing faculty from the author's own memory to the character-narrator's fictional memory. As a matter of fact, one can argue that any direct references to the factual world disappear while giving place to a fictional world enclosed inside the character's memories. Invention, which can be seen as the source of imagination, is now located in

the character's consciousness as the polyphonic principle proposed by Bakhtin suggests.

The significant modifications suffered by the mnemonic paradox can be explained by the difference between author and narrator. What really occurs in the polyphonic pattern is that the author imagines being a character subjected to a different factual reality (strictly speaking "fictional," but nevertheless presented for the meanings of the novel as "real"), that is to say, a character possessing an individual memory. Due to this act of imagination, the author's own personal and real memory tends to hide behind the character's imaginative memory. This fictional representation of the author is tied to the fact that the characters take possession of the first-person narration. This could suggest that the author's consciousness is somehow relegated to the background. Yet one cannot underestimate that Lobo Antunes remains at the commencement of the imaginative act that gave birth to the character accomplishing a mnemonic act. Sutrop, arguing against Käte Hamburger's well-known theory which excludes the first-person narration from the fictional domain, states:

If we define fiction as an expression of the author's imagination, we will be able to bring first-person narratives back to the category of fiction. [In first-person and third-person narratives] the author does not tell us what he believes or knows but what he imagines to believe. The only difference is that the author of a first-person narrative imagines being the narrator = character, i.e. he imagines having the beliefs of a concrete character who participates in the events of the story. (129)

After all, the constitution of a polyphonic narration implies a second act of imagination even greater than the one produced by the author in the autobiographical situation to represent himself as a fictional character. The question will then be if this act, which hands over the mnemonic faculty to the character in order to create fiction, concerns in some way the author's memory. The latter impasse can be solved by considering the issue of the point of view, applied to Antunes's polyphonic configuration.

One can notice that, in the polyphonic pattern, the author's consciousness remains perceptible in spite of the undermining of the autobiographical dimension inside the fiction. Thus, the coexistence of a variety of first-person narrators in the actual pattern can be fairly accepted if one presupposes the involvement of an omnipresent consciousness, whose main role is to assemble the character's narratives in order to produce the text of fiction. This situation

materializes in the novels by the narrative technique of the *inquiry*, dear to the author. Antunes imagines a narrative situation where he (to be precise, a fictional representation of himself) dialogues with his fictional characters: fiction emerges as a consequence of this action, leading to a third act of imagination which is derived from the second act of imagination that introduced the polyphonic situation. This symbolic conversation between the author and his characters clearly reminds one of the “dialogic imagination” phenomenon underlined by Bakhtin, resulting from the polyphonic nature of the novel.

Maria Alzira Seixo underlines in her study of Lobo Antunes’s novels the existence of several situations in which inquiry plays a major role. Hence, in *An Explanation of the Birds*, she discovers that “o inquérito aparece não no sentido da indagação ou da pesquisa, mas no sentido do depoimento, da manifestação de opiniões e, no fundo, do falarório e da má-língua do mundo” (103), whereas in *Act of the Damned* the narration “é de vez em quando referida como um relato feito por solicitação ou encomenda, que o título neste caso pode relacionar com uma acção judicial” (154). However that may be, the author’s inquiries induce the characters’ discourse to develop within the plot.

Referring to *The Inquisitor’s Manual*, the critic argues that the inquiry develops between the interrogation of the story (of history, in his instance) and the judicial investigation. In this novel, one can infer from the indications given by the characters that behind their discourse there is a silent interlocutor transcribing the speeches of each narrator.⁹ This interlocutor can be seen as the true, yet mute, narrator of the novel. In *The Inquisitors’ Manual*, the silent interlocutor is from time to time unmasked by the narrator’s speech, as occurs in this relevant extract:

confesso-lhe que ignoro por completo do que está a falar, não percebo nada dessa história de Salazares e Estado Novo e ministros e namoradas de ministros nas ruas Castilhos [...] não entendo que interesse possa ter para um livro a maneira de pensar de um furriel de trinta anos acabado de chegar de cabo [...] em lugar de falarmos não quer antes que lhe traga uma cadeira e um guarda-sol de praia para gozarmos a tarde, ouvem-se os pavões da mata, nem precisamos de falar, e no momento em que o escuro impedir de nos distinguirmos um ao outro você mete os seus papéis e as suas gravações na pasta que não há utilidade em desenterrar o passado e desampara-me a loja sem fazer perguntas, esquece tudo e nunca me viu na vida, deixe o Salazar que já bateu a bota em descanso, deixe o ministro que apodrece por aí num hospital qualquer em descanso. (345-46)

Here, the hidden consciousness is openly presented as someone who inquires in order to compose a book. The inquirer (who could be called, for instance, "the inquisitor," considering the character's reaction to the questions) plays in some way an opposite role to the one held by the woman in *Os cus de Judas*: the two silent individuals exist within the plot to act as a balance to the ubiquitous self in the use of speech. Furthermore, by imagining an inquiring hypothesis, Lobo Antunes may as well insinuate a mimetic situation based on a psychiatric interview, similar to the ones conducted by the author when he worked as a psychiatrist. However, the narrative technique of the inquiry reveals an autobiographical aspect which is firmly anchored in the polyphonic pattern, but nevertheless obscured by the proliferation of fictional voices.

As for the rest of the polyphonic situations that do not explicitly recreate the illusion of a fictional encounter between the author-character and the narrator-character, one could advance the hypothesis that the inquiry situation remains implied because of the narrative structure represented. By giving the right of speech to a broad number of characters, all of whom are first-person narrators who tell their memories "aloud," Antunes places himself as the receptor of these intimate confessions, and thus appears as being the entity that ties together this panoply of voices. As a result, the reader plays the role of a true spectator who assists in a dialogue between the author and the characters. However, due to the muteness of the author, the reader tends to occupy provisionally the vacant place left by the author-inquirer. As Michal Glowinski argues:

In various types of the first-person tale, different elements are accentuated: at times it is the personality of the speaker, at times his position at the moment of utterance. Yet wherever the accents occur, they always constitute the essential distinction. Their effacement causes the first-person narration to lose its basic distinctive features and begin, necessarily, to resemble the third-person story. Thus, we can say that, entangled in its kind of dependence, *a first-person narration becomes somewhat similar to a dialogue in the presence of the reader. He is in possession not only of the narrative text, but also, so to speak, involved in the very act of creating and transmitting the story.* (110; italics added)

In a sense, because of his voiceless but essential duty, the silent interlocutor of a polyphonic situation (both the implied, and the explicitly enounced) plays the part of a traditional third-person narrator. His personality and position,

when putting together the different narrators at his service, remain unnoticeable most of the time. The multiplication of the points of view increases the imaginative sphere, obliging the true narrator of this plural world to act as the conductor of a symphonic patchwork of voices.

By transferring the narrative function to his characters, Lobo Antunes accomplishes two actions: first, he allows the emergence of the character's memory which, based on the mnemonic model, will produce fiction. Secondly, he ensures his presence by imagining a fictive dialogical situation between himself and the characters. The polyphonic pattern turns out, after all, to be the quest of a voice to express the contents of memory. The hesitations between the first- and third-person narratives, which appeared in the early novels of Lobo Antunes, somehow remain valid. The alternative of a multiplicity of first-person narrators is then justified by the author's necessity to create a fictional mnemonic atmosphere richer than his autobiographical experience.

4. Poetic Fiction: The Characters in the Role of the Author

The third pattern also answers to the issue of the many representations shown by the Antunian narrative voice. However, at this point the concern does not truly lie in the observation of the multiplicity of viewpoints, but rather in the "aptitude" of the character to create fiction. After ten years of polyphonic creation, Lobo Antunes's characters seem to have reached a remarkable "fictional independence." By taking advantage of this, the author then proceeds to elaborate a profound interrogation of the meaning of fiction, and at the same time of the essential act of writing.

From the observation of the two last novels published by Lobo Antunes, one can notice that the limits between characters and author have undeniably started to fade away. Although there is still a fictional framework to which the events narrated refer, there are also a significant number of indications alluding to the appropriation of the author's functions by the character-narrators themselves. As a consequence, the whole issue of genre is brought back into question.

In *Não entres tão depressa nessa noite escura*, two elements point to this narrative's unsteady situation. In spite of the multiplicity of voices that emerge within her discourse, Maria Clara appears to be the main character and the only true narrator of the text. She keeps a personal diary, and whatever is written in it is referred to in the novel in the same way as the rest of the events that make up the story. Besides, Maria Clara's impressions are, most of the time,

opposed to the story's sequence. As Seixo argues (392), the father's death, which is one of the major events developed by Maria Clara, can be considered as information coming exclusively from her imagination. The reason for this is that the general plot does not provide the arguments to verify its validity.¹⁰

Therefore, *Não entres tão depressa nessa noite escura* contemplates a double-level framework: there is a second fiction within the main fiction. The two levels of fiction fuse constantly, it being frequently impossible for the reader to detach the events belonging to one or the other. Moreover, the fact that Maria Clara's relatives participate in the development of the story, either by using their own speech or by writing some chapters of her personal diary, contributes to strengthen the impression of a double plot. Actually, they can also be seen as the characters of Maria Clara's own fictional universe. The dynamic contribution of Maria Clara to the progression of the framework, which is materialized in her writing act, also denotes that the character embraces the role of the author regarding the construction of a fictional universe. The former imitates the latter in the imagination of fictive characters and its subsequent confrontation with their fictional discourse. Hence, Maria Clara constantly interacts with an imaginary character whose name is Leopoldina, and she is unable to state whether her "friend" is real or just a simple emanation of her personal diary.

In *Que farei quando tudo arde?*, the vanishing of the distance separating the author from his creatures can be seen as a query of the self. Paulo Antunes Lima, the main character, is a young drug addict undergoing the disintegration of his family life: his father is a transvestite who abandons his wife and son, and his mother turns alcoholic while despairing over the absence of her husband. Yet, throughout the novel, Paulo insists on having his name changed to *Antônio*. Within the plot's logic, this last modification is a direct consequence of his father's change of name, from Carlos to Soraia. Maria Alzira Seixo suggests that, unlike in previous novels, in this case the coincidence of the character's name with the author's own name involves a certain degree of "simulation," given that the doubt about the character's real name persists throughout the novel (449-50). Thus, *Que farei quando tudo arde?* brilliantly develops the never-ending ambiguity of all first-person narrations concerning the individualization of the narrative voice and its correspondence with the author's own consciousness.

This shared identity concerning the first name is clearly developed inside the book. In a crucial chapter, Paulo, who is struggling against the oblivion of

his dead father's memory, decides to pay God, who lives in a decayed attic of a hotel surrounded by pigeons, a visit (329-70).¹¹ Thus, Paulo questions the divinity about his father, but God cannot remember him ("—Vocês são tantos garoto," he replies), nor find him within the city pictured through the tiled roof's holes. Paulo is then obliged to refresh God's memory ("ginastical-lhe a memória") by alluding to his father's sexual behavior ("um maricas Senhor, um travesti, um palhaço que o Filho perdoou em Vosso santo nome"), seeking to confirm that his real name is Carlos and not Soraia. At the end of the chapter, God finally pronounces the name "Carlos," impelled by Paulo's desire. The narrative function is momentarily shared by both Paulo and God. As a result of this "narrative partnership," God/Paulo impede Carlos from abandoning his wife and children, thus modifying a fact reiterated many times throughout the story. In Paulo's consciousness, one of his major fears is then erased from memory. One can infer that the peculiar encounter held by the narrator with the Supreme Creator connotes a metaphoric dialog between the two entities. The author, hilariously personified by God, is hailed by one of his characters, so he can somehow modify the issue of the story. Besides, God's name, Mister Lemos, can be considered as an anagram related to the literary activity: *Lemos* could then mean in Portuguese "what we are reading,"—"o que estamos a ler," as Maria Alzira Seixo has underscored (437).

The intrusion of the character in the author's universe involves, in a sense, an inversion of the inquiry's technique as it has been stated for the polyphonic pattern. In spite of the fact that the poetic fictions continue to recreate a form of inquiry which is similar to the one typified in *The Inquisitors' Manual*, one can observe that there is an inversion of roles in situations where the characters query the act of producing fiction: the inquirer of the fictional field (the fictionalized representation of the author) ends up being a respondent, whereas the fictional character ends up leading the quest.¹²

Therefore, this proximity between characters and author (in his fundamental role of composer of fictions) suggests a renewed autobiographical relationship that introduces a reinterpretation of the mnemonic paradox. The autobiographical pattern is revisited, once one observes that the Antunian characters question their creator about his writing activities rather than his personal memories. Thus, what is really brought into play here is, once more, the act of invention. Given that in accordance with the mnemonic paradox all invention proceeds from the ordering of memory, the fusion of entities studied above confirms the predominance of the author's memory in the creation

of fiction. Whereas in the first pattern the autobiographical nature of fiction was a result of the fictionalizing of factual events, in the poetic pattern it is about the representation of the character in the factual dimension, in order to act as the creator of fiction. In a sense, through his characters' questioning of the genre, Lobo Antunes questions himself and his role as a writer. However that may be, the dialogical situation stated for the polyphonic fiction ends up being confidently enhanced.

This final pattern underlying the configuration of Antunes's fictional universe proves to be poetic, not only because of the imaging connotation of language that presents many traits of the poetic genre, but mostly because of the profound query of the act of writing developed presently. By placing his characters into the role of creators of fiction, Lobo Antunes somehow challenges the principles that rule any literary activity involving an act of creation. The mnemonic paradox has suffered in effect a radical transformation since its first variant, the autobiographical fiction, but nevertheless remains valid. Thus, the inventive attribute of imagination refers more to the mnemonic function of producing fiction itself than to the act of transposing the author's own past to a fictional situation.

Não entres tão depressa nessa noite escura denotes this ontological interrogation since it is presented as a poem, in spite of its remarkable length.¹³ The poetical consonance of the title evokes a wide variety of interpretations that can be drawn from the novel, since the "dark night" connotes a lyrical characterization of the art of fiction. In this sense, Seixo's analysis of the concept of night reveals some of the possibilities that can be proposed: the Antunian dark night could then imply the act of writing, the text that the reader has in his or her hands, the emerging of the past, as well as the main reason to write to push away the darkness of silence (396-98). In consequence, the novel reveals itself to be a book about creation, somehow referring to the Book of Genesis that tells the origins of the world and that at the same time introduces each one of the seven parts of Antunes's novel. Writing could then be considered as the only possible answer for Maria Clara, if not to avoid the coming of the dark night, at least to delay her plunging into the shadows, as long as the fiction lasts.

In an overwhelmingly imaginative chapter of *Que farei quando tudo arde?*, Paulo accomplishes an act of writing within the fiction (457-75). Even if Paulo's notes do not integrate the fiction with the same frequency as Maria Clara's personal diary, his actions become somehow a clear metaphor of the author's art of writing by their significance and poetic dimension. This chapter, having

far too many relevant passages to be quoted extensively, can be approached from a dual perspective: one could imagine that Lobo Antunes expresses his beliefs about composing fiction through the narrator's assertions, or in other words, by using Paulo's descriptions of his notebook. As a result, Paulo writes in a notebook to bring to mind his entourage as if it were the author's construction of the plot: "é a única forma que tenho de tentar encontrar-vos [...] e então soltar os cães das palavras na esperança que alguma de elas, vibrando a cauda de uma consoante alegre, vos descubra vivos" (457).

He would like to get closer to his father ("se lograsse conhecê-lo por intermédio do caderno com a mesma nitidez com que lhe noto as joiazinhas de vidro" [466]), but the words seem to have their own life ("as sílabas que não me obedecem, trazem à tona episódios e pessoas que sepultam de novo, enganam-se ao oferecerem-me recordações que não são minhas [459]), and behave like wild beasts ("as palavras [...] filando-me a manga com pontos de exclamação de incisivos, pontos de suspensão de molares, o til do contorno dos lábios" [468]). The character, like his creator, is aware of the magic of words to evoke reality ("no caso de procurar o rafeiro do laçarote escrevê-lo às escondidas [...] completar uma das patas para o impedir de coxear" [462] "e logo que escrevo / moscas / as moscas ali, se pudesse não escrever" [464]). For a short time, the author's voice manages to monopolize the narration by the autobiographical confession ("eu a aproximar o nariz do papel buscando-vos submersas nas linhas, uma vozita débil / —Paulo / que penso reconhecer a pesar dos caprichos da memória que distorce e apaga, da surdez que me apoquentua" [458]) relegating the character to the background. Finally, Paulo and Lobo Antunes give the impression to be conscious of the mnemonic dimension of writing ("este caderno onde o passado se torna presente e me persegue, me sufoca" [472]). In a unique example of the relationship he entertains with his characters and with the literary work, Antunes's humoristic variation on the theme of writing abolishes all the obstacles imposed by fictional logic.

Thus, the two novels' subject of the poetic pattern can be summarized in a single word: writing. Writing is on the one hand the solution to prevent the narrator, and furthermore the author, from the hazard of emerging into the dark night, and to give them confidence when everything burns around them. Writing suggests, on the other hand, the mnemonic activity questioned by both the character and the author in the poetic fiction. One could suggest that the reason why the mnemonic paradox is still applicable to Antunes's fiction is that the author's consciousness has continuously been occupied by

his characters, constituting an immediate memory from which the invention emerges when producing fiction. According to the mnemonic principle, the author's fictional imagination would then issue from the fictive minds he has created throughout the years, and whose invented memories somehow reflect his perception of the world. In this sense, Seixo observes the existence of a variety of autobiographies in Lobo Antunes's works:

Deste modo, é como se houvesse *várias* autobiografias nesta obra, umas coincidentes com a personalidade do escritor ou com a de entidades que com ele se cruzaram, outras coincidindo, e talvez que mais corporeamente ainda, com entidades que são predominantemente projecções do pensamento, criações ficcionais embutidas num olhar fixado na experiência que o romancista colheu na observação e no contacto. (496)

The factual and fictional autobiographies revealed by Seixo happen to be nothing other than the three patterns of fiction underlined in the present study. Hence the poetic pattern of fiction turns up to be a profound interrogation of the writing process accomplished by the author through the characters' perspective. This questioning would never be possible if the fictional voices did not truly reveal the deepest figures of the author's consciousness.

From the study of the three fictional patterns in Lobo Antunes's works, one can conclude that the configuration of fiction is intimately linked to the multiple materializations of memory that appear in all the author's novels. In other words, the factual universe emerges from the fictionalization of past events in accordance with a narrative presentation ruled by an intense mnemonic order.

As a result, the mnemonic paradox stated here appears to be the fundamental principle that rules the configuration of fiction in the different stages of the Antunian production. Given that the imaginative faculty draws entirely from the mnemonic configuration, the fictional universe is associated at all times with the ordering of memory. However, the act of invention undergoes many transformations resulting from its fundamental role within the mnemonic paradox. One can notice that the mnemonic imagination describes a metaphoric circular itinerary, which can be illustrated as follows: in the autobiographical fiction the imaginative faculty is placed in the author's own consciousness, whereas in the polyphonic fiction it lies within the character's consciousness. As for the poetic fiction, the imaginative mnemonic act ends

up being positioned once more in the author's consciousness, yet is referred to the activity of writing rather than to his personal experiences.

Thus, the figurative itinerary followed by the author's imagination happens to be nothing more than the true quest for a narrative voice inside the fictional universe, capable of expressing a rich intimate dimension via literary language. Ultimately, one can conclude that whether Lobo Antunes's first novels appear as an interrogation of the potentialities of fiction to reflect his deepest memories, his latest works question the fictional universe to find out the essential meaning of the act of writing. In addition, the polyphonic fiction proves to be the most accomplished example of Antunes's imaginative talent to multiply the mnemonic sources of fiction with no loss whatsoever of the autobiographical factors. Regardless of the pattern evidenced, what seems to be fundamental is the fact that Lobo Antunes's approach constantly questions the role of the author in the invention of a fictional world.

Furthermore, the Antunian configuration of fiction confers a key role to the reader. In all three patterns, the reader is somehow confronted by the author's perspective, as he feels occasionally concerned by the first-person discourse of the characters. Due to the mnemonic nature attributed to the act of invention, the reader will then have to consider various degrees of the autobiographical narration within the fictional plot to take over the facts narrated. Lobo Antunes conceives the relationship between the author and the reader as a close journey into the depths of the human soul. In a revealing chronicle, which would deserve to be quoted extensively, he confesses his devotion to the reader:

A verdadeira aventura que proponho é aquela que o narrador e o leitor fazem em conjunto ao negrume do inconsciente, à raiz da natureza humana. [...] Exijo que o leitor tenha uma voz entre as vozes do romance / ou poema, ou visão; ou outro nome que lhes apeteça dar / a fim de poder ter assento no meio dos demónios e dos anjos da terra. [...] Reparem como as figuras que povoam o que digo não são descritas e quase não possuem relevo: é que se trata de vocês mesmos. Disse em tempos que o livro ideal seria aquele em que todas as páginas fossem espelhos: reflectem-me a mim e ao leitor, até nenhum de nós saber qual dos dois somos. Tento que cada um seja ambos e regressemos desses espelhos como quem regressa da caverna do que era. É a única salvação que conheço e, ainda conhecesse outras, a única que me interessa. (*Segundo livro* 109-11)

One can therefore observe that the fictional model proposed by Antunes undeniably considers the reader as a fundamental element for the completion of the text's intentions. The author declares thus his sincere writing commitment to the readers by letting them identify with the characters, and above all, by hoping to eliminate the genre's distance that exists between the author and the person who has the novel in his hands.

Finally, it seems important to remember that the literary distinction between fact and fiction, based on the imaginative faculty commonly accorded to the fictional field, cannot be thoroughly applied in the works of Lobo Antunes. As a matter of fact, in the Antunian fictional universe, these two poles endure a never-ending confusion due to the mnemonic role that is reserved to imagination. After all, the three patterns of fiction studied here confirm entirely the author's affirmation related to the impossibility of the invention of a fictional world. António Lobo Antunes's novels are somehow consistent with the opinion he once declared: "you don't invent anything, imagination is the way you arrange your memory."

Notes

¹ Further on, the case of *Não entres tão depressa nessa noite escura* (2000) and its genre duality between poem or novel will be examined (see section 4 of this article, "Poetic Fiction: The Characters in the Role of the Author").

² This is the Portuguese translation, as given by Carlos Aboim de Brito: "penso que todos os livros são autobiográficos, sobretudo *Robinson Crusóé* [...]. *Porque não se inventa nada, a imaginação é a maneira como se arruma a memória.* Tudo tem a ver com a memória. [...] *Se não temos memória, não podemos ter imaginação.* Creio que a memória não tem apenas a ver com o passado; também tem a ver com o presente e talvez com o futuro" (Blanco 114; italics added).

³ William James defines memory as "the association of a present image with others known to belong to the past" (598).

⁴ The term *voice* is understood here in the same way as Genette's definition of *voix narrative*, which is "used to describe the way the narrative situation, along with the narrator and his or her audience, is implicated in the narrative" (Hawthorn 145).

⁵ One could presume that the novel published by Antunes in 2003, the title of which is *Boa tarde às coisas aqui em baixo*, somehow follows this third pattern.

⁶ Maria Alzira Seixo speaks about the "surroundings of the self" ("*os arredores do eu*") referring to the incidence of the autobiographical context in Lobo Antunes's fiction (483).

⁷ Chapter "K" in the English translation: "Why the hell won't they talk about it? I'm beginning to think that the million and a half Portuguese who passed through Africa never existed and I am narrating for you a cheap, implausible novel, a contrived story composed of one third bullshit, one third alcohol, and one third tenderness, you know what I mean? to persuade you to watch the sunrise with me in the pale-blue clarity that pierces the blinds and crawls through

the sheets, revealing the curve of a thigh, the silhouette of a shoulder on the mattress, our bodies entangled in torpor" (51).

⁸ This new narrative situation may be inspired by Faulkner's technique, principally developed in *The Sound and The Fury* (1929) and *As I Lay Dying* (1930).

⁹ This expression, "silent interlocutor," was first suggested by João Camilo in an article about *Os cus de Judas* (234). Eduardo Prado Coelho's interpretation underlines the same phenomenon (12), as does Maria Alzira Seixo's analysis (296-97).

¹⁰ Speaking about a fictional universe, it seems more convenient to avoid the concepts true/false to qualify the event of the father's death. Moreover, Maria Clara's diary can be considered as an example of "counterfiction." This term, recently suggested by Maxime Abolgassemi, is defined as follows: "La contrefiction consistera alors, en s'éloignant un instant du fil de l'histoire, à parler de ce qui pourtant n'a pas eu lieu: à ouvrir ainsi dans le récit une branche narrative qui n'accède pas au statut de fait avéré" (223).

¹¹ In *South of Nowhere*, Lisbon's sky is described as follows: "Even sky is cluttered with flocks of pigeons" (22).

¹² Hence, in *Que farei quando tudo arde?*, there is a journalist who inquires about the suicide of Rui, one of the characters.

¹³ Maria Alzira Seixo's analysis examines in detail the lyric elements of this novel, and proposes to qualify it as a "*poema sinfónico em distonia concertante*" (415-25). For the purposes of this study, the question will be treated from the angle of the configuration of fiction, which implies that the genre's hesitation will be somehow resolved by considering *Não entres tão depressa nessa noite escura* as a novel developing a poetic dimension.

Works Cited

- Abolgassemi, Maxime. "La contrefiction dans *Jacques le Fataliste*." *Poétique* 134 (April 2003): 223-37. Print.
- Antunes, António Lobo. *Os cus de Judas*. Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 1979. Print.
- . *O manual dos inquisidores*. Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 1996. Print.
- . *Memória de elefante*. Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 1979. Print.
- . *Não entres tão depressa nessa noite escura*. Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 2000. Print.
- . *Que farei quando tudo arde?* Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 2001. Print.
- . *Segundo livro de crónicas*. Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 2002. Print.
- . *South of Nowhere*. Trans. Elizabeth Lowe. New York: Random House, 1983. Print.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail Mikhailovich. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Austin: U Texas P, 1981. Print.
- . *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984. Print.
- Blanco, María Luisa. *Conversaciones con António Lobo Antunes*. Madrid: Siruela, 2001. Print.
- . *Conversas com António Lobo Antunes*. Trans. Carlos Aboim de Brito. Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 2002. Print.
- Camilo, João. "Alguns aspectos da técnica narrativa em *Os cus de Judas* de António Lobo Antunes." *Cahier d'études romanes* 10 (1985): 231-49. Print.
- Cohn, Dorrit. *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978. Print.
- Glowinski, Michal. "On the First-Person Novel." *New Literary History* 9 (1977): 103-14. Print.

- Harmon, William and C. Hugh Holman. *A Handbook to Literature*. New York: Macmillan, 1992. Print.
- Hawthorn, Jeremy. *A Concise Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*. New York: Arnold, 1994. Print.
- James, William. *The Principles of Psychology*. Vol. 1. London: Macmillan, 1901. Print.
- Macdonald, Margaret. "Le langage de la fiction." *Esthétique et Poétique*. Ed. Gérard Genette. Paris: Seuil, 1992. 203-28. Print.
- Prado Coelho, Eduardo. "O mistério das janelas acesas." *Público—Leituras* 2428 (2 Nov 1996): 12. Print.
- Seixo, Maria Alzira. *Os romances de António Lobo Antunes: análise, interpretação, resumos e guiões de leitura*. Lisbon: Dom Quixote, 2001. Print.
- Sutrop, Margit. *Fiction and Imagination: The Anthropological Function of Literature*. Paderborn: Mentis Verlag, 2000. Print.

Felipe Cammaert completed his PhD on António Lobo Antunes and Claude Simon (Université Paris X-Nanterre) and joined the Centro de Estudos Comparatistas (Universidade de Lisboa) as a post-doctoral fellow in 2007. His research project, "Temporal Representations and Memory in Contemporary Literature (Lobo Antunes, Simon, Faulkner, Borges)," was granted by Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (Portugal). He was the organiser of the international conference "António Lobo Antunes: a arte do romance" held at Universidade de Lisboa in June 2009. His recent publications include: *António Lobo Antunes. A arte do romance* (org.), Lisboa, Texto, 2011; "António Lobo Antunes, o autor: o seu nome é Legião," *Revista Colóquio/Letras* 174, Maio-Agosto de 2010, pp. 96-113; and *L'écriture de la mémoire dans l'œuvre d'António Lobo Antunes et de Claude Simon*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2009. Email: fcammaert@campus.ul.pt