The deconstruction of the figure of D. Sebastião in ‘The Return of The Caravels’ of António Lobo Antunes

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We have to bury king Sebastião
We have to tell it to everyone
That The Desired One can not come.
We have to break in the thought
And in the song
The fantastic and sick guitar
That somebody brought from Alcácer Quibir.

I say that he’s dead.
Leave him in peace
Leave him in the defeat and in the madness.

-Manuel Alegre

The figure of D. Sebastião, the mythical king, has nourished for more than five centuries the cultural imagination of Portugal, giving birth to one of the founding myths of the Portuguese nation and culture. The overwhelming story of the mysterious monarch has also been responsible for a significant production of texts, including not only novels, poems, theatrical plays but also various oeuvres with philosophical and historiographic intention. After the tragic defeat in Alcácer Quibir started to arise the myth around the figure of the disappeared king, “which is followed by a literary phase – the sebastical belief serves as a theme for the poets and intellectuals” (Pires, 1984: 32). Without any doubt the myth of D. Sebastião has spawned a wide literary production, and the figure of the young sovereign himself has turned out to be the protagonist of a certain kind of textual discourse. As Cristian Moraru points it out:

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“There are highly canonical, widely popular fictions that capture, even give birth to key myths of certain communities. At the same time, they acquire in the long run a communally “mythic” weight through successive editing, teaching, reading and related institutionalizing acts.” (Moraru, 2001: 3).

Thus, in the center of my analysis stands the relationship between the authentic masterpiece of António Lobo Antunes As Naus – The Return of The Caravels (1988) and the mysterious Portuguese king D. Sebastião. I’ll trace the different appearances of the legendary monarch in the novel, focusing on the carnivalistic détournement and deconstruction of his figure. The mythical image of the king, so as the entire myth and the obscure belief in his return, are turning to be victims of Lobo Antunes’ parodistic and grotesque interpretations. Although, D. Sebastião plays a supporting role in the polydiscursive danse macabre of the national heroes of Portugal presented by the novel, the way Lobo Antunes bitterly treats the figure and the rough allegory in the very end of the book can lead us to the recognition, that the deconstruction of the Sebastical myth constitutes, however, one of the Leitmotifs of the whole narrative. In Maria Alzira Seixo’s insight the figure of the young monarch is one of the key-metaphors of the whole hopeless and desperate national mythology (cf. Seixo, 2002: 184) which constitutes the typically morbid Weltanschauung of Antunes’ masterpiece.

We can verify the presence of a strong mytho-critical tendency in the post-revolutionary Portuguese literature which focuses, in an explicit way, on the figure of D. Sebastião. The mythical character of the young monarch becomes a victim of a powerful fictional attack that intends to achieve through the deconstruction of his figure the deconstruction of the canonized concept of national identity. The so called Sebastianism, according to Cunha Leão is one of the five great, mythical narratives of the Portuguese nation (cf. Leão, 1962: 131). However, in António Quadros’ interpretation, the most powerful, original and persistent mythogenesis of the Lusitanian culture (cf. Quadros, 2001: 364), a legitimizing narrative, which has the capacity to sustain the national identity and to give an ontological eschaton to the destiny and to the whole existence of the homeland. The Sebastianism, in fact, is a whole mythical apparatus and tradition with a strong messianistic vision. According to the myth, the young king, who disappeared in the battle of Alcácer Quibir, will return one day to save Portugal and to restore the former glory of the country.

With the loss of the colonies, the consequent rapid decolonization, and the collapse of the dictatorial regime, Portugal had to face an identity crisis. It had to leave behind the fixed
and canonized identity and arrive to the recognition of a new, collective autognosis. The tendency of the constant rewriting of history and national myths in the post-revolutionary novel helps to realize this subversive enterprise. De facto, we can verify the presence of a complex cultural parallax. The term, borrowed from the Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek refers to an instant and radical change in the observational field, which implies a new and critical view of the object in case, free of the previously canonized perceptual strategies:

“The common definition of parallax is: the apparent displacement of an object (the shift of its position against a background), caused by a change in observational position that provides a new line of sight. The philosophical twist to be added, of course, is that the observed difference is not simply "subjective," due to the fact that the same object which exists "out there" is seen from two different stations, or points of view” (Žižek, 2006: 17)

In literature, a parallax view of the national history and myths makes an organic and critical revision of the former tradition and values possible. In my opinion, a certain parallax takes place in the post-revolutionary Portuguese literature regarding the traditional way of looking at myths and cultural identity. The Return of The Caravels of António Lobo Antunes rides this new and fresh mytho-critical wave which brings into play the legitimizing narratives of the Portuguese. It questions the national identity and suggest a tabula rasa.

The idea that the Sebastianism arises mainly in harsh times of crises, when the existence of the nation has to face an exterior or interior threat, is one of the clichês of a wide range of works dedicated to the phenomenon. At the end of the XX century, after the primary historic changes that led to questioning the construction of national identity, the figure of the legendary king appears again, but this time under the aegis of an essentially deconstructive literature which attacks, subverts and treats him with a certain kind of critical distance. As Isabel Pires Lima remarks: “When, once again, the nation’s destiny is reformulated, the ghost of D. Sebastião appears in the light or rather in backlight, and the sebastical myth peeks out. Our contemporary fiction re-reads it, absorbs it intertextually, and re-ficionalizes it”² (Lima, 1997: 256). The character of D. Sebastião and the whole literary and philosophical apparatus of the Sebastianism reappear in the post-revolutionary Portuguese novel but in a totally

² All quotations from Portuguese references are my own translations.
negative, critical, parodical and even grotesque light. João Medina in his important study *O Mito Sebastianista Hoje: Dois exemplos da Literatura Portuguesa Contemporânea: Manuel Alegre e António Lobo Antunes* calls the post-revolutionary times an era of the total eclipse and fade-out of the Sebastical discourse and also points it out that:

“If the revolution of 74-75 contained any germs of messianism, the truth is that the intellectual attitude of society and of the Intelligentzia which came after this democratic liberation, came to ruin forever the coriaceous mitology of the Encoberto. The intellectual life expressed both in the novel and in poetry, in painting (Pomar, João Abel Manta, v.g.) as in other plastic arts, not forgetting the cinema (remember the movie *Non* de M. Oliveira) is from now on strongly against D. Sebastião and his insanity, against the national myth itself, against all bandarrist temptation of the Fifth Empire” (Medina, 1997: 201)

*The Return of The Caravels* of António Lobo Antunes inscribes itself into the sequence of those mytho-critical novels that announce the phase of eclipse of the Sebastianism. These oeuvres with their mega-revisionary game can be categorized as the authentic anti-epopees of the post-25 of April literature that intended to eliminate the Sebastical myth from the national discourse. *Jornada de África* (1989) of Manuel Alegre and *O Conquistador* (1990) of Almeida Faria, together with Lobo Antunes’ masterpiece have more or less the same intention: to exorcize the myth and clarify the breakdown and emptiness of the legitimizing narrative of Sebastianism in the post-revolutionary Portuguese culture. In the words of Ruth Tobias, all of these novels “in different aesthetic forms criticize and re-read the mythically exalted hero-figures of the Portuguese history.” (Tobias, 2002: 282) We have to keep in mind also the fact that the political discourse of the Salazar regime celebrated and used the myth of the disappeared king to maintain and to support its ideology. The figure of the dictator clearly appeared in the propaganda as the new savior of the nation (cf. Tobias, 2002: 282), whilst the system itself, worked constantly on a mythical exaltation of the national history and traditions (cf. Lourenço, 1988: 56) as Eduardo Lourenço points it out. According to the ideology of the dictatorship, the idea of the Portuguese colonial empire – which appeared as “the supreme expression of Portuguese creativity as in the most exalting accomplishment of our ecumenic genious, as the most finished exemplification of Portugal’s missionary and civilizing vocation” (Torgal, 1989: 188) –, was founded with its ideological background on the glorious
past and on the national mythology. The Sebastical utopia of the Fifths Empire\(^3\) helped the Estado Novo to maintain and to freeze the *status quo* in the colonial situation. The post-revolutionary literature, after the liberation of the cultural space, tried to do everything to get rid of the dogmatic ideas and degenerative ideology of the former regime. As the concept of the Sebastianism was exploited and abused by the ideology of the system, the new literature obviously started a counterattack and intended to write the counternarrative of Sebastianism.

Whilst in the novels of Manuel Alegre and Almeida Faria the reactivated and reconsidered figure of D. Sebastião appears as the absolute protagonist, the center of the storyplot and also as the autodiegetic narrator itself, applying the categorization of Gérard Genette (cf. Genette, 1972: 253), the antunian text uses the king only in a supporting role. *The Return of The Caravels* is divided into eighteen different chapters. Every chapter has its own narrator, namely the mythical figures of the history of Portugal. We can verify also a certain, dynamic repetition and reappearance in the relation of the diverse narrative voices and the sequence of the chapters. The focalization varies in each chapter from an internal autodiegetic perspective to an external one. D. Sebastião, thus, doesn’t belong to this pluri-vocal group of different narrators; he doesn’t have the right to the word, to the narration and to the internal focalization, he doesn’t have a voice *per se*. He appears as any other character in the narrative, without having the gift of the own focalization. Hence, we can verify an ephemeral appearance of the king in the novel, as a supporting actor who only assists in the morbid black-parade of the national heroes of Portugal. Although, D. Sebastião doesn’t stand in the center of the narrative but disappears and reappears throughout the development of the story, the representation of his figure, in my view, constitutes one of the *Leitmotifs* of the novel. Borrowing the expression of João Medina, I read the *Return of The Caravels* as the morbid epitaph of Sebastianism (cf. Medina, 1997: 204). Thereinafter I’ll trace the different appearances of D. Sebastião in the narrative, always taking into account the context, and I’ll try to explain how the novel presents itself as the epitaph of sebastianism. I must state my profound agreement with Maria Graças Moreira Sá when she declares in one of her important studies that “the parodic treatment of the great Portuguese myth represents the culmination of the mythical deconstruction of Portugal.” (Sá, 2004: 197)

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\(^3\) The myth of the Fifths Empire (Quinto Império) originates from the biblical tradition. The idea of an eternal and divine Fifths Empire founded on the prophecies of Daniel, after the battle of Ourique (1139) becomes a topos of the Portuguese identity and later on contaminates with the myth of D. Sebastião. The disappeared king according to the messianic belief will come back one day to the establish the legendary Fifths Empire, a new, global Portuguese kingdom. See Besselaar, 1987: 32-35 and Domingues, 2002: 347-359
As Maria Alzira Seixo has remarked, *The Return of The Caravels* can be read as a free and partial rewriting of the Portuguese national epic-poem *Os Lusíadas*⁴ (cf. Seixo, 2002: 176). Tacking into account Seixo’s observation, we can find the first indirect relation between the novel and D. Sebastião. Luís Vaz de Camões, the author of the national epopee – *Os Lusíadas* – has dedicated his masterpiece to the young D. Sebastião, referring to him in the sixth canto of the first strophe:

“I address you too, Sebastião, noble scion and guaranty of the ancient liberties of Portugal and no less certain hope of increase to this small corner of Christendom, pride and portent of our age, sent by God to strike new terror into Moslem hearts and to win for the faith vast new regions of the earth.” (Camões, 1980: 40)

Camões mentions the young prince as the guarantor of the Portuguese independence and freedom and imagines a victorious fighter who’ll protect the country from the Arabic threat. These lines synthesize in a sublime and literary form all the hope of the second part of the XVI century that surrounded the young king, “The Desired One” (O Desejado), in whom a whole society trusted at time of his birth. *Os Lusíadas*, thus, are reminded metaphorically in the universe of *The Return of The Caravels*, being this latter the hypertext, the hipertextual rewriting⁵ of the epic-poem by Camões. But, at the same time the monumental epic-poem is brought into the game by the emphasized presence of the man named Luís “who was missing his left eye” (Antunes, 2002: 10), and who is without any doubts Luís Vaz de Camões itself. The author of the epopee, thus, becomes one of the narrators of the multidimensional and pluri-vocal narrative. The *exegi monumentum* of the glorious expansion and the splendid history of Portugal – the Portuguese literary work *par excellence*, the absolute model and example – is also present metonymically in the novel. The man named Luís starts to write his epopee on the dirty benches of a cheap café at the Santa Apolónia railway station, on the pages of a checkbook left at his table by the waiter:


⁵ By elaborating a complex system of transtextual relations, Gérard Genette introduces the categories of hypo- and hipertextuality which refers to a textual relationship uniting any text to an earlier one (Genette, 1982: 10). See also Allen, 2000: 107-115.
“Then I took the bottle of soda water to a corner of the table, grabbed the boneless attendant’s pen and notebook, settled better into my seat, leaned my left elbow on the tabletop, and with the tip of my tongue sticking out and my brow knitted with effort, I began the first heroic octave of my poem.” (Antunes, 2002: 74)

We can conclude that the first implicit relation between the universe of the novel and the character of D. Sebastião is set by the figure of Luís de Camões and *Os Lusiadas*, both presented in a direct form in the narrative. Hence, we can consider the national epic-poem with the dedication to the young D. Sebastião as an authentic initial epigraph of the Sebastianism and of the tradition of the Sebastical literature. *Os Lusiadas* is one of the first literary works which refers to the mythical monarch by praising him. In this manner it inaugurates a new discourse in the Portuguese literature, a discourse that has nourished the obscure belief in the return of the missing king throughout the centuries, sustaining, in a certain form the national identity. Among others we can find such names in the history of this Sebastical discourse as Padre António Vieira, Antero de Quental, Teixeira de Pascoaes, Carlos Malheiro Dias and Fernando Pessoa itself. Thus, I consider Lobo Antunes’ novel as the opposite side of this discourse: the epitaph of Sebastianism, a work that bring an end to this essentially Portuguese literary-philosophical phenomenon and imparts closure to the history of Sebastianism.

Lobo Antunes doesn’t leave us any doubt that in his novel “one of the founding myths of the portuguese existence is brought into question: the Sebastianism.” (Lima, 1996: 61) The mythicized monarch appears several times in the carnavalesque universe of *The Return of The Caravels*, but as I formerly pointed out, we can witness only an ephemeral and fugitive presence. For the very first time D. Sebastião emerges from the perspective of the man named Luís confirming our idea, that the first link between the novel and D. Sebastião is established by the author of the national epopee, and his masterwork. The man named Luís sees for the first time the mythical king in the very center of Lisbon, at the square which bears his own name.

“(…) and precisely at the moment, dear readers, the Rua do Carmo lighted up with a procession of torches and the laughter of apes, halberds stuck the pavement, the adenoids of jennets snorted, and King Sebastian appeared on horseback surrounded by minions, archbishops, and favorites, wearing bronze armor and a plumed helmet, and
D. Sebastião appears in the internal focalization of the man named Luís who was at the moment completely drunk and dizzy because of the significant quantity of wine and firewater he had been drinking in the shady bars and cafés of Lisbon. The mythical king, thus appears as a fugitive dream in the alcoholic delirium of the drunk poet. In this short passage, D. Sebastião is nothing more than an absurd and surreal vision of a drunk poet who is writing his epic poem, crawling around in a city, from bar to bar. Lobo Antunes performs here a special sort of cruel double-demythification: on one hand he de-sacralizes the figure of Camões – the par excellence national poet – who, besides, doesn’t have the right to his mythicized surname, whilst turning him into a drunk tramp, an alcoholic hobo, who’s writing his epopee in a constant delirium. On the other hand this de-sacralization surpasses on the figure of D. Sebastião who is reduced to a fugitive, irreal phenomenon in the alcoholic vision of the poet. But even so, reduced to an absurd vision, D. Sebastião keeps most of his typical attributes and appears in the center of the post-revolutionary Lisbon in complete suit of armor, surrounded by his soldiers, ready to face the Arabic troops in Africa. There’s an enormous contradiction between the circumstances of the representation (appears in a drunk vision of the narrator) and the representation of the figure of the king, that still keeps itself faithful to the traditional frames. And we cannot forget about another huge contradiction, which is, besides, one of the main features and goals of the novel: the authentic mixture of the temporal layers. In the Antunian narrative we are facing a paratactic timestructure: various segments of time and history are mixed up in a shocking coexistence. In the words of Diane Elam we can verify “an ironic coexistence of temporalities” (Elam, 1992: 3) à la postmodern, a temporal parataxis which combines, juxtaposes and confuses the glorious past of the expansion (the departure of the caravels) with the tragic present of the miserable decolonization (the return of the caravels). The result of this narrative strategy is the total de-mythification of the national past. The mythical king reappears in the center of Lisbon, at the Camões square in an urban space and in a time which are totally inappropriate to his figure. The unexpected and absurd presence of D. Sebastião surprises and shocks the policemen and the night-guards who are witnessing his irreal derby. We have to point out the fact that various authors already remarked (cf. Medina, 1997: 206; Tobias, 2002: 285): King Sebastião always appears on the way to his ill-fated battle, which implies a total denial of the Sebastical belief and the
salvation of the country. D. Sebastião is always on his way to Alcácer-Quibir, but he never comes back to save his country and his people: to believe in his return and in the absurd idea of the *Quinto Império* doesn’t make any sense in the perspective of António Lobo Antunes.

We can observe also an approximation between the episode of the mortal remains of the man named Luís, and the first appearance of D. Sebastião. We find these two parts in a metonymical proximity to each other. From the very beginning of the narrative, the poet carries with himself, in an obsessive way, the dead body of his father. The corpse of the father is the metaphor of the declining Portuguese Colonial Empire, the already dead and meaningless glorious past of the nation. The man named Luís carries this burden around as a stigma in the postcolonial, post-revolutional country and can not escape the weight of it. The mortal remains of the father-empire finally end up to be sold as a fertilizer for the carnivorous plants of Garcia da Orta and the poet can liberate himself from the burden of history which equals to death (cf. Ghandi, 2003: 346). The man named Luís sees D. Sebastião for the first time after getting rid of the liquid corpse-metaphor of his father which implies on one hand that he’s still tied to the nightmare of history as long as it comes back in the mythical figure of D. Sebastião in the middle of his drunk visions. On the other hand it also implies the beginning of a liberation process of the old legitimating narratives of the Portuguese nation. If he was able to separate himself from the corpse of his father he can also separate himself from the ghosts of the Sebastical belief.

The young king reappears in the narrative more or less in the same circumstances three chapters ahead:

“(…) and by the window put on one of her fearsome low-cut gowns, spotting from that attic lookout the armada of fishing trawlers from Alcácer Quibir gathered together by the Column Docks under the command of a blonde boy who was to save us from the Spanish occupation. (…) She lengthened the tips of her lashes with a tiny touch of pencil when Dom Sebastião, surrounded by a throng of nobles and businessmen in frock coats, took his place on the ferryboat Palmelense, with wooden buoys all around its hull” (Antunes, 2002: 170-171)

This time the focalisation is of an old prostitute from Luanda who came to Lisbon to find her lost love Diogo Cão. D. Sebastião is described once again according to the rules of his
traditional representation: a blond young man followed by his noble people. According to the traditional image the young king was blond or red haired. In this sense Lobo Antunes remains faithful to the tradition. The presence of the noble people is also an element of the Sebastical tradition. Gonçalo Eanes Bandarra in his messianic Trovas, which are the origin and a constant point of reference of the Sebastianism, mentions that the hiding king will return “On a restrained and un-saddled horse with people of great value” (apud Pires, 1984: 142). Antunes keeps the noble people but adds also a new element, the businessmen. By juxtaposing the royal nobility and the yuppies as the followers of D. Sebastião Lobo Antunes starts the subversion of the canonical image of the king. The author substitutes also the caravels by a bunch of small fishing-ships and the ferryboat which connects the docs of Cais do Sodré with the other side of the river. The sublime mission of the new crusade in Morroco and the protection of the Portuguese Kingdom from the threatening Spanish occupation loses its glorious and megalomaniac aspect due to the introduction of the small fishing-boats which clearly do not correspond to the majestical African mission. We also have to take into account the deconstructive element that king Sebastião is represented, in this episode, through the focalization of a prostitute, a completely marginal identity. Antunes shows in an ostentatious parallel-montage the young blonde monarch and the way how the anonymous African prostitute puts on her clothes and make-up. Once again the deconstruction lies in the howling contradiction between the circumstances of the representation and the representation itself.

Without any doubt a more direct and harsh deconstruction takes place in the following passage:

“(…) a sentry informed us that King Philip was meeting with his field marshals in the High Command trailer, planning the invasion of Portugal, because Dom Sebastião, that useless ninny in sandals and with an earring in his ear, always licking the paper for the hashish cigarette, had been knifed in a drug-dealing neighborhood in Morocco for robbing an English fairy named Oscar Wilde of a bag of pot” (Antunes, 2002: 149)

To see how Lobo Antunes deconstructs and subverts the classical image of the mythical king we should take into account the visual and literary topoi of the representation of D. Sebastião. There are four main portraits that we know about D. Sebastião: two of them are made by Cristóvão de Morais. The first one we can find in Madrid, represents the king at the age of eleven, the second one is in the Museu da Arte Antiga in Lisbon, which is the most well
known portrait and probably was painted when the king had eighteen or nineteen years. The
third one is at the S. Telmo Museum in San Sebastian, whilst the fourth one from an unknown
author is kept in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Viena and shows a twenty-three years old
D. Sebastião. António Abelard da Fonseca remarks that “the figure of the unfortunate
monarch, in all of these authentic portraits, appears to us as that of a perfect young man, full
of life and of youth, distinct in his attitudes and with that slightly proud posture which at the
time was characteristic of the royalty” (Fonseca, 1978: 80). Taking a look at the four different
portraits we can agree with Fonseca and conclude that all of the paintings represent a
powerful and healthy young man with a sublime expression on his face and a clearly
ambitious gaze. We know also several descriptions from contemporary historians about the
king which evidently corroborate the image we can testify on the portraits. I quote here one of
the most typical descriptions made by Frei Manuel dos Santos:

“He was of medium height, the color of his face white and flushed, with some freckles
in which he resembled his mother, princess D. Joanna. His eyes were blue, small but
gracious, his hair in between blonde and red; his hand and leg so well shaped that it
seemed as if they were made by a sculptor. He had a serious appearance,
representative of sovereignty, and a whole body without any unequal part where
appeared a flaw” (apud Fonseca, 1978: 33)

Definitely, according to the iconography and the several descriptions, a typical representation
of the king has been canonized. This traditional and classical image turns to be the main
victim of António Lobo Antunes’ cruel deconstruction. We can verify a grotesque visual
détournement of the classical representation of the legendary monarch. The notion of
détournement is associated first of all to the situationist movement of the late fifties and
implies an overwhelming artistic strategy that intends to rethink and reconsider a previously
canonized artwork. The détourned representation still contains the traditional frame-elements
of the canonical image but combines them with subversive, absurd and totally inappropriate
fragments which results a new, shocking work with an antagonistic or antithetical meaning to
the original. Guy Debord in his essay Methods of Détournement distinguishes two principal
forms of the subversive strategy: the minor and the deceptive détournement. In our case we
face a harsh deceptive détournement on the figure of D. Sebastião, once this latter implies
“the détournement of an intrinsically significant element, which derives a different scope from
the new context” – quoting Debord. The détourned image, thus, absorbs a strong destructive-iconoclastic potential and announces a new, parodical and grotesque vision of the original. The Deleuzian de- and re-territorialization of the canonized representation maintains a political-ideological intention as well. The détournement of D. Sebastião refers obviously to the hyperbolic cult of the national mythology which used to be a significant element of the self-legitimizing propaganda of the Salazar dictatorship. By presenting D. Sebastião in a new, critical and grotesque way Lobo Antunes indirectly criticizes the politics of the Salazar regime and it’s ideology on the colonial empire widely supported by the myth of the Sebastianism and the Quinto Império.

The figure of D. Sebastião is presented as a junkie hippie with earrings and slippers in the drug-quartier of Morroco. In the kronotopos of the North-African country we can clearly see the reference to the tragic battle of Alcácer Quibir, where D. Sebastião mysteriously disappeared. But in Lobo Antunes’ version the young king didn’t go to Africa to dedicate himself to the holy mission of converting the Muslims to Christianity and spreading the glory of the Portuguese nation. On the contrary: he goes to Morroco to get drugs and finally ends up being stabbed by another drug-addict – namely Oscar Wilde – because of stealing a small amount of hash. The mythical king, the savior of the nation, the guarantor of hopes and salvation is completely helpless and incapable to accomplish the widely expected salvation. D. Sebastião from the Antunian perspective is nothing more than a pathetic antihero, an antimessiah who’ll never come back to save his country and restore the faded glory of Portugal due to the fact that as a junkie hobo he’s simply unable to realize such sublime mission. Lobo Antunes in a fascinating way mixes up the détourning elements of the counterculture (clichés of a hippie aesthetic: earrings, flip-flops, drugs, ignorance) with the literary high culture (the presence of the figure of Oscar Wilde) and the tradition of the so called anti-Sebastianism. The idea of the anti-Sebastianism as a counter-discourse of the traditional Sebastical belief originates in the XIX century. During the French invasion the unreal belief in the mythical king who’ll save Portugal from the intruders gained a new popularity. José Agostinho de Macedo in his anti-Sebastical pamphlet Os Sebastianistas, Reflexões sobre esta ridicula seita (1810) criticizes and mocks the obscure belief and calls the ones who still expect the return of king Sebastião stupid ignorant (Macedo, 1810: 14). Macedo’s pamphlet, thus, opens up a new counter-discourse in the history of Sebastianism: the anti-Sebastianism, which intends to attack the tradition and to point out the irrevelancy of the myth. Among others, the greatest prophets of the anti-Sebastianist tradition are Sampaio Bruno, A. de Sousa Silva Costa Lobo
and António Sérgio. The latter is directly referred by Lobo Antunes in the quoted passage, where he describes D. Sebastião as an ignorant fool. The original text says “pateta inútil” which appears to be a clear allusion on António Sérgio’s work. Sérgio, one of the most rational thinkers of Portugal, started a full-contact attack against the Sebastiálem myth. The anti-Sebastianismo is without any doubt, one of the strongest Leitmotifs in his oeuvre, from the dynamic essay Interpretação Não Romântica do Sebastianismo until the endless polemics with Carlos Malheiro Dias. Lobo Antunes borrows the adjective “pateta” from one of António Sérgio’s anti-Sebastical works, where he describes the believers as “patetas e psicopatas” (Sérgio, 1979: 105-106). With this intertextual evocation and his clearly anti-Sebastical intentions The Return of The Caravels inscribes itself into the tradition of the anti-Sebastianism.

The drug-addict Anti-Sebastião of The Return of The Caravels ends up being killed by another junkie, namely Oscar Wilde. Lobo Antunes in a grotesque act, kills the postmodern avatar of the mythical king and therefore excludes the utopian possibility of any kind of external salvation for the Portuguese country. D. Sebastião is dead, he’s not hiding on a mysterious island somewhere in the Atlantic ocean6 and he’ll never come back to restore the faded glory of the nation and to lead the Portuguese to construct a new, legendary empire.

A few chapters later the author evokes again the mythical figure of D. Sebastião. This time the legendary monarch is mentioned simply as a “faggot king” (Antunes, 2002: 204). By referring to the unusual sexual identity of the king, Lobo Antunes completes the total détournement of the traditional image. D. Sebastião is nothing more than a queer-clown, a junkie gay-hippie. The presence of the figure of Oscar Wilde suddenly turns to be a clearly understandable reference to the sexual identity, introducing as a mythical queer-figure the homosexuality to the representation of D. Sebastião. Fernando Bruquetas de Castro, in his elucidative book Kings who loved like queens daringly asserts that the king used to maintain sexual relationships with the same sex. Based on the analysis of contemporary sources de Castro tries to prove that D. Sebastião from the age of ten used to have a homosexual relationship with his confessor. The author also calls our attention to the mysterious and regular nightwalks of the king as a pretext for homosexual encounters (cf. Castro, 2010: 191-192). The sexuality of the king used to be a widely discussed topic of the historians but nobody went as far away as de Castro and Lobo Antunes by claiming that D. Sebastião was,

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6 As it is widely accepted in the mythical tradition (Sampaio Bruno, 1983: 136-137)
de facto, gay. The mythical deconstruction of D. Sebastião reaches the apex of the grotesque parody here.

The gay king killed by Oscar Wilde in Morroco doesn’t appear anymore in the narrative. Lobo Antunes, thus, evokes his figure in the morbid and bitter coda of the novel but D. Sebastião is absent. He will never come back to bring the salvation. Nevertheless, the hopeful waiting for D. Sebastião constitutes the morbidly ostentatious final scene of the book. In a moribund hospital of Lisbon, a group of tuberculars in constant coughing and blood-spitting starts a conspiracy against the Spanish occupation of the country and plan to take over the city. The leader of the movement supposed to be, of course, king Sebastião. The agonizing group of sick patriots in pyjamas, armed with their infusions, take a short bus-ride to the beaches of Ericeira and wait at dawn for the return of the mythical king who’ll lead them in the glorious mission. The man named Luís also participates in this grotesque danse macabre of anonymous patriots. He becomes one of those sick ghosts who are waiting for the Messiah to come. He was able to get rid of the corpse of his father, but he couldn’t get away from the contagious sickness of Sebastianism. Lobo Antunes, thus, finishes his novel with this overwhelming and complex metaphor including the country as a sick body, and the Sebastianism as the lack of salvation. The absent king is once again referred to as a blond teenager with a crown on his head and with sulky lips, adorned with cheap gipsy and morrocan jewelry. Lobo Antunes does here more or less the same method of détournement as he did previously by combining the elements of a traditional royal representation (the crown, the blonde hair and the typical sulky lips of the Habsburg dynasty, mentioned several times by contemporary historians and present also on the portraits on the young king) with the elements of a marginalized counterculture-hippie aesthetic. As I already mentioned, Luís de Camões is also waiting in the midst of the dying crowd for the return of the king. The author of the national epopee, who with his dedication to D. Sebastião has written the epigraph of the sebastical literature, is testifying now the metaphoric écriture of the epitaph of the Sebastianism. The place of the absurd and never ending waiting – Ericeira –, besides, is also a classical element of the history of Sebastianism. After the mysterious disappearing of the king in the battle of Alcácer Quibir there have been some self-appointed impostors who tried to get the power announcing themselves as the returned king. The tradition refers to these unscrupulous carpet-baggers as the fake-Sebastião (falso Sebastião). One of these fake-

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7 Almeida Faria in his parodical romance O Conquistador (1990) turns D. Sebastião into an erotomaniac Don Juan who dedicates himself interely to the women. The quintessence of the parody originates from the enormous contradiction of the sublime purpose of the original mission of the king and the new mission. D. Sebastião instead of conquering lands in Africa for the glory of his nation, conqueers just nice women.
Sebastiãos was the so called King of Ericeira, who managed to gain certain popularity and to organize an almost significant riot against the Spanish occupation in the town of Ericeira. The impostor and his obscure movement finally didn’t succeed and the authorities executed the famous King of Ericeira (cf. Fonseca, 1978: 35-36). Therefore, the space where Antunes’ novel ends has a strong symbolic potential. The crowd of the tuberculars is waiting for the return of the king on a place which is clearly marked by the failure of the sebastical narrative, in a symbolic space which is filled by the traces of a fake-saviour. And the D. Sebastião of *The Return of The Caravels* is a fake-saviour indeed: a Messiah who’ll never come to complete the mission and to lead the ones who are still waiting for him. He is, on contrary, an anti-saviour who’s completely unable to satisfy the needs for a salvation.

The grandiose and extremely cruel closure of the novel is, at the same time, the closure of the Sebastical tradition. The whole idea and ideology of the myth of the multidimensional Portuguese Empire, sustained by the legitimizing narrative of the Sebastianism, suffers a shipwreck on the reefs of Lobo Antunes’ grotesque deconstruction. D. Sebastião is a dead junkie, there’s no more salvation, there’s no more savior to wait for in a tuberculotic exaltation on the beaches of Ericeira. As Maria das Graças Moreira Sá points it out, the circle of the Portuguese expansion has closed, has arrived to its end (cf. Sá, 2004: 178-179). After the loss of the colonies and the symbolic return of the caravels, the idea of Sebastianism doesn’t have relevancy anymore; and the nation, portrayed by Lobo Antunes as a group of sick people still waiting for the *deus ex machina*, has to be cured of the illness of Sebastianism. The way how the novel represents and treats the mythical figure of D. Sebastião and the idea of Sebastianism finally turns to be the quintessence of the narrative. The absurdity of the most powerful legitimizing myth, brought us by the détournement of D. Sebastião, shows us the impossibility of any self-legitimation based on the former constructions. Portugal has to leave behind and finally bury D. Sebastião and with him all the great heroes of the national pantheon, to achieve a new *autognosis*. 
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