

ANTÓNIO LOBO ANTUNES, often short-listed for the Nobel Prize for Literature, was born in Lisbon in 1942 and received degrees in medicine and psychiatry, which he has practiced in addition to writing novels that have made him one of the most widely translated Portuguese authors in Europe and the United States. His books include *Elephant Memory*, *South of Nowhere* (with the more vivid title in Portuguese of *Os Cús de Judas*, or *The Butts of Judas*), *Getting to Know the Inferno*, *An Explanation of Birds*, *Act of the Damned*, and *Return of the Caravels*.

Many of his novels—including this excerpt from *Fado Alexandrino*—draw upon his experience as a soldier in Africa and align urban nausea with the unrelieved effects of war, particularly in the late twenty-century's style of guerrilla battles and Pyrrhic victories. "Fado" means "fate," but it is also a traditional form of soul-singing that has been described as the Portuguese blues, in which the force of the song, often about longing and destiny and loss, is supposed to seize possession of the singer.

This novel takes shape as the reunion of five men confronted with a fatal stabbing on the tenth anniversary of their battalion's return from Mozambique to Portugal. The notion that war might, once upon a time, have consisted of honorable tasks and that the reward was the grateful, safe haven of home is demolished here. Having been in hell, these men are here to tell us that there is nowhere that is not caught forever in its flames.