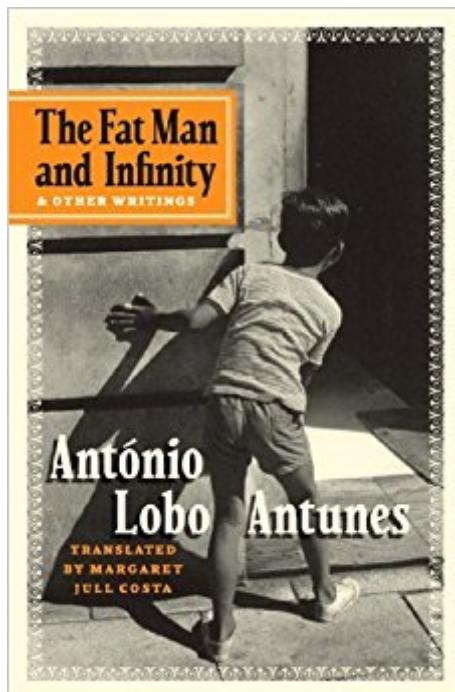


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The Fat Man And Infinity: And Other Writings



Synopsis

A lyrical, searing work of autobiography, reflection, and fiction, evoking GarcÃ- a MÃjrquez's memoirs and Pamuk's Istanbul. AntÃnio Lobo Antunes's sole ambition from the age of seven was to be a writer. Here, in *The Fat Man and Infinity*, "the heir to Conrad and Faulkner" (George Steiner) reflects on the fractured paradise of his childhoodâ the world of prim, hypocritical, class-riven Lisbon in midcentury. His Proust-like memoirs, written over thirty years in chronicle form, pass through the filter of an adult who has known war and pain, and bear witness to the people whom he loved and who have gone into the dark. Stunningly translated by Margaret Jull Costa, in prose that glides like poetry, this is a modern-day chronicle of Portugal's imperfect past and arresting present, seen through the eyes of a master fiction writer, one on a short list to win a Nobel Prize. Readers particularly touched by Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* will be drawn to this journey into the heart of one of our greatest living writers.

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Customer Reviews

I recently saw this title in the new book section of the library, was intrigued and took it home. I became an instant convert! Billy Collins, former US poet laureate, has said : "His descriptive quickness and his genius for metaphor causes the line between prose and poetry to vanish before our astonished eyes." Harold Bloom, literary critic, said: "One of the living writers who will matter the most." Antunes is easily in the company of James Joyce, William Faulkner and Sigmund Freud, all three of whom he has acknowledged as influences, while remaining a great original himself. If you

enjoy good poetry and its inherent ambiguity, his writings are bound to astonish you. The present book is a collection of 107 short pieces, 600 to 1000 words, partly a memoir, that is an excellent, very approachable introduction to his many novels. I have now read three of his novels and am finishing a fourth, where his imagination really soars. I write some poetry and found his works really inspiring in my pursuit of my own imagination, stirred up by his. Each of his works is a treasure chest about the human condition. He is a meticulous craftsman -- he reports that three pages a week is about his usual pace for his novels. Many of the 107 pieces have been published previously as newspaper pieces, so reading all 107 pieces at one go might be overwhelming compared to enjoying one a week. The stories have a ordinary coherence that his novels sometimes do not. In his novels he allows himself to tell a story from points of view of many of the minds of his characters, weaving these voices in his original manner. At times it seems the reader is left with little clue as to who is saying what, but after while, with persistence, one can catch on to his method.

I bought this book, as a hardback, with a "Deckle edge" on the pages, from , for three bucks and some change. Should I be proud or ashamed? The price had to be below the actual cost of the printing and binding, leaving the publisher and author in deep negative territory. The first book by Antunes that I read was "The Return of the Caravels". I had high hopes - it was a great theme - the Portuguese caravels coming home after 500 years of empire, but I did not think he delivered as well as he could have. I was advised by a fellow reviewer not to give up on him; that this book was far better, and indeed it is. The picture on the cover is so evocative of its contents; yes, at least on this one, feel free to judge the book by its cover. The book is composed of 107 short stories, usually around three pages in length. It is divided into three parts, with the first two devoted to mainly childhood memories, and are told in the first person. If you are at all sentient, several of these stories should stir some long dormant neurons that contain incidents in your own childhood. Even though the place names in Portugal may be unfamiliar, there is the universality of the experiences that resonate. The third part is equally astonishing, maybe even more so. Instead of his own reminiscences, he has a phenomenal ability to project himself into the lives of the people around him, male and female, and capture one of the dilemmas, if not the central one, of their life. As other reviewers have indicated, and I heartedly agree, this book is not for the "speed-read" crowd. The stories are meant to be savored, and reflected upon, and I rarely read more than six at a time.

If Raymond Carver is the American master of minimalism and purveyor of domestic dramas in plainchant, then Antunes is Portugal's polyphonic reply as the Iberian Faulkner or Joyce without all

the narrative confusion. In the quote above a man sits at a table eating braised rabbit and rehearses all that he wishes to say to his lover, knowing that he lacks the courage, torn as he is to be the dutiful son and care for his ailing mother. He really has the need to talk, to declare his love and yet he won't because he can't. His beloved will love Carlos, the other man in her life. It would seem that everyone in Portugal has a lover on the side without blinking. In the end the repetition of "feeding corn to the chickens" announces, with the repeated throwing down of corn to the floor, his resignation. Antunes is a trained psychiatrist and he is an astute observer of the human emotional and mental landscape. Most of his stories - there are 107 of them in this volume - have some form of interior dialogue and introspective journey, whether it is the man recalling childhood, a dying woman recalling happier days, or a spouse speaking of destructive routines and infidelity (his and hers). Speaking is key to all these stories; Antunes is a masterly storyteller because the reader is privy to multiple conversations, imagined questions and answers, announcements and wished-for declarations in flowing paragraphs of discourse that break traditional syntax. You shouldn't be able to follow the conversation but you are in the conversation as it unfolds emotionally and logically. The sentences should not work but they do. Equally admirable is that all 107 stories in this volume are 600 to 800 words long. In the world of 'flash fiction' each of the 107 stories are crown jewels.

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