

**O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo, by Saramago: an anthroponomical reading**  
***O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo, de Saramago: uma leitura antroponímica***

Kleber Eckert  
Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia do Rio Grande do Sul – IFRS  
[kleber.eckert@bento.ifrs.edu.br](mailto:kleber.eckert@bento.ifrs.edu.br)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6436-1193>

Maiquel Röhrig  
Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia do Rio Grande do Sul – IFRS  
[maiquel.rohrig@bento.ifrs.edu.br](mailto:maiquel.rohrig@bento.ifrs.edu.br)  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3647-8212>

Translated by Marcelo Sapparas  
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9924-8369>

**Abstract:** The subject of this paper is a symbolic and etymological analysis of the characters' names from *O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo* by José Saramago. This study aims to verify how the names are related to their functions in the literary work and to their physical or behavioral features. Additionally, it aims to determine whether the choice of their names was intentional and corresponds to their etymological origin or if it was merely fortuitous. The study is justified due to the book's and its author's relevance to the Portuguese language, besides, it is noted that, as far as has been determined, no publication has approached this matter. The theoretical foundation is based on Onomastics studies and, more specifically, on Fictional Anthroponomastics, which focuses on the study of proper names of fictional characters. Regarding the methodological procedures, the following procedure was considered: careful reading of the work and recording all occurrences related to proper names; consulting dictionaries of first and last names; verification of the correspondence between the meaning of the name as presented on the dictionaries and the functions and characteristics within the literary work. It is concluded that the choice of names in the case of the analyzed book was not fortuitous but rather etymological and symbolically motivated.

**Keywords:** Fictional Anthroponomastics; *O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo*; names.

**Resumo:** O tema deste artigo é uma análise simbólica e etimológica dos nomes dos personagens da obra *O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo*, de José Saramago. O objetivo é verificar de que maneira os nomes relacionam-se com suas funções na obra e com suas características físicas ou comportamentais, além de verificar se a escolha dos nomes foi intencional e corresponde à sua origem etimológica ou se foi fortuita. O trabalho justifica-se dada a relevância da obra e de seu autor para a língua portuguesa, e por não ter sido encontrado, até onde foi possível saber, nenhuma publicação que versasse sobre a abordagem em questão. A fundamentação teórica consiste nos estudos da Onomástica e, mais especificamente, da Antroponomástica Ficcional, cujo objetivo é o estudo dos nomes próprios de personagens de obras ficcionais. Quanto à metodologia, procedeu-se da seguinte maneira: leitura atenta da obra e registro de todas as ocorrências relacionadas aos nomes próprios; consulta a dicionários de nomes e sobrenomes; verificação da correspondência entre o significado do nome registrado nos dicionários e as funções e características dentro da obra literária. Conclui-se que a escolha dos nomes, no caso da obra analisada, não foi fortuita e sim, etimológica e simbolicamente motivada.

**Palavras-chave:** Antroponomástica Ficcional; *O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo*; nomes.

## **Introduction**

The present paper proposes an analysis of the Fictional Anthroponymy of the novel *O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo*<sup>1</sup>, by José Saramago. The main objective is to analyze etymologically and symbolically (Gasques, 2003) the proper names of the main characters in the work, in order to verify whether the names are related to the physical, emotional or behavioral features of these characters. To achieve the proposed objective, initially, questions about a person's first name were discussed, in addition, the role of such names in the society in which the story narrated in Saramago's work takes place were analyzed.

Initially, the studies of the proper names are within the field of Lexicology and then there is a shift to the objects of study of Onomastics – study of proper names –, divided into Toponymy (study of the proper name of places) and Anthroponymy (study of first name of people), mainly. Next, the concept of onomastic sign is presented, in comparison to the linguistic sign, and reflects on the transparency or opacity of this sign. Finally, to conclude the reflections on the area of Onomastics, we discuss the object of study of Fictional Onomastics and, more specifically, Literary Anthroponymy, to which is the epistemological approach to which the analysis undertaken in this article belongs.

As for methodological procedures, the literary work was read carefully and the names of the main characters were highlighted, with special interest in the narrator's own considerations about each of them. Furthermore, all selected names were analyzed etymologically and symbolically, with the aim of evaluating a possible relationship between the meaning of the name and the features of the characters, based on name dictionaries and specialized works, such as Guérios (1973), Andrade (1994), Obata (1986) and Oliver (2005). This methodology can be

---

<sup>1</sup> In English: The Gospel According to Jesus Christ.

considered a qualitative approach, which has been a trend in Fictional Anthroponymy studies, according to studies carried out by Seide (2016: 1154).

This article is organized as follows: the first part, as already mentioned above, deals with the theoretical studies of Onomastics, Anthroponymy and, more specifically, Fictional and Literary Anthroponymy. Afterwards, the author and the work are briefly presented, with emphasis on the intertextuality of the novel with the New Testament. Next is the analysis of proper names, based on the relationship between the meaning of these names in specific dictionaries and Saramago's own reflections on them. Finally, there are the final considerations and bibliographic references that supported this text theoretically and analytically.

### **1. Anthroponymy: the study of people's proper names**

The lexicon of a language, according to Dubois et al. (2006: 364), “[...] designates the set of units that form the language of a community, of a human activity, of a speaker, etc.” More specifically, Correia and Almeida (2012: 11) state that, by tradition and in a generic way, the lexicon of a language is “[...] the set of all the words that are part of it”. In this sense, it is responsible, according to Seabra (2006: 1953), “[...] for naming and expressing the universe of a society”. Lexicology is, therefore, the science that studies the lexical heritage of a given language and Onomastics, which deals with the origin, formation, and meanings of proper names, subdivided, especially, into the study of the proper name of a person – Anthroponymy – and of place – Toponymy, is among its objects of study.

Although Toponymy and Anthroponymy have different objects of study, they are similar in some aspects, as recommended by Dauzat (1950):

Names of places and names of people have always had relationships of interdependence, more or less indicated according to the era. A city or village was often called by the name of its founder or the possessor of the domain around which an agglomeration was later formed. On the other hand, the individual, or the family, are often named according to their location, their municipality, their country of origin, according to their property or according to the particularity of their residence (DAUZAT, 1950: 04).

The confluence between Toponymy and Anthroponymy is also discussed by Seabra (2006), although she does so from a different perspective. For the researcher:

[...] despite being constituted in semantic fields of variable dimensions of Onomastics – person and place – still have a relationship of inclusion, since they are found in the onoma, in an area of intersection: the word, upon leaving its full use in a language, transitioning to its onomastic use, takes on a denominative character – in deictic or anaphoric use – and becomes referential as a toponym or anthroponym (SEABRA, 2006: 1954).

Still in the field of onomastic studies, there is the onomastic sign, which is, exactly, the object of study and reflection in the area. In relation to this topic, Sartori (2015) presents a discussion about the difference between the linguistic sign and the onomastic sign. The first is arbitrary or necessary, while the second is motivated. Furthermore,

In addition to differing in terms of motivation, the onomastic sign has a specific particularity in terms of function. It must, therefore, be perceived from two aspects: the function of the denominator (reasons that make the speaker select one onomastic sign and not another) and the semantic origin of the denomination, in a transparent or opaque way (Sartori, 2015: 132).

A transparent onomastic sign can be verified when it is possible to relate, for example, the proper name to a certain element of the vocabulary of a language. If this possibility does not exist, it is because the onomastic sign probably arose in a remote era when another language was spoken in the territory where this sign occurs. In this case, it is often said that the sign is opaque (Marcato, 2009: 18).

In this sense, we can present the examples cited by Guérios (1973: 16), who also discusses the opacity and transparency of the onomastic sign. For the author, the name Lycurgus can currently be classified as an opaque sign, as no one remembers the primitive wolf hunter, when

calling someone by that name. On the other hand, the toponym Bahia can be considered a transparent sign, as a place so named can translate, in fact and in reality, into a bay. Frosi (2015: 43) adds that, often, the transparency of the onomastic sign is only noticeable at the moment of its birth and, as time passes, it becomes opaque.

Dauzat (1950) concluded that

[...] the change in value suffered by proper names over the course of their history is no less suggestive from the perspective of semantics. The word quickly emptied of its primitive meaning, it became sterilized to the point of being no more than a label for the individual; we no longer understand it in the etymological sense (Dauzat, 1950: 10).

Based on this observation, Sartori (2015: 132) also states that, if there is no knowledge of the motivation of the onomastic sign, proper names end up becoming mere identifying labels. It is in questioning this perspective that the analyses of the names of the characters in this paper stand, since the main objective is to evaluate to what extent the etymological meaning of the names (and surnames or nicknames) of the characters is related to their physical and/or behavioral characteristics. As a result, we have a type of study named Literary Onomastics by Marcato (2009: 26), Fictional Onomastics by Seide (2016: 1154), Literary Onomastics by Camargo (2018:5) and Literary Anthroponomastics, according to Amaral and Seide (2020: 196).

Fictional Anthroponomastics' field of activity is the analysis of the names of characters in literary works, in addition to dedicating itself to the study of proper names present in audiovisual works, such as cinema and television (Marcato, 2009; Seide, 2016). In this text, which analyzes the proper names of people in the work *Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo*, Literary Onomastics is understood as part of Fictional Onomastics, since the latter is broader than the former, and because it sees the characteristics of the literary text is fiction. It is also possible to be more specific, viz., to state that the real object of reflection in this text is Literary Anthroponymy, since the object of

analysis is only the proper names of people, although reference is made to place names when they help compose the characters' names.

Marcato (2009: 25) states that this area of study is relatively recent. According to the researcher, Literary Onomastics began to develop in the early 1980s in Italy, with studies dedicated to analyzing the names of people and places in ancient and modern literary works. With the analyses of the works of Dante, Pirandello, Manzoni, Boccaccio and Petrarca, the discipline acquired a certain autonomy and freed itself from literary analysis or criticism, starting to expand its field of research. In this way, Literary Onomastics began to effectively analyze the functions that the proper name plays in a work or even in the onomastic corpus of a given writer.

It is also necessary to consider that the study of the proper names of characters in a work generally has an interdisciplinary approach. In this sense, based on a survey carried out by Seide (2016: 1156) in ten articles whose theme is Fictional Onomastics, this interdisciplinarity was perceived, especially in studies that combine the literary and audiovisual spheres, that is, we could reach a dialogue between literary and semiotic studies. From a similar perspective, Santos (2015: 12) states that Literary Onomastics develops itself as a current of research into proper names that draws on different areas of knowledge and that, in literature, it expands the semantic horizons of the text.

The choice of the name of the characters in a literary work must be, on the part of the author, a creative act, as they can take into account the environment in which these characters live and also the evocative and connotative power that the names have (Marcato, 2009: 25). In the work that is the object of analysis in this article, the presence of the environment is noticed when, when adding a type of surname (or nickname), the author chooses a toponym that is directly related to the place of life or birth of a certain character. Regarding this choice, Mexias-Simon and Oliveira

(2004: 63) explain that “the character's name takes on concrete form, if it did not already have it. It is a message from the author to the readers, it outlines the features of the characters, it is part of the plot, it becomes a full linguistic sign, with a signifier and significant, if not intelligible, at least intuited”. For Marcato (2009: 25), creativity can also manifest itself in the addition of a nickname to the character, which is often an additional element that the author uses to add details to that character's profile.

As the plot of the work that is the subject of analysis in this work takes place at the beginning of the first millennium, it is still necessary to reflect on the motivations behind parents' choices of their children's names. In this sense, Carvalhinhos (2007: 02-3) explains that there is a difference between this choice today and in ancient times. Nowadays, it is common to name a child after soap opera heroes, especially those shown in prime time with great success, or to choose the name as a tribute to the saint of devotion, through a grace achieved. On the other hand, “in ancient times, the proper name fulfilled the significant function, that is, its semantic function was assured: the individual was not only designated by his name, but received all its connotative load” (Carvalhinhos, 2007: 02). The author exemplifies the statement with the name Cícero, which comes from the Latin Cicero, whose root has the meaning of chickpea. The name probably arose from its use as a nickname, due to a mark on the face, resembling a chickpea. In summary,

[...] if today Western societies present this phenomenon of semantic emptying in people's first names, in these same societies in Ancient times names were not assigned by tradition or taste, but there was actually a reason or motivation to do so, whether due to physical or moral attributes that one wanted to imprint on the named individual, or due to devotion or the belief that a sacred name or one linked to the sacred would bring luck to its bearer (Carvalhinhos, 2007: 03).

From a similar perspective, Mexias-Simon and Oliveira (2004: 15) believe that the first name is an extremely important convention, because in some cultures the name can confer power and prestige on its bearer. Furthermore, for researchers,

[...] the proper name says something about its bearer, but it also says about the namer. In so-called primitive societies, proper names, in addition to their function of indicating, classify the individual as belonging to a clan (as in modern societies too) and evoke a habit, an attribute, a characteristic quality (true or not) of the person named, citing positive or negative aspects (Mexias-Simon; Oliveira, 2004: 32).

Regarding the choice of name in ancient times, especially by people without a written tradition, Calvet (2011: 98) considers that the name given to the child could be a message or even a means of communication. Furthermore, this name can be “a bearer of the desire to influence luck, to conjure harmful auspices: it is simultaneously protection and message” (Calvet, 2011: 95).

Still on the value and symbolism of anthroponyms, names and surnames carry marks of past civilizations and, according to Guérios (1973: 18), “reflect past civilizations with all their institutions. Names are created under the religious, political, historical influence, etc., in very varied circumstances, and in which the popular soul of all times and all places shines through”. From a similar perspective, studies on proper names “allow us to reconstruct not only the history of languages, but also that of the people who spoke to them: geographical origin of these people, migrations, etc.” (Calvet, 2011: 119).

For Dauzat (1950), studying names and surnames takes us to the heart of the popular soul of ancient times. These names and surnames are living symbols of now-disappeared beliefs and superstitions. Carvalhinhos (2007) points to a similar perspective, for whom people’s names are “a rich source of knowledge not only of the language, but also allow us to learn a little about the

culture, religion and even ideology of the people who created it at a given time” (Carvalhinhos, 2007: 16).

In this way, we once again reach the main objective of this work: analyze the importance and meaning of names and surnames (if any) for the work, with the aim of identifying whether anthroponymic motivations are loaded with meanings or whether the names chosen by the author are mere identifying labels. Furthermore, one can also think about the importance of studying names to understand how the anthroponymic system worked at the time in which the plot of the work takes place.

## **2 Author and work**

José Saramago (1922-2010) is considered the greatest name in Portuguese literature in recent decades. His worldwide recognition reached its peak in 1998, when he became the first and, to date, only Portuguese-language writer to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. Died at the age of 87, he left behind a vast body of work, including his 17 novels.

*O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo* narrates, from a literary perspective, events from the New Testament. Published in 1991, it is Saramago's longest novel, with 24 unnumbered chapters, totaling 445 pages. The narrative tells the story of Jesus from his conception to his crucifixion. Intertextuality with the New Testament occurs, but Saramago humanizes the character, subverting some events that, in the Bible, deify him. Saramago also uses historiography, reflecting on the veracity of historical facts relating to the period in which Jesus would have lived, drawing on studies of Archeology and History.

According to Schmidt (2003: 56), the novel is the “proposal of a temporally double evangelist, who [...] will bring together two spaces widely separated by time: the past (historical

and memorial) and the present (self-reflexive, critical and reviewer)”. Despite the title, it is not a gospel “according to Jesus Christ”, but according to a third-person narrator who is located on that threshold between the past (considered from an intertextual perspective, related to the New Testament, and historical) and the time in which the narrator is located, whose temporal distance allows him to have a reflective character in relation to the events narrated.

The narrator's omniscience is complete, and he even knows more than the character God, whose omniscience, in the novel, appears to be flawed. Jesus' mother, in turn, is humanized and Saramago undoes the idealization created from her conception in a state of virginity. The Maria in her novel is a fifteen-year-old girl, submissive to her husband and Jewish law, marked by the culture of the time in which she lives. She becomes pregnant through sex with her husband, Joseph. Afterwards, God explains to Jesus that he “mixed his seed” with Joseph's, which, although it records Jesus' divine character, does not eliminate his human condition, born “like all the sons of men, dirty with their mother’s blood, viscous with their mucus and suffering in silence” (Saramago, 1991: 83).

Saramago tells the story of Jesus' childhood, adolescence and adulthood, filling in gaps in the gospels. In these, there is a gap of eighteen years, from the twelve to the thirty years of Jesus. The author also fills a gap in the biblical text in relation to Joseph. Saramago gives him an importance that does not exist in the New Testament, in whose texts Joseph disappears so that we know little about his work and nothing about his death.

Saramago's Jesus judges his parents, does not forgive their faults, leaves home disobeying his mother, does not submit to God's designs and even tries to deceive him: he asks Pilate to inscribe on his cross that Jesus is the king of the Jews, and not the son of God, as they claimed, accusing him of heresy. Jesus does not do what is expected of him, in clear opposition to what is

stated in the biblical text, that is, Jesus fights for life, does not submit to suffering, to God or to death.

The Devil is present in the life of Jesus from his conception until moments before his crucifixion. For four years, going by the name Shepherd, he welcomed Jesus by teaching him the job of shepherding sheep. More than that, he tries to teach his pupil to see life without alienation from Jewish law, showing him God's inconsistencies and cruelties. Jesus, however, does not learn. The clear demonstration of this occurs when Jesus meets God in the desert and sacrifices a sheep to him. Pastor then expels him from his company, accusing him of not having learned anything.

The encounter with Mary Magdalene, or Mary of Magdala, gives Saramago's Jesus the love that the Jesus of the Bible did not have the opportunity to experience. Mary of Magdala accompanies him not because she venerates him, but because they both love each other. Jesus maintains a relationship with her that is very different from that which was usual at the time, as he respects her and treats her as an equal, without subjecting her to the prejudices of his religion and the morals of his time.

In Saramago's novel, God and his set of laws are the great antagonist. While Jesus and the Devil seek to love and understand men, God works to submit them to his will, expand the number of his faithful and the power he has over them. Next, we carry out the analysis of some of the names of the characters in the novel, in order to check whether there is correspondence so that we can explain how the correspondence between the name of the character, their characteristics and functions in the text is established, taking into account the intertextual aspect of the novel.

### **3. Character names**

Saramago's work reveals a special concern with the characters' proper names and the way they are named. This can be seen, for example, in works such as *Todos os Nomes*, in which only the protagonist receives his own name (Mr. José), while all the other characters receive generic

designations, such as boss, lady on the ground floor, etc. It is also possible to verify the author's concern in naming the characters in the work *Ensaio sobre a cegueira*, in which the characters do not receive proper names, being treated based on their professions, functions or personal characteristics. In the work *O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo*, the issue of names is made clear again, including in the narrator's own reflections, as can be seen in “be certain the kneeling woman is called Mary, because we knew in advance that all those who came here are called by this name. If they use this name, only one of them, as she is also Madalena, is onomastically distinguished from the others” (Saramago, 1991: 14).

In the novel that is the subject of analysis in this text, there are several characters with the name of Maria (Mary), identified by the narrator as an extremely common name, to the point of confusing different characters, as can be seen in the following passage: “behind them were the women, from behind most of whom we don't know their names, in fact, it doesn't matter, almost all of these are Marias, and even those who aren't will be called by that name, we say woman, we say Maria, and they look and come to serve us” ( Saramago, 1991: 400). In this sense, the narrator extends his reflection by treating the proper name Maria as a synonym for the common noun woman, also attributing to it a burden related to the values of the time, especially in relation to the submission of women. This reveals that the lack of concern for the woman's name is associated with her insignificance in that society.

To distinguish one Maria from another, Saramago chose to add toponymic information. Thus, we have Mary Magdalene (or of Magdala) so that there is no confusion with the other Mary present in the plot, who is the mother of Jesus - named, in some situations, Mary of Nazareth. The toponym does not always refer to the place of birth; it can refer to the place of residence, which is what happens with the character in question: “you never know where a person’s identification with

the place where they were born or, in this case, where they became man or woman can lead.” (Saramago, 1991: 140-41). In this case, Saramago's option was to choose the toponym Magdala, in order to differentiate Maria Madalena from Maria de Nazaré.

In many cases, the toponym is also added to the names of other male characters. Examples include Judas Galileo (or from Galilee), Joseph of Arimathea, Simon of Cyrene (or Cyrene). According to the narrator, “we should not be surprised by such primitive identifications, which are actually very common” (Saramago, 1991: 140). This way of naming reveals one of the trends in the emergence of surnames that, at that time, did not yet formally exist, as people only received their first name. Mioranza (2009: 48) clarifies that “surnames included under the title of toponyms are generally easier to recognize than others, due to the fact that they refer to a certain location, a specific point of reference, located in time and space”. In this sense, the concern with the choice of which toponym to add to the person's name - place of birth or place of residence - appears in the novel's reflections, including in the characters' speeches, as is the case in the dialogue between Mary Magdalene and Jesus:

You have lived far away, this is Galilee, [said Mary] And I am a Galilean, they will not harm me, [said Jesus] You are not a Galilean, if you were born in Bethlehem of Judea, My parents conceived me in Nazareth, and I truly, I wasn't even born in Bethlehem, I was born in a cave, deep inside the earth, and now it even appears to me that I was born again, here, in Magdala (Saramago, 1991: 289).

When consulting name dictionaries and specialized works on anthroponyms, there are many references to the origin of the name Mary Magdalene and possible etymological meanings linked to the time of Jesus. Some of these meanings are also related to the way Saramago defines the character. The name Maria, according to Oliver (2005: 449), “gave rise to countless interpretations. With diverse roots and origins, according to most authors, what is understood as subsequent developments of the original term. From Sanskrit Maryâh, lit. purity; virtue; virginity.” According to Obata (1986: 136), the name comes “from the Hebrew Myriam, for which there are

about seventy interpretations. The most famous ones derive their name from the Hebrew *Marah*, 'contumacious' or 'one who has bitterness'; or from the Egyptian *Mrym*, 'beloved of Amón' or 'beloved of God'; or, even, from Semitic, meaning 'lady, sovereign'."

Considering the etymological meanings of the name Mary, we can see that some relate it to Jesus' mother, while others relate to Mary Magdalene. In relation to the mother of Jesus, we have the issue of purity, virtue, and virginity. Furthermore, she is God's beloved, as Mary was chosen to be the mother of the Savior. As for Mary Magdalene, we can associate the name with the meanings of contumacious and bitter, due to her strong personality and the fact that her profession, prostitute, caused her bitterness for much of her life. This last aspect also concerns Jesus' mother, since she suffered the great bitterness of seeing her son humiliated, crucified, and unjustly killed.

The name Magdalene originates from the toponym *Magdala*, which is a city in Galilee. From this toponym came the qualifier *Magdalena* (natural from *Magdala*) which, in turn, for reasons of phonetic adaptation, evolved into *Madalena* in Portuguese. According to Obata (1986: 132), the name comes from the Hebrew word *Maghdal*, with the meaning of tower or city of towers. For the author, "the name, originally *Magdalena* 'natural from *Magdala*', was used as a qualifier for Mary, the famous repentant sinner, influencing the meaning, today, of 'repentant woman' or 'tearful woman'" (Obata, 1986: 132-133). Oliver (2005: 446) adds that, symbolically, the name Magdalene corresponds to the idea of matter purified by the spirit.

As previously mentioned, the use of *Madalena* next to the name *Maria* refers to the need to differentiate between characters (or people) with the same name, in this case *Maria*. Also, in the name of this character, there is an embryo of the emergence of the first surnames, which are those of toponymic origin (Mioranza, 2009: 48). Regarding the meanings of the name Magdalene, we

can see that they are related to the character's life, because she is a woman who, in the work, is seen by Jesus as magnificent, to the point that he chose her as his only follower, in a group made up mainly of men. Furthermore, the moment the character meets Jesus, she feels purified, because Jesus does not judge her and her past sins as a prostitute have been forgiven.

Another trend in the origin of surnames is also seen in Saramago's work. These are patronymics, that is, when the surname derives from the father's name. Initially, to avoid difficulties in identifying people with the same name, they began to be named using their first name plus the designation “son of”. Different passages reveal this tendency, as can be seen in the following examples: “The carpenter, called José son of Heli, was a young man, in the prime of his life, he had just turned thirty-three years old a few days ago” (Saramago, 1991: 166). “They will behead James, son of Zebedee, and the second James, son of Alphaeus, will be stoned” (Saramago, 1991: 435). “What is your name, man, Jesus, son of Joseph, I was born in Bethlehem in Judea, but they know me as Jesus of Nazareth because I lived in Nazareth in Galilee” (Saramago, 1991: 441).

The concern with the naming of characters is a recurring theme in the work, as was also identified by Camargo and Bini (2022), when analyzing two texts by Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez. In the case of Saramago's novel, one of these reasons concerns the accuracy of the information:

The emissaries then left, with Joseph in the lead, indicating the way, and they were Abiathar, Dotaim and Zaquias, names that are recorded here to hinder any suspicion of historical fraud that may, by chance, linger in the minds of all those people who of these facts and their versions have obtained knowledge through other sources, perhaps more accredited by tradition, but not therefore more authentic (Saramago, 1991: 39).

Regarding the meanings of personal names, the novel's narrator mentions that, in their origin, these names are not mere identifying labels. This is the case of the reflections regarding the choice of the name of the character Jacob's son: “giving birth to the child whom Jacob would name

Benjamin, which means, son of my right hand, but to whom she, before dying, He called, with great reason, Benoni, which means, son of my misfortune” (Saramago, 1991: 79).

This passage explains the fact that children's names, at that time, were chosen by parents in order to mean something related to the parents' experience with the child or their expectations regarding the child's future. Even today, according to Butkuviené et al. (2021: 421), there is a specific category of anthroponymic motivation associated with onomatomania, which they call “belief”; In this motivation perceived in a comparative anthroponymic study of Brazilian and Lithuanian names, the choice of name is repeated based “[...] on the belief that the name has traits that influence the personality of the person named”. A similar situation occurs with the name of Jesus, chosen by his father, Joseph: “the carpenter who long ago decided that this would be the name of his firstborn” (Saramago, 1991: 76). The name Jesus originates, according to Oliver (2005: 209), “from the Hebrew Ioshua, Jehoshea, lit. ‘God (Jehovah) is salvation: God is help.’” According to Obata (1986: 116), the name Jesus was “little used in early Christianity because it was considered disrespectful to its first bearer. Today it is a very popular name in Spain and Portuguese and Spanish America.”

Still in relation to the importance of a person's first name, we have one of the central characters who refuses to reveal his name, using the profession he performs as a designation: pastor. When he meets Jesus, he asks him: “What is your name, I have no name for my sheep, I am not your sheep, Who knows, Tell me what your name is, if you are so keen to give me a name, Call me Pastor, that’s enough for you to have me, if you call me” (Saramago, 1991: 227). The character prefers to call himself Pastor because his name is stigmatized, containing a meaning that, according to him, does not reveal his true personality. And in this lies the associative and encyclopedic meaning of the proper name, according to considerations by Camargo (2018) and

Camargo and Bini (2022). Pastor is, in fact, the devil, and he feels wronged by the way he was treated by God. This stratagem is adopted by the character because it is the only way he can live with Jesus for a period of time, because if he revealed his name, Jesus would not follow him into the desert. It is clear that there is an associative meaning of the proper name in society and in the quote above it is possible to observe it in the textual fabric.

In a conversation between the devil and God, Pastor comments on his original name: “as in happy times, when I was one of your favorite angels, Lucifer you called me, to which the light led, rather than an ambition to be equal to you devoured my soul and made me rebel against your authority” (Saramago, 1991: 392). Remaining anonymous or avoiding the name, in this case, is necessary because according to God's speech in the plot, “sin and the Devil are the two names of the same thing” (Saramago, 1991: 386). Despite the poetic meaning of the name Lucifer, what can be seen is that it became stigmatized to the point of not being used to name people from the time of Jesus to the present day. The name does not even appear for consultation in the dictionaries of names and surnames used in this research.

### **Final considerations**

In this article, the names of the main characters in the work *O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo* were analyzed from a symbolic and etymological perspective. It was possible to establish a parallel line between the behaviors or aspect of these characters with the data collected in specialized dictionaries in the field of Anthroponymy.

Firstly, it reinforces the idea that the topic of personal names is dear to the writer José Saramago. Just as the author did in other works, in the novel *O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo*, there are also reflections on the importance of the characters' names throughout the narrative, even though it was constructed intertextually from the New Testament. In other words, the characters –

and their names – are not pure objects of fiction, as they already appear in the biblical text from which the author was inspired.

Secondly, personal names are not used in the analyzed novel as mere identifying labels. In Saramago's text, names are, therefore, transparent, in the sense that there is a symbiotic relationship between their meaning and the being named. The same applies to the self-nomination “pastor”, that is, the fact that there is a character who nominates himself is fundamental to the constitution and actions of that character. In this way, self-naming makes a subversion/parody of the way Jesus constantly defines himself in the Bible.

It is also necessary to highlight the embryo of the emergence of the first surnames, as the narrative takes place at the beginning of the first millennium and, at that time, the anthroponymic system of name followed by surname, as we know it today, did not yet exist. In this case, surnames derived from toponyms – such as Magdalena, Nazaré, Galilee, etc. – and patronymics – such as Heli, Alphaeus, Zebedee, etc. stand out. Even though they do not appear in the work, in addition to the two examples above, surnames derived from physical characteristics and professions appear.

Finally, it is possible to say that the analyzed novel, in addition to being an intertextual narrative, is also a meta-anthroponymic novel, as the author presents the characters and relates them directly to their names, as already explained in the issue transparency of these names. In this way, new research perspectives are opened on the names of the characters in José Saramago's novels, in order to verify whether the meta-anthroponymic approach is a constant in the author's literary production.

Recebido em 08/11/2023

Aceito em 02/07/2024

Publicado em 03/07/2024

## References

- Amaral, E. T. R.; Seide, M. S. (2020). *Nomes próprios de pessoa: introdução à antroponímia brasileira*. São Paulo: Blucher.
- Andrade, J. de. (1994). *O étimo dos nomes próprios*. São Paulo: Thirê.
- Butkuvienė, K. et al. (2021). Name-giving motives in Lithuania and Brazil. *Domínios de Linguagem*, (15) 2.
- Calvet, L. (2011). *Tradição oral & tradição escrita*. São Paulo: Parábola Editorial.
- Camargo, A. K. de. (2020). Onomástica Ficcional: status quo no Brasil. *Revista GTLex*, 3 (1).
- Camargo, A. K de; Bini, R. P. (2022). O ethos pela homonímia: o grupo de Barranquilla e a personagem-autor em Cem anos de solidão e Viver para contá-la. *Revista De Literatura, História E Memória*, (31) 18.
- Carvalhinhos, P. de J. (2007). As origens dos nomes de pessoas. *Domínios de Linguagem*, (1), 1.
- Correia, M.; Almeida, G. M. de B. (2012). *Neologia em português*. São Paulo: Parábola Editorial.
- Dauzat, A. (1950). *Les noms de personnes: origen et évolution Prénoms – Noms de famille – Surnoms* (4a ed.). Paris: Delagrave.
- Dubois, J. et al. (2006). *Dicionário de Linguística*. São Paulo: Cultrix.
- Frosi, V. M. (2015). *Provérbios italianos: pérolas na educação informal dos ítalo-brasileiros*. Caxias do Sul: Educs.
- Gasques, A. E. G. (2003). *Um estudo simbólico: o paraíso em o primo Basílio e o cemitério em "Venha Ver o Pôr-do-Sol"* [Dissertação de Mestrado]. Universidade de São Paulo.
- Guérios, R. F. M. (1973). *Dicionário Etimológico de Nomes e Sobrenomes*. (2a ed.) São Paulo: Ave Maria.
- Marcato, C. (2009). *Nomi di persona, nomi di luogo: introduzione all'onomastica italiana*. Bologna: il Mulino.
- Mexias-Simon, M. L.; Oliveira, A. de M. (2004). *O nome do homem: reflexões em torno dos nomes próprios*. Rio de Janeiro: HP.

Mioranza, C. (2009). *Filius Quondam*: a origem e o significado dos sobrenomes italianos. São Paulo: Larousse.

Obata, R. (1986). *O livro dos nomes*. São Paulo: Círculo do Livro.

Oliver, N. (2005). *Todos os nomes do mundo*. Rio de Janeiro: Ediouro.

Santos, B. da S. (2015) *Dom Casmurro à luz da onomástica*: tramas e tramoias do romance machadiano. [Dissertação de Mestrado] Universidade Federal do Espírito Santo.

Saramago, J. (1991). *O Evangelho Segundo Jesus Cristo*. Rio de Janeiro: Record.

Sartori, T. O. (2015). Signo linguístico versus signo onomástico: convencionalidade e motivação para falar e nomear. *Ciência em Curso*, (4) 2.

Schmidt, J. M. da G. (2003). Manual de pintura e caligrafia, História do cerco de Lisboa e O evangelho segundo Jesus Cristo – uma leitura trilológica. *Romansk Forum*, (17) 1.

Seabra, M. C. T. C. de. (2006). Referência e Onomástica. In: *Múltiplas Perspectivas em Linguística*. Magalhães, J. S. de; Travaglia, L. C. (org.). Uberlândia: Edufu.

Seide, M. S. (2016). Métodos de Pesquisa em Antroponomástica. *Domínios de Linguagem*, (10) 3.