

■ *All the Names and the Event of Love*

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Abstract

In this article I seek to re-read José Saramago's novel *All the Names* with reference to Alain Badiou's theory of the Event and the truth procedures that follow upon events of both Love and Art. Touching on various examples of love in the Western tradition, I show how Saramago's novel presents an interesting case of the chance encounter, the Event, point-by-point episodes of fidelity, and the on-going development of a truth of love for Senhor José. I then conclude by briefly considering the Event Saramago in the novelistic tradition. Badiou's theory allows us to see this work of the later Saramago in a new light and gives us reason to reassess his novelistic accomplishment.

Keywords: Saramago, Badiou, Love, Event, *acontecimento*, Sousa Dias

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The Portuguese philosopher Sousa Dias, in a chapter entitled the “Lógica do Impossível,” develops, drawing on the thought of Alain Badiou among others,¹ an account of the event [*acontecimento*] in an intriguing discussion for contemporary politics. The Event, in this understanding, is precisely not something which develops from the facts of a situation in a logical and natural way. It is not, strictly speaking, a *possibility* of that situation, but a sort of explosion of the impossible (within a given frame or paradigm): un-anticipatable, inexplicable, unheard of. In the context of his book *Grandeza de Marx: por uma política do impossível* (*Greatness of Marx: For a Politics of the Impossible*), the discussion motivates an account of the Event of the thought of Karl Marx himself, and even more importantly, the seemingly impossible possibility of a revolutionary Event (of communism) despite the current apparent death of the communist idea and triumph of the neo-liberal capitalist order. However before moving to his discussion of Marx, Dias gives the example of Velchaninov in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *The Eternal Husband* as a way of illustrating the unpredictability and im-possibility (existential in-com-possibility [Leibniz]) of the event. Dias explains, “An event is this: something that was impossible with respect to a given reality (psychological in the case of Velchaninov), in really existing conditions, and which nonetheless happens” (108; my translation).² Again, the Event is precisely not determined by the situation but represents a “rupture, incision, absolute caesura” (108). Only retroactively will the Event have created the conditions of its own possibility, particularly through the fidelity of those involved.³ Fidelity to the Event—love, friendship, the encounter with a work of art, and so forth—“is precisely to refuse the reinscription, or absorption, of the event in the order (ontological, historical, personal) of being, to affirm the event as in absolute excess of the conditions of being, of the real and of the possible, as an im-possible extra-being” (112).⁴

¹ Notably Gilles Deleuze, about whom Dias wrote an earlier book, *Lógica do acontecimento—Deleuze e a filosofia* (1995). On the radical difference between Deleuze’s sense of event and Badiou’s, see Badiou, *Logic of Worlds* 325-31. See also Crockett, Ch. 1, *et passim*.

² “Um acontecimento é isso: qualquer coisa que era impossível de acordo com a realidade (psicológica, neste caso) dada, com as condições reais existentes, e que no entanto acontece” (*Grandeza* 108).

³ “O acontecimento ou o novo, a sua vinda ou efectuação, é a abertura no presente de um futuro não dado nele, nele não co-presente mesmo em potência, o acontecimento é pois uma retroacção do futuro no presente” (116); “The event, or the new, its arrival or taking place, is the opening in the present of a future not given in it, in it not co-present even potentially—the event is therefore a retroaction of the future in the present.”

⁴ “é justamente recusar a reinscrição, ou absorção, do acontecimento na ordem (ontológica, histórica, pessoal) do ser, afirmar o acontecimento como excedência absoluta das condições do ser, do real e do possível, como im-possível extra-ser” (112).

This is how we can think in terms of new *truths* made possible by the Event and which did not exist prior to it. Finally the Event, though affecting the individual, is not a matter of will or some subjective choice. “Every event that happens to each one of us, however imperceptible it may be in its state of arrival as our becoming-other or unpredictable change—a passion, a love, a sudden change in habits or interests, a creation surprising for the author himself—is an involuntary or a-subjective rupture, a sudden vital gap that traverses the I as an intimate impossibility and that makes our individuality or personal reality a com-pulsion of impossible individuations” (107).⁵ Will or decision only come later in assumption of fidelity to the Event, itself involuntary, unexpected, almost miraculous in its occurrence. Without going into the ramifications of this model for politics, I want to think a little further about the conception of Event and truth rather in the domain of love. In the following discussion I seek to describe Badiou’s influential model of the Event and explore its explanatory value in understanding several works of literature by Dostoevsky and José Saramago. I show how these novelists, drawing indirectly on a conception of love familiar from the Western poetic tradition, develop an ethical conception of love that is very similar to Badiou’s conception. I believe Badiou’s theory and Saramago’s novel *All the Names* mutually enrich one another and indeed help us better understand something about love (and about art).

Dostoevsky, Badiou, and the Event of Love

To get a clear sense of the *acontecimento* or Event of love, we can follow Dias’ suggestion and look first to Dostoevsky’s *The Eternal Husband* to see how the unexpected occurrence of love can institute a truth and found an ethics for the subject. Dias mentions Dostoevsky’s Velchaninov in discussing the Event, who at the beginning of the story “contrary to expectations” (3) remains in St. Petersburg for the summer—thus making possible the subsequent drama with Pavel Pavlovitch Trusotsky. While I am not at all sure that this acting against expectations yet constitutes an *acontecimento* for Velchaninov, certainly it reflects some sort of premonitory instinct that change is approaching. The reminder of

⁵ “Cada acontecimento que acontece a cada um do nós, por imperceptível que seja no seu estado de vinda como nosso devir-outro ou imprevisível aleração—um paixão, um amor, uma brusca mudança de hábitos ou de interesses, uma criação surpreendente para o próprio autor—é uma ruptura involuntária ou assumptiva, uma súbita fenda vital que atravessa o eu como uma íntima impossibilidade e que faz da nossa individualidade ou realidade pessoal uma co-pulsão de impossíveis individuações” (107).

his former passion for the now deceased Natalya Vassilyevna, Pavel Pavlovitch's wife with whom Ivanovich Velchaninov had an affair some nine years ago, likewise serves as a sort of tremor from past passion shaking Velchaninov, who has seemingly definitively formed habits and a lifestyle of a rake. This all prepares the way for the event of the introduction of Liza, the eight-year-old daughter of Pavel Pavlovitch and Natalya Vassilyevna who in fact seems to be Velchaninov's own daughter.

In a chapter Dostoevsky mockingly entitles "A New Fancy of an Idle Man," Velchaninov begins to undergo the transformation, becoming dedicated to saving Liza. "One thing only he knew for certain: that he had never before felt what he was experiencing now and that it would never leave him all his life" (65). Velchaninov's new-found devotion is complicated by the erratic and drunken behavior of Pavel Pavlovitch, who seems to have forsaken the girl and set out on a quest for a new wife, and Velchaninov repeatedly has difficulty confronting "the eternal husband" about both their past (the affair and betrayal) and the present situation (his connection to Liza). On one occasion he waits fruitlessly for Pavel Pavlovitch to accompany him to the Pogoryeltsev's, where Liza is temporarily staying, and confirms to himself, "His heart beat faster at the thought that he would soon, within two hours, see his Liza again. . . . It's my whole life and my whole object now! . . . What has life been until now? Muddle and sadness . . . but now . . . it's all different, everything's changed!" (87). However, Liza has taken ill and Pavel Pavlovitch continues to shirk his apparent parental duty. Indeed very shortly thereafter Liza dies, and Dostoevsky complicates Velchaninov's transformation. Velchaninov suffers intense grief at the loss of Liza—not so much for her herself, whom he hardly knew, but for the lost opportunity to give her his love. "By my love for Liza," he muses, "all my old putrid and useless life would be purified and expiated; to make up for my own, idle, vicious, and wasted life I would cherish and bring up that pure and exquisite creature, and for her sake everything would be forgiven me and I could forgive myself everything" (114). This reveals not a little selfishness on the part of Velchaninov.⁶ Perhaps Dostoevsky intends to ironize Velchaninov, and at one point Velchaninov even equates himself with Pavel Pavlovitch: "we are both vicious, underground, loathsome people" (160)—a Dostoevskian specialty. But even in his selfish grief over Liza, Velchaninov comes to a moment when he feels "a

⁶ René Girard famously gives a rather different reading of Velchaninov, focusing on the obvious mimetic desire involved in the relation of the two men (e.g. 46). To what degree is the metaphysics of the Event, and its subsequent ethics, compatible with Girardian mimetic desire? Subject for another essay.

rush of pure, calm faith flood his soul” (115), and this is obviously an important moment for Dostoevsky in the tale.

The subsequent episode of Pavel Pavlovitch’s courtship of Nadyezhda Fedosyevna takes a rather comic turn, as everyone mocks and derides Pavel Pavlovitch, and Velchaninov seems entirely in control of the social situation. However he will undergo a change in his relationship to this pathetic “eternal husband.” After the latter even tries to kill him, Velchaninov reaches a state of peace, “entirely transformed, or rather reformed” (199), and when two years after the fateful incidents of the main story he runs into Pavel Pavlovitch again in a train station, once again husband of a young, pretty, and presumably unfaithful woman, Velchaninov feels a sympathy and forgiveness, eschewing an invitation by the young wife to visit, thus sparing (some of) Pavel Pavlovitch’s worries. However the story is certainly ambiguous, and after the attempted murder scene, Dostoevsky writes of Velchaninov, “All that morning, for the first time in three weeks, he scarcely thought of Liza—as though that blood from his cut fingers could ‘settle his account’ even with that misery” (187). Moreover, on the very last page, after his encounter in the train station with Pavel Pavlovitch, Velchaninov continues his journey: “He did not turn off to the right to see his fair friend [a possible amorous adventure]—he felt too much out of humour. And how he regretted it afterwards!” (210). These last words certainly give us reason to doubt the profundity of the moral transformation of Velchaninov, but in any case Liza had been a life-changing event for him, and importantly one involving a “love” he had never before experienced. This event, and his fidelity to it as long as it lasts, marks an “unexpected” change in the very character of Velchaninov, even if its effects do not ultimately prove permanent.⁷

Dias’s discussion of the *acontecimento*, in which he gestures towards the Dostoevsky novel, clearly relates to Badiou’s famous theorization of the Event and the ethic of truths. “The French Revolution of 1792, the meeting of Héloïse and Abélard, Galileo’s creation of physics, Haydn’s invention of the classical musical style. . . . But also the Cultural Revolution in China (1965-67), a personal amorous passion, the creation of Topos theory by the mathematician Grothendieck, the invention of the twelve-tone scale by Schoenberg . . .”: so many examples of the Event which “compels [one] to decide a new way of being” (*Ethics* 41). This involves *subjectification* through fidelity (since there is no Ethics in general nor any abstract Subject, but instead “only a particular kind of

⁷ In fact, Dmitri Dmitrich Gurov from Anton Chekhov’s “The Lady with the Dog” might have been a better example here, but in any case the very wealth of choices attests to the validity of the model proposed of the Event of love.

animal, convoked by certain circumstances to become a subject” [40]).⁸ Famously, in this context Badiou speaks of truth. “I shall call ‘truth’ (*a* truth) the real process of a fidelity to an event: that which this fidelity *produces* in the situation” (42). The truth-process that results is “heterogeneous to the instituted knowledges of the situation” itself, as in Dias’ *acontecimento*. Moreover, “the subject . . . in no way pre-exists the process . . . [rather] the process of truth induces a subject” (43). And the truth grounds an ethic. As Badiou densely writes, “the ‘ethic of a truth’ is . . . *that which lends consistency to the presence of someone in the composition of the subject induced by the process of this truth*” (44). So, against the backdrop of his mathematical ontology of inconsistent multiplicity (which needn’t concern us here), Badiou describes how in a series of subtractions the Event emerges within the undecidable, giving rise to a subject within the indiscernible, and founding a generic truth.⁹ Something unanticipatable by reference to the given frame or situation (im-possible) explodes onto the scene radically altering the individuals involved, subjecting them to a sort of transformation that exceeds their previous state of being and follows no given rule. And this is the initiation of an ethics as a subjecting to the evental [*événementiel*] transformation in fidelity to this im-possible Event in the process of its truth. “There is always only one question in the ethic of truths: how will I, as someone, *continue* to exceed my own being?” (*Ethics* 50). While Badiou is most interested in the political dimension here—although he insists on the interrelation and interconnection of the various fields or “procedures” (love, art, science, politics)—the process is perhaps clearest in the case of love.

Badiou discusses love as an “encounter between two differences [that] is an event . . . contingent and disconcerting” (Badiou and Truong 29), a matter of chance (even *grace* [*Ethics* 133]) and not susceptible of planning or calculation.¹⁰ Nor is it a matter of choice or decision, although subsequently one must decide more or less consciously whether to be true to the Event. The Event is the birth of something supplemental to the individuals involved, to which they are subsequently linked in their fidelity. It is not a matter of knowledge (indeed of knowability). But it involves a commitment to be true to that love (through the

⁸ Fidelity: “that transition from random encounter to a construction that is resilient, as if it had been necessary” (Badiou and Truong 44).

⁹ “The undecidable is a subtraction from the norm of evaluation and the indiscernible is a subtraction from the remarking of a difference . . . [and] the generic is infinite subtraction from the subsumption of the multiple beneath the One of the concept” (*Theoretical Writings* 108).

¹⁰ The encounter is both “situated and supplementary” (*Ethics* 68)—encompassed by a certain state of affairs or situation but also totally un-anticipatable from it. It is also singular, specific to the situation, and at the same time universal, applicable to anyone.

other, but not exactly in the other). In short, it is the “scene of the Two” (Badiou and Truong 38). Beginning in a state of disjunction, there occurs an encounter (chance), then the move towards union, but not in the sense of a Romantic unity or fusion (Badiou and Tarby 45). This is a myth (to say nothing of “the non-relation between love and sexuality” [Badiou, *Infinite* 88] which determines that there is always difference and distance and that the Two is never a One). Rather each being is transformed into participants in a new thing, the Two. “The lovers as such enter into the composition of *one* loving subject, who *exceeds* them both” (*Ethics* 43). Fidelity then means that “one accepts to participate in the new subject made possible by the event” (Badiou and Tarby 48). This process founds (a) truth.

As Badiou notes, the event of love does not necessarily involve the *coup de foudre* (Badiou and Tarby 42), and the case of Abélard and Héloïse shows that the encounter can even involve a degree of calculated seduction. Although Badiou maintains the important distinction between love and desire, he insists that love involves the dimension of desire, of the body and sexuality.¹¹ He distinguishes love from friendship and denies that friendship involves a real truth procedure. In this case Abélard and Héloïse are again instructive, given the ardent physicality of their love in the beginning. The crisis of their discovery, and hence the cessation of their physical relation (even before the rendering of it physically impossible), marks a new stage in their relationship: “chacun de nous déplorait l’infortune de l’autre et non la sienne. Mais la séparation des corps ne faisait que resserrer nos cœurs; privé de toute satisfaction, notre amour s’en enflammait davantage” (69).¹² What follows is the famous attempt by Abélard to elevate their love

¹¹ Héloïse: “Tandis que je goûtais avec toi les plaisirs de la chair, on a pu se demander si c’était la voix de l’amour que je suivais ou celle du plaisir. On peut voir maintenant à quels sentiments j’ai, dès le principe, obéi. Pour me conformer à ta volonté, j’en suis arrivée à m’interdire tous les plaisirs; je ne me suis rien réservé de moi-même, si ce n’est pas de me faire toute à toi” (121); “As I tasted the pleasures of the flesh with you, one could wonder if it was the voice of love that I was following or that of pleasure. We can now see what feelings I have, from the start, obeyed. To conform to your will, I have come to forbid myself all pleasures; I did not reserve anything of myself, if not to make myself all to you.”

¹² “Each of us bemoaned the other’s misfortune and not his own. But the separation of bodies only tightened our hearts; deprived of all satisfaction, our love ignited more.” It’s true that Héloïse seems to express more fidelity to this love than Abélard, who is all too eager to pass beyond her to God, to deny her as his *épouse* in order to embrace her as *épouse du Christ*. The most he will grant about their past, the Event and its subsequent truth—when he isn’t cursing it as concupiscence—is in the following prayer: “Vous nous avez unis, Seigneur, et vous nous avez séparés, quand et comme il vous a plu. Achevez aujourd’hui, en mettant le comble à vos miséricordes, ce que vous avez miséricordieusement commencé; et ce qui vous avez séparés l’un de l’autre dans ce monde, unissez-les à vous pour l’éternité dans le ciel” (166-67); “You have united us, Lord, and you have separated us, when and as it pleased You. Complete today, crowning your mercies, what you have mercifully begun; and what You have

into a spiritual union with God, in some ways an infidelity to their own love, left behind. In any case, the question of whether friendship, or love without physical desire (much less consummation) can constitute an eventual passion sufficient to elicit a truth procedure is one which may necessarily lead beyond Badiou's own account. In any case, let us explore a little further that account and submit it to a test case.

The event of love presents a challenge: "to construct a world from a decentered point of view other than that of my mere impulse to survive or reaffirm my own identity" (Badiou and Truong 25). Indeed, love is "the opportunity we are given" by chance, if at all, "to enjoy a positive, creative, affirmative experience of difference" (66)—but not without work, effort, and sacrifice: Badiou speaks of "the onerous development of a truth that is constructed point by point" (80-81).¹³ Notable is the temporality of the Event—as I said, not necessarily *le coup de foudre* in the case of love or its equivalent in the other domains.¹⁴ The Event and its truth have a strange temporality—in effect, the Event *will have* happened, if it does, in a way to be determined subsequently in fidelity to it. A chance occurrence which will have become necessary or fateful.¹⁵ Likewise in a way staying true to the truth of a given event—point by point—takes one momentarily out of the regular concatenation of banal time into a sort of alternate dimension that exists along with, or rather slightly above, normal time.

O estranho caso da mulher desconhecida / The strange case of the unknown woman

After the successful, early Portuguese historical works, above all *Balthasar and Blimunda* (*Memorial do Convento*), the later Saramago, starting with

separated from each other in this world, unite with You for eternity in heaven." The Two really becomes a three (or a One) in God.

¹³ Point, in Badiou's jargon, is: "a particular moment around which an event establishes itself, where it must be re-played in some way, as if it were returning in a changed, displaced form, but one forcing you 'to declare afresh.' A point, in effect, comes when the consequences of a construction of a truth, whether it be political, amorous, artistic or scientific, suddenly compels you to opt for a radical choice, as if you were back at the beginning" (Badiou and Truong 50).

¹⁴ Although Badiou describes the Event, in general, as "the originary disappearance supplementing the situation for the duration of a lightning flash; situated within it only in so far as nothing of it subsists; and insisting *in truth* precisely in so far as it cannot be repeated as presence" (*Theoretical Writings* 122).

¹⁵ "A truth can be represented only in the future perfect. . . . There is an incommensurability between the finitude of its act and the infinity of its being" (*Theoretical Writings* 114).

Blindness (*Ensaio sobre a Cegueira*), subjected his works to “uma espécie de res-simplificação” (Reis 45; “a sort of simplification”—also figured in the metaphor of “a estátua e a pedra”—the statue and the stone: the early works had concerned themselves with statues; the later works explored the essential depth of the stone [Vieira 692-93]). This new direction, involving allegory and the effacement of Portuguese or Iberian reference, came with a change in intended audience as well, even prior to the Nobel in 1998, as Saramago became a sort of figure of World Literature. As a World Writer, then, his works, I believe, will be judged according to the merits of the late trilogy (*Blindness*, *All the Names*, *The Cave*). I have written elsewhere of the other two,¹⁶ so in this article I would like to focus attention on *All the Names* (*Todos os Nomes*, 1997), an important late work that continues in the new direction established by *Blindness*. In this paper I seek to show how we can understand its power by reference to this theory of the Event formulated by Badiou. Saramago was himself dedicated to a rethinking of community (*The Stone Raft*, *Blindness*, *The Cave* . . .) as well as actively committed to communism and engaged in militant politics throughout his life. While presumably unaware of the particular development in philosophy and theory associated with Badiou, he nonetheless provides a compelling case of the eventual power of love in/as transformation and subjectification.

All the Names is the most Kafkaesque of Saramago’s works in its depiction of “bureaucratic alienation” (182; 210) as well as what can be called the inauthenticity of modern, urban life.¹⁷ Senhor José, a lowly clerk at the Central Registry of Births, Marriages, and Deaths (Conservatória Geral do Registo Civil) of an unspecified country, is notable only for his very insignificance (9; 19), and in Kafkaesque fashion is entirely dedicated to mindless, repetitive copy work.¹⁸ He even lives (again like *Bartleby*) at the Registry, in an adjacent flat that opens onto the main building. When he is addressed by the boss, it is with “authoritarian indifference” (10; 20). Like Gregor Samsa, in all his years of service he has not missed work or come in late (“twenty-five years of dutiful and always punctual service” [38; 51]), so, as in Franz Kafka, his increasing infractions over the course of the story stand out all the more as major transgressions, or indeed “crimes” (e.g. 155; 180).

All the drama of the story originates in Senhor José’s somewhat pathetic hobby of collecting information of famous people, not just documentation from

¹⁶ For example, see Chesney.

¹⁷ In citing the novel I list the page number of the British edition of Margaret Jull Costa’s translation followed by the original Caminho text unless I am stressing the Portuguese.

¹⁸ The book also recalls Herman Melville’s *Bartleby*, especially in Margaret Jull Costa’s choice to translate various expressions as “he would prefer not to” (e.g. 107; “ele não queria pensar nisso” [126]).

the Registry but newspaper clippings and so forth. He does not seem interested in the celebrities individually as such, but more as a collective of notables who live lives of glamour and renown far above the banalities and indignities of small people like himself. In keeping files of these notables, Senhor José has tended to reduce the elite group to a hundred names, but he is beginning to keep files of a second tier, in case of rises or falls of renown (19; 29), when he accidentally collects the file of an unknown (and unnamed) thirty-six-year old divorced woman—a *mulher desconhecida*—the *unknown woman*. It is this completely chance event, trivial as it seems, that constitutes “a iluminação que iria transformar a sua vida” (25; “[the] illumination that would transform his life” [14]). Without knowing why, Senhor José decides to follow up on the random file. “He was pursuing through the confused labyrinth of his unmetaphysical head the trail of motives that had led him to copy out the details from the unknown woman’s card, and he could not find a single one that could have consciously determined that unexpected action” (28-29; 39). Pure chance and un-anticipatable action thus mark the Event, and Senhor José does not so much decide to devote himself to the search, as have the decision foisted on him by . . . fate? “Strictly speaking, we do not make decisions, decisions make us” (31; 42) Saramago writes. And chance becomes fate. *Incipit vita nova*.

Senhor José thus decides to track down the unknown woman, using the birth address as the place to start, and thus begins his Quest.¹⁹ There he is directed to the old lady on the first floor (a *senhora do rés-do-chão*) who turns out to be the godmother of the unknown woman. In order to convince her of the legitimacy of his mission (and reluctant to reveal even to himself his real reasons), Senhor José has forged a letter of authorization from his boss, the tone of which is revelatory of the Kafkaesque situation: it sounds written by “an extremely authoritarian person, with a harsh, inflexible, secretive nature, convinced of the rightness of his own views, scornful of other people’s opinions” (43-44; 57). Besides revealing some personal information (including her affair with the girl’s father), the old lady reveals some wisdom about marriage which, *mutatis mutandis*, sounds exactly like Badiou’s conception of love and the Two (including the gender difference): “There are three people in a marriage, there’s the woman, there’s the man, and there’s what I call the third person, the most important, the person who is composed of the man and the woman together” (50; 63). Unfortunately she had acted as a very different sort of third person in this marriage (adultery), causing the family to move away years earlier.

¹⁹ On the quest and the figure of the labyrinth in Saramago, see Atkin.

Although it is not yet clear what Senhor José hopes to find or what he wants from the unknown woman, the quest itself is of the utmost importance. Saramago writes, “we know that it is the search that gives meaning to any find and that one often has to travel a long way in order to arrive at what is near” (56; 69). Senhor José himself will later explain to the old lady, when asked why he did not simply look up the woman in the phone book or at the tax office: “I preferred to take the longest, most complicated route” (165; 190). While Senhor José asks himself at one point, “What do I want her for, what would I do with her if I met her” (67; 81), this question, following quickly on a lament about his inauthentic life (66; 81), makes clear that in and through her he is seeking precisely a new life, new meaning, and indeed love. This also reveals the void (*le vide*) in his situation prior to the Event that sets his truth, and quest, in motion. The quest continues with the school. Here Saramago stages a dramatic break-in, again stressing the criminal nature of Senhor José’s new life in transgression of his ordinary existence—earlier the labyrinth of the Registry archive (associated with death), now the attic of the school, the dark and danger of the burglary (with, in both cases, mention of Ariadne’s thread). The harvest of this action is the yearly file cards from school with pictures of the girl. The cost is a serious case of influenza, for which Senhor José is consigned to bed for a week.

Eager to continue his investigations (131; 153) upon recovery, Senhor José does not know how to continue. Throughout the novel he engages in ironic conversations with himself or proxies like the ceiling, and in one such conversation he reaches a “feeling of panic provoked by the idea that he would now have nothing further to do in life, if, as he had reason to fear, the search for the unknown woman was over” (137; 159); “e o universo / Reconstruiu-se-me sem ideal nem esperança, e o Dono da Tabacaria sorriu.”²⁰ Soon however a new clue presents itself. The unknown woman’s file is missing from the archive of the living, and Senhor José expects the worst. Indeed the worst happens: it turns out she is dead (139; 162—just over halfway through the book). And yet, as Badiou insists, to be true to the Event of love, one must “Keep going! Keep going even when you have lost the thread, [Ariadne again!] when you no longer feel ‘caught up’ in the process, when the event itself has become obscure” (*Ethics* 79).

Finding her file in the archive of the dead involves another search in the labyrinth. However, this change in affairs curiously makes clearer Senhor José’s duty: “there is no one else in the world interested in the strange case of the un-

²⁰ “and the universe / Falls back into place without ideals or hopes, and the Owner of the Tobacco Shop smiles”—to quote Álvaro de Campos, in Richard Zenith’s translation of Fernando Pessoa, 179.

known woman” (156; 181)—it is his task to attend to her memory.²¹ But then he remembers that there is another who cares: the godmother. So he returns to inform her, but is caught out in his lies (about his official duty to track down the woman) and confesses that in fact his duty is anything but official. Quite to the contrary. The old lady then asks what he will do with his life now that the object of his quest is gone—go back to his collection of famous people (170; 197)? This seems unlikely to be rewarding or even diverting and Senhor José seems deflated, at risk of what Badiou calls the evil of betrayal.²² So she suggests, “since she’s dead, you can go on looking for her, she won’t mind now” (171; 198), thus encouraging Senhor José (and serving as donor or enabler in the quest) to continue in fidelity to the Event despite the apparent futility of the task in the definitive sundering of the (potential) Two. Senhor José feels new-found commitment: “it would be best to take up her idea and begin searching again, only from the opposite direction this time, that is, from death into life” (172; 199). So he resolves on a trip to the cemetery. In the meantime, the Registrar officially announces a change in Registry policy: from now on they will shift the files of living and dead together instead of separating them out and the reader senses a connection between this development and Senhor José’s quest (181; 209)—that is, a personal truth can have transformative effects in the larger world.

The General Cemetery, whose unofficial motto, “All the Names” (188; 217) ought by rights to belong to the Registry of Births *and* Deaths, presents Senhor José with yet another labyrinth and again Ariadne’s thread is mentioned (on a page that also includes a very Borgesian map the size of the territory mapped [194; 224]). He is surprised though to find that the unknown woman is to be found in the section for suicides. At last he manages to find her, his quest seemingly over, “but what he felt inside him seemed more like indecision, doubt, as if, just when he thought he had reached the end of everything, he realised that his search was not yet finished, as if having come here were merely another point on the journey . . .” (202; 233). In any case Saramago adds an-

²¹ This is not unrelated to Walter Benjamin’s speculation on history and redemption in “On the Concept of History,” e.g. “the idea of happiness is indissolubly bound up with the idea of redemption. The same applies to the idea of the past, which is the concern of history. The past carries with it a secret index by which it is referred to redemption” (389-90). While this account resonates more clearly with Saramago’s early historical works—*Levantado, Memorial*—it has an interesting relevance here as well in *All the Names*.

²² “Evil has three names: to believe that an event convokes not the void of the earlier situation, but its plenitude, is Evil in the sense of *simulacrum*, or *terror*; to fail to live up to fidelity is Evil in the sense of *betrayal*, betrayal in oneself of the Immortal that you are; to identify a truth with total power is Evil in the sense of *disaster*” (*Ethics* 71).

other twist. Senhor José decides to spend the night in the cemetery, communing with the unknown woman, and is awoken early by sheep and an old shepherd, a keeper of sheep, who reveals that he changes the numbers on the plots before the suicides are buried, so we do not know which grave is hers (209; 240). Senhor José is outraged—foiled again in his attempt to reach her: “Porque quem ama nunca sabe o que ama / Nem sabe porque ama, nem o que é amar . . .”.²³ But he seems to be convinced by the shepherd’s argument that suicides don’t want to be reached. In any case, in what way did he know the woman, the shepherd asks. “It was precisely because I didn’t know her that I came looking for her” (210; 241), responds Senhor José. Devotion in lack of knowledge; love: “a singular adventure in the quest for truth about difference” (Badiou and Truong 72). The adventure: *la vita nuova*. In fact, another conversation with the ceiling follows where the event is finally named: “Love” (*All the Names* 215; 248). Senhor José seems reluctant to admit it, but he has been faithful all along to the truth procedure of a love, in Badiou’s terms, rising above himself (the “animal [that] gets by as best it can” [*Ethics* 41]) in striving to be the “Immortal” of the situation (15).

The pace speeds up. Senhor José visits the parents of the girl and is given the key of her apartment by her mother. He visits the headmaster of the school, where it turns out the woman worked as a mathematics instructor (apparently the very night he broke into the school and could have found her teacher file was her last night alive) (*All the Names* 154-55; 180). Senhor José returns once again to visit the godmother, but she has been taken away in an ambulance and may herself have passed away. Finally in a sort of a climax, Senhor José visits the apartment of the unknown woman. He looks around her apartment—investigation—as if not quite sure what to look for, but committed nonetheless “to rescue her from the dead world” (236; 271) if only her name. Thus like Orpheus, as like Theseus, Senhor José ventures repeatedly into the labyrinthine depths to try to save her. It is in the dark in her apartment then that a sort of final climax occurs. The telephone rings and is answered by an answering machine and Senhor José finally has contact with the woman, if only her recorded voice stating the banal formula for such devices (238; 272).²⁴ Senhor José entertains the idea of staying the night in the woman’s apartment, but rejects the idea as a sort of

²³ Alberto Caeiro, from *The Keeper of Sheep* (*O Guardador de Rebanhos*): “Because those who love never know what they love / Or why they love, or what love is”—Pessoa translated by Zenith, 48.

²⁴ Manuel Vázquez Montalban notes the presence in the novel of Jorge Luis Borges, Kafka, and, in this last episode, of Samuel Beckett, whose “Krapp’s Last Tape” plays so vividly with the recorded voice and lost (possibility of) love—but Saramago disavows any connection with the apparently unknown Beckett piece (*Último caderno* 52-54).

defilement (or so suggests Saramago's irony, 239; 273).

Instead he returns home/to the Registry, in an attitude of *Gelassenheit*, letting go of his previous life and all of its values and pieties (240; 274)—a man transformed. Badiou speaks of fidelity and consistency: “consistency is the engagement of one’s singularity (the animal ‘some-one’) in the continuation of a subject of truth” (*Ethics* 47), however conflictual its consequences with the *status quo* before the Event. Now, the consequent truth process involves effort as well as passion, but it is marked strangely by a sort of “disinterested interest” (*Ethics* 49). Senhor José’s self-neglect (disinterest) at the same time as committed effort and quest (interest) at precisely this moment show him engaged in the truth process of his Love. The novel then concludes with a sort of surprise ending. It turns out that the Registrar (*o conservador*) has been monitoring Senhor José’s behavior the whole time and has discovered his secret. But rather than demanding his dismissal, the Registrar, as if he had read Saramago’s *História do Cerco de Lisboa* (the *deleatur* is even mentioned on page 15; 25) suggests Senhor José add “Não,” as it were, to the record, to refuse her death. The novel ends back in the labyrinth as Senhor José goes looking for the death certificate to efface it and keep alive her name.

The maxim of Badiou’s ethics: “Keep going! Continue to be this someone, a human animal among others, which nevertheless finds itself *seized* and *displaced* by the eventual process of a truth. Continue to be the active part of that subject of a truth that you have happened to become” (*Ethics* 91). Senhor José stays true to this maxim, absurdly, and presumably benefits from his commitment. He arises out of his everyday inauthenticity and finds meaning for his existence. However, Badiou would probably not count this story as involving an encounter and Event, the Two, fidelity, and a truth procedure. Senhor José never meets the unknown woman and does not begin to form any real Two with her—although the critic Eduardo Lourenço apparently wrote in a review of the novel, “Todos os Nomes é a historia de amor mais intensa da literatura portuguesa de todos os tempos” (qtd. in Saramago, *Cadernos* 194—“*All the Names* is the most intense love story in the history of Portuguese literature”)! My reference earlier to Dante suggests that the truth of Love need involve very little interaction—to say nothing of sex!—to be highly transformative of lives, initiating truths.²⁵ Although I think Badiou’s

²⁵ Although perhaps then not really truths of a Two—rather truths for a one—incidentally a *male* one in most of these examples, as in the Saramago novel. This obviously deserves further exploration. In any case, Saramago elsewhere in his work is much more devoted to developing fully fleshed out (heterosexual) couples that more obviously constitute a Two. On love in Saramago, see Aranda.

model here is instructive despite what the Master might think about its specific employment, perhaps besides Sousa Dias I can mention here the more general—perhaps too general—notion of Peter Sloterdijk of the vertical dimension in ethics, the role of vertical tension in “anthropotechnics” (14, 34, 39)—above all in this context the imperative from art, among other practices, exemplified by Rainer Maria Rilke’s “Archaic Torso of Apollo” (both statue and poem): “Du mußt dein Leben ändern!” (“You must change your life!” [*New Poems* 183]).²⁶ This imperative is not the same thing as in Badiou’s event, to be sure, but it is even more resonant with the chivalric tradition gestured to in the reference to Dante. It also resonates with Sousa Dias’s idea of possibility in excess of the situation. In Saramago’s words this is mixed with the critique of inauthentic existence: “it is only because we live so sunk in ourselves that we don’t notice that what is actually happening to us leaves intact, at every moment, what might happen to us” (*All the Names* 36-37; 48). Hidden possibilities, new potential truths; elevation (sublime) and intensified life.

Saramago and the Event of Art

This leads us back to the notion of the Event and truth but as regards not love but the artwork itself. The artwork, too, can interpellate a subject and found an ethic of truth. However, Badiou’s conception of art and art truth is both frustratingly narrow and excitingly suggestive. His own discussion of what he calls the “Age of the Poets,” from Stéphane Mallarmé and Arthur Rimbaud through Georg Trakl, Osip Mandelstam and Pessoa to Paul Celan,²⁷ is obviously too narrow even as regards poetry proper, and his treatment of prose is

²⁶ Sloterdijk speaks here in terms of the sublime: “Ethics can only be based on the experience of the sublime, today as much as since the beginning of the developments that led to the first ethical secessions. . . . Only the sublime is capable of setting up the overtaking that enables humans to head for the impossible. What people called ‘religion’ was only ever significant as a vehicle of the absolute imperative in its different place- and time-based versions” (444-45). Here Sloterdijk speaks rather casually of the sublime, but on possible resonances of Badiou’s model with the Kantian sublime more rigorously speaking, see Crockett, Ch. 6, e.g.: “The dynamical of the dynamical sublime becomes horizontalized in and as the event in *Being and Event*. Here the event is ecstatic, or stands out from being in a way that retains the shadow of the dynamical sublime even though it is not a transcendental operation” (115).

²⁷ This corresponds effectively to what Jacques Rancière, for his part, calls the “aesthetic regime of the arts,” leading one to suspect that the categorization is a particularly French way of referring to the art, and especially poetry, of Modernity. E.g.: “In the aesthetic regime, artistic phenomena are identified by their adherence to a specific regime of the sensible, which is extricated from its ordinary connections and is inhabited by a heterogeneous power, the power of a form of thought that has become foreign to itself...” (22-23).

even more inadequate—really Beckett is the only one to whom he gives serious attention. What about Kafka, Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, William Faulkner, Borges, Clarice Lispector—to name just some obvious authors from his chosen period? Can these proper names be associated with Events that give rise to truth procedures?

The Age of Poetry is designated as such because it marks a period, actually getting its start with Friedrich Hölderlin, where there is a special relationship between poetry/literature and philosophy/thought. Not that the poets are simply doing the thinking for the philosophers—although there is a suggestion of that, in the midst of nineteenth-century scientific positivism on the one hand and Marxist political thought on the other dominating philosophical thinking (“suturing” it) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—but that the poets require philosophy (notably that of Badiou rather than, say, Martin Heidegger) to explicate their thought in a co-development of truths. Badiou really seems to designate a particular strand within the literary tradition dating from early German Romanticism and culminating in Modernism of a kind of speculative, difficult, “philosophical” poetry which demands explication to be understood—thus quite opposite of the popular tradition of, say, the *Lyrical Ballads* or any conception of poetry as an immediately popular, communicable medium. The Age of the Poets can thus be seen as another name for Modernism of a certain type, but what about other poets (e.g. Victor Hugo, Gerard Manley Hopkins, or T. S. Eliot, that Badiou in fact mentions [*Age* 4])? Can these or many other “strong” poets be associated with this eventual theory of truths?

Rather than pursue that question, I will rather turn my attention to prose as more relevant to the present essay. Badiou devotes little attention to prose (mainly explored very specifically in the Beckett book and the long essay on *Worstward Ho* in *Handbook of Inaesthetics*), but does have some things to say in a piece “What does Literature Think?” from 2005. Badiou explains, literature that thinks “opens up the realm of the particular—subtle psychological insights, social differences and cultural specificities—to the field of knowledge” (*Age* 133). This surely describes a great majority of novels, particularly in the realist tradition—depending on how generous we want to be in understanding the “thinking” involved in exploring the sensuous particular. In doing this, literature—the novel—follows “the maxim of art thought . . . to produce something finite (artificial) to rival the infinite (natural)” (134). This surely can describe many of the great novels of the tradition from Miguel de Cervantes to Leo Tolstoy and can hardly be limited to the Age of the Poets. The novel tames the sheer multiplicity of existence and gives shape and meaning, and in a way that seems to rival the creativeness of nature itself. But it does this in language not

“employed for what it is capable of saying, [but] rather exploited mercilessly for what it has not yet said, or what it has always been reluctant or unable to say” (137)—and here we see a more properly Modernist criterion. Literature explores the particular, gives form and meaning (“produces coherence”), and does so in inventive and challenging language that undermines the simple status quo (“to surprise, to be original” [Badiou and Tarby 86])—either of lived life or of literary tradition. And finally does so with a goal of “elevation.”

Within this conception, then, what would be a literary Event? Not, Badiou stresses, an individual work. The given work is at best merely a point in the Event: “An artwork is a subject point of an artistic truth” (*Handbook* 12). That Event then can be associated with a proper name or with a movement, but neither is quite right.²⁸ In any case, as a point in a possible Event, a great work, like Joyce’s *Ulysses*, then speaks to others (through its particularity, its coherence, and its innovation) and demands some kind of fidelity (and incites elevation). What others? Badiou insists that this is not simply some communication between artists (“ . . . un cri répété par mille sentinelles . . . ”),²⁹ nor some more or less anxious creative influence. The Event demands fidelity and initiates a truth procedure in whoever thinks and rises to the thought of the works involved. This involves “incorporation” (Badiou and Tarby 70)—in the listener, reader, viewer, whose very sensitivity and thought becomes transformed by the encounter with the work. The danger with proper names is idolatry—focus on biography and personality and so forth that are completely irrelevant to the experience of the work itself. Equally fatal are the conservative dangers of canonicity, the deadening of innovation in consecration. So Badiou is keen to suggest that the given creator is a “vanishing cause” (Badiou and Tarby 72) of the work and its truth. What is important is the encounter of individuals with works that inspire transformation and initiate truths: “You must change your life!” In this conception, art really matters, yet is not a tool of conservatism or the reproduction of norms of taste, and so forth. What is at stake is as much an ethics as an aesthetics.

So what about the case of the proper name Saramago? First, for those who already accept the importance of Saramago, who are already engaged by some of his novels, we might seek to add *All the Names* to his canon as an impressive late achievement in exploring the theme of love and transformation, long prominent

²⁸ “The proper name intervenes here as a substitute: it testifies to the fact that one doesn’t exactly know what can be said about the subject. For the subject is the process of the works themselves” (Badiou and Tarby 73).

²⁹ Charles Baudelaire, “Les Phares,” 13; “a cry repeated by a thousand sentries.”

in his work: a salient point in the Event Saramago. But more generally we might take into consideration the stylistic and ethico-political achievement of Saramago's work as a whole: his unusual punctuation and oral style, his ironic tone, his occasional forays into magical realism, his non-socialist-realist political engagement and celebration of the common man and woman; his detailed exploration of particularity—historical in the earlier works, existential in the later ones; and finally his allegorical exploration of philosophical and ethical issues: the *thinking* of his novels.³⁰ *All the Names* takes its place in the Event Saramago, then, precisely as elaborating an eventual ethics (of love) and adding a new dimension to Saramago's project of exploring forms of solidarity and community and attendant values of care, resistance, effort, and love. I believe there is every reason to consider Saramago an Event in the history of the novel (certainly in the Portuguese or Lusophone novel), one to which we should continue to attend. But then an Event is not really something one can advocate. It occurs or it does not—and its continuance, its truth, is up to the individual reader. But we critics and teachers can at least try to assist in fidelity to the work's truth and hope others will become encompassed in it.³¹

³⁰ For a comprehensive overview of Saramago's style and innovations, see Amorim, Ch. 1.

³¹ "We must conceive of truth as both the construction of a fidelity to an event, and as the generic potency of a transformation of a domain of knowledge" (Badiou, *Infinite* 43). Badiou has always been concerned with the role of philosophy vis-à-vis truths and their conditions. The role and function of literary criticism is a somewhat different affair, but I certainly conceive of the critic as both a curator of knowledge and a servant of truths.

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《所有的名字》與愛的事件

摘要

在本文中我將以阿蘭·巴迪歐的事件理論，以及愛與藝術之事件產生的真理程序 (truth procedures)，來重讀喬賽·薩拉馬戈的小說《所有的名字》(All the Names)。文中將觸及西方傳統裡許多著名的愛情案例，探討薩拉馬戈的小說如何以喬賽先生為例，呈現其經歷了偶然相遇之事件，逐步體現、宣示忠誠，並持續過渡至某種愛的真理之建構，最後再以討論小說傳統中的薩拉馬戈事件作為總結。巴迪歐的理論讓我們能以不同的角度檢視這部晚期薩拉馬戈的作品，並且啟發了重新評價其小說成就之可能。

關鍵字：薩拉馬戈、巴迪歐、愛、事件、蘇薩·迪亞斯