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Krista Brune

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Accumulating Literary Prestige in the Careers of Chico Buarque and Silviano Santiago

*Acumular prestígio literário nas carreiras de Chico Buarque e Silviano
Santiago*

Krista Brune

<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-1771-2584>

Pennsylvania State University, University Park PA, USA.

E-mail: kbrune@psu.edu

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ABSTRACT

This article studies the careers of Brazilian writers Chico Buarque and Silviano Santiago as recipients of the Camões and Oceanos prizes to better understand the dynamics of literary

prestige in Portuguese. While both honor writers throughout the Portuguese-speaking world, the prizes differ slightly in scope with the Camões deemed the most prestigious recognition of a living author's lifetime achievement, and the Oceanos awarding the best books published each year. By analyzing the Oceanos-winning texts by Buarque and Santiago as part of their overall corpus, this article identifies a shared interest in how the circulation of people, ideas, and objects can transform ideas of national culture and identity. Lived experiences of the “space in-between” have resulted in thematic affinities that contribute to the visibility and circulation of their literary texts among a broader Portuguese-language readership, which, in turn, helps to accumulate literary prestige.

KEYWORDS: Chico Buarque; Silviano Santiago; literary awards; space in-between

RESUMO

Este artigo estuda as carreiras dos escritores brasileiros Chico Buarque e Silviano Santiago como recipientes dos prêmios Camões e Oceanos para entender melhor as dinâmicas de prestígio literário em português. Enquanto os dois reconhecem escritores do mundo lusófono inteiro, os prêmios diferem levemente em alcance: o Camões, considerado o prêmio mais prestigioso, comemora um escritor vivo pelo conjunto da obra e o Oceanos concede prêmios aos melhores livros publicados cada ano. Ao analisar os textos consagrados pelo prêmio Oceanos de Buarque e Santiago como parte de sua obra, o artigo identifica um interesse compartilhado em como a circulação de pessoas, ideias e objetos podem transformar ideias de cultura e identidade nacional. As experiências vividas do “entre-lugar” resultaram em afinidades temáticas que contribuem à visibilidade e circulação de seus textos literários dentro de um público leitor de língua portuguesa mais amplo, o que, por sua vez, ajuda a acumular prestígio literário.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Chico Buarque; Silviano Santiago; prêmios literários, o entre-lugar

In recent decades, Portuguese-language literary awards have proliferated to garner real and symbolic capital to authors, texts, and publishers. Within this vast landscape of literary recognition, the Camões and Oceanos Prizes stand apart for being open to writers from throughout the CPLP (Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa). The Camões Prize recognizes living authors' lifetime contributions to literary and cultural heritage in Portuguese. The Oceanos Prize celebrates the best books published each year. Both prizes strive to honor diversity in terms of nationality, gender, race, and literary style, yet the juries and governing boards inevitably encounter difficulties when assessing writers and texts from diverse nations and communities that speak Portuguese. Despite the awards' similar objectives, only two writers—Brazilians Chico Buarque and Silviano Santiago—have received both prizes. To better understand the dynamics of literary prize culture, this

article will analyze the careers of Buarque and Santiago with close attention to the points of connection and divergence between their literary works and trajectories.

Recipients of the Camões Prize in 2019 and 2022, respectively, Chico Buarque (b. 1946) and Silviano Santiago (b. 1936) are among the most celebrated names in contemporary Brazilian literature, even though their literary work is only one facet of their careers. Buarque is best known as a singer, songwriter, and composer whose songbook has accompanied key moments in Brazilian history and culture since the 1960s. Santiago is one of Brazil's most astute critics and theorists whose concepts of the "space in-between" (2000, p. 9-26) and the "cosmopolitanism of the poor" (2004, p. 45-63) are indispensable to understandings of Brazilian and Latin American literature and culture. Both have combined the writing of literature with other critical and creative practices. In 1978, Santiago published the poetry collection, *Crescendo durante a guerra numa província ultramarina*, and his iconic volume, *Uma literatura nos trópicos: ensaios sobre dependência cultural*. Santiago has since shifted between publishing fictional narratives—including *Em liberdade: uma ficção* (1981), *Stella Manhattan* (1985), *Histórias mal contadas: contos* (2005) and *Machado* (2016)—and critical essays like *O cosmopolitismo do pobre* (2004), *As raízes e o labirinto da América Latina* (2006), and *Graças de vida—a morte* (2023). In a similar mode, Buarque's literary works have alternated with the release of musical albums. He followed his debut novel, *Estorvo* (1991), with the 1993 album *Paratodos* before returning to literature with *Benjamim* in 1995, the same year as the album *Uma palavra*. Since 2000, Buarque has increasingly dedicated himself to literature by publishing five novels and a short story collection, while only releasing three full-length albums of new songs.

The parallels between Santiago and Buarque extend beyond the multi-faceted nature of their careers and their accumulation of prestige. Notably, both writers lived abroad during formative moments: Buarque spent part of his childhood in Rome during his father's professorship there in the 1950s and then lived in self-imposed exile in Italy in the late 1960s, while Santiago studied at the Sorbonne in the late 1950s and early 1960s before moving to the United States in 1962, where he worked as a professor at the University of New Mexico, Rutgers University, and SUNY Buffalo, and, in Canada, at the University of

Toronto before returning to Brazil in 1972. This time in Europe and North America contributed to their cosmopolitan outlooks and familiarity with displacement as a lived experience. As a result, their writings often interrogate how the circulation of people, ideas, and objects can transform understandings of national culture and identity. These themes grant Buarque and Santiago more visibility and recognition among a broad Portuguese-language readership, which, in turn, facilitates the accrual of literary prestige.

The authors approach these topics through distinct styles, however, with Santiago's prose often inflected with metafictional asides that rehearse his theoretical concepts. Buarque constructs more accessible narratives, even though a similar concern with the relationship of the author to narrators and characters recurs in his work. These stylistic differences contribute, in part, to their varied success in translation, with Buarque's novels more widely translated than Santiago's books. Both accumulate literary prestige via critical reception, scholarly attention, and the awards circuit. Examining their success in these venues can contribute to our understanding of the dynamics of literary prize culture in the Lusophone context. To set the stage for this analysis, I offer an overview of literary awards in Portuguese with a focus on the Camões Prize and the Portugal Telecom/Oceanos Prize. I then highlight the success of Buarque and Santiago in this prize economy before addressing why their literary narratives might have garnered this recognition. Through a comparative analysis of key entries in their oeuvre, I suggest that their interest in how writers constitute themselves, their narrators, and their characters via language foregrounds the written word in a way that connects with arbiters of literary prestige.

I. LITERARY PRIZE CULTURE IN PORTUGUESE

Literary prize culture in Portuguese illuminates the contradictions and complexities of comparatively evaluating global Portuguese literatures. The Camões and Oceanos Prizes propagate what James F. English terms "the economy of prestige" in his study of the proliferation of literary prizes since 1900. As English documents, discourses of economics with their "rhetorics of calculation, invoking fine points of balance, fairness, obligation, and debt" dominate discussions internal to prize committees and external among a broader public (2005, p. 7). By viewing prizes as an integral part of the cultural economy whereby

certain literary works accrue more value via acts of consecration, English surmises that “the prize functions as a claim to authority and an assertion of that authority—the authority, at bottom, to produce cultural value. It provides an institutional basis for exercising control over the cultural economy, over the distribution of esteem and reward on a particular cultural field—over what may be recognized as worthy of special notice” (2005, p. 51). For English, this value is primarily symbolic, yet it has economic potential given the accumulative nature of both cultural and financial capital in the global literary market.

The Camões and Oceanos Prizes are critical to the symbolic and economic value of literature written in Portuguese. The two prizes share a multinational approach in their commitment to literary excellence, but their aims differ slightly. Awarded annually since 1988, the Camões Prize recognizes lifetime achievement of a living Portuguese-language author. Akin to a Lusophone Nobel Prize for Literature, the Camões Prize is considered the most prestigious Portuguese-language literary award. Beginning in 2002, the prize’s annual jury has consisted of six members: two from Portugal, two from Brazil, and two from the remaining CPLP members (Angola, Cape Verde, East Timor, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and São Tomé and Príncipe). The honored writer receives a prize of 100,000 euro, co-funded by Brazil’s National Library Foundation and Portugal’s General Direction of Books, Archives, and Libraries (Prémio Camões, n.p.). The Camões Prize is thus best understood as a political project created by two nation-states invested in fostering cultural connections. As Ellen W. Sapega explains, “it was necessary to invent a ‘post-imperial’ Camões, capable of representing a new policy of cooperation in the Lusophone space” (2016, p. 27).¹ Luís de Camões (1524-1580) was a product of early modern Portuguese imperialism with his 1572 epic *Os Lusíadas* depicting Vasco de Gama’s voyage to India, yet he remains the most celebrated literary figure of the Portuguese-speaking world with prominent prizes and institutes bearing his name. The namesake prize plays a critical role in constructing literary networks in Portuguese by promoting writers and facilitating the circulation of their works. In the process, the prize reveals the linguistic legacies of imperialism by excluding Portuguese-based creoles and other languages spoken

¹ All translations from Portuguese into English are mine, unless otherwise noted.

in the CPLP to restrict eligibility to Portuguese-language writers while, at the same time, striving to promote a future of linguistic and cultural collaboration.

The Oceanos Prize is less explicitly inflected by politics as it is administered by a non-governmental organization. It is worth remembering, however, that literary prestige is generally politicized, as Sarah E. Bowskill asserts in her astute study of prizes and Spanish American literature (2022, p. 1-7). Even when not sponsored directly by the state, prizes function within a politicized literary field marked by hierarchies of nations, regions, and publishers. As a result, a prize like the Oceanos must navigate an uneven landscape of symbolic and material value. Akin to the Booker Prize, which engages implicitly in forms of postcolonial and postimperial politics to honor English-language books published in the United Kingdom (Strongman, 2002), the Oceanos recognizes books published in Portuguese in a specific year from diverse contexts. Created in 2003 by Luso-Brazilian telecommunications company Portugal Telecom to honor Brazilian literature, the prize expanded its eligibility in 2007 to all literature written in Portuguese and, relatedly, updated its name to the Portugal Telecom Prize for Literature in the Portuguese Language. The prize updated its regulations to require that at least twenty percent of its semifinalists and finalists be Portuguese and African books published in Brazil. The submission process became more democratic as authors and editors could register their own books for the prize.

In 2015, the prize changed its name to Oceanos with Banco Itaú its primary funding source, providing 300,000 reais to be split among the recipients. Ironically, as Rui Miranda notes, “the Oceanos Prize definitively embraces Lusofonia at the moment that the Luso-Brazilian multinational [Portugal Telecom] ... falls apart” (2016, p. 204). Currently, Brazil’s Rouanet Law, officially the Federal Law of Incentives for Culture, facilitates Itaú’s investment by offering tax incentives to invest in literature and the arts. To ensure an ethos of transnational collaboration, Oceanos has developed partnerships over the past decade with Portugal’s General Direction of Books, Archives, and Libraries; Cape Verde’s Ministry of Culture and Creative Industries and the CPLP; and Mozambique’s Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Bibliographic Fund for the Portuguese Language (Oceanos História, n.p.). The prize is independently managed by Oceanos Cultura, a Brazilian organization

established in 1996 with the aim of valorizing and disseminating cultural works from Portuguese-speaking countries.

II. THE SUCCESS OF BUARQUE AND SANTIAGO WITHIN PRIZE CULTURE

Despite the similar objectives of these awards, only two writers—Buarque, and Santiago—have received both the Camões Prize and the top Oceanos honor. To date, the Camões Prize has recognized the lifetime achievement of thirty-eight writers, primarily from Brazil (fifteen) and Portugal (fifteen), but also from Angola (three), Mozambique (three) and Cape Verde (two). The Brazilians recognized by both awards had accrued prestige via other honors prior to receiving the Camões Prize as the pinnacle of their literary achievement. Santiago won the Oceanos Prize in 2015 and 2017 for his novels *Mil rosas roubadas* (2014) and *Machado* (2016), respectively, and Buarque received the honor in 2010 for his 2009 novel *Leite derramado*. The Oceanos Prize serves as an apt antecedent to the Camões given that both awards are open to Portuguese-language writers from any part of the Lusophone world. Submitted books and nominated writers are evaluated annually by juries of writers, critics, professors, and journalists from Brazil, Portugal, and Lusophone Africa. Some overlap exists between the jury members, with Portuguese critic Ana Mafalda Leite, Angolan poet and 2025 Camões recipient Ana Paula Tavares, and São Tomé’s scholar Inocência Mata, among others, judging both prizes.

While structural parallels exist between the two awards, criteria for selection differ slightly. Per the protocol establishing the bilateral agreement, the Camões Prize seeks “to consecrate annually a Portuguese-language author who, through the intrinsic value of their work, has contributed to the enrichment of the literary and cultural heritage of our shared language” (Prémio Camões, n.p.). The Oceanos website emphasizes its selection process, rather than the qualities of the celebrated works, to define it as “a transnational prize, with a democratic and representative structure in its dynamics of selection and evaluation, counting on curators of different nationalities and a body of jurors composed by specialists from Africa, Brazil, and Portugal” (Oceanos História, n.p.). Both prizes embrace a transnational vision of literary works in Portuguese, even as the Camões Prize cultivates an image of prestige that contrasts with the democratic ethos of the Oceanos.

The fact that both the Camões and the Oceanos have honored Buarque and Santiago for their literary contributions speaks to the writers' prominence in the Portuguese-language literary field. These prestigious awards are the culmination of the authors' decades-long accumulation of prizes. Buarque received musical recognitions in the 1960s and the 2000s as the winner of the 1966 and 1968 Festival of Popular Brazilian Music (MPB) and the 2002 Latin Grammy for Best MPB Album for *Cambaio* in collaboration with Edu Lobo, theatrical prizes in the 1970s (Molière Prize for Theater for best playwright in 1976, with Paulo Pontes, for *Gota d'água* and in 1979, for *Ópera do malandro*), and literary prizes since the 1990s (Jabuti Prizes in 1992 for his debut *Estorvo*, 2004 for *Budapeste*, and 2010 for *Leite derramado*; the 2013 José María Arguedas Prize for Narrative, awarded by the Casa de las Américas, for *Leche derramada*; the 2014 Paulista Association of Art Critics Prize for *O irmão alemão*; and the 2016 Roger Coillos Prize for a Latin American author, granted by the PEN France and the Maison de l'Amérique Latine). Buarque was also inducted into Portugal's Order of Infante Dom Henrique in 1996 for his contributions to expanding knowledge about Portugal, its history, and its values (Ordens Honoríficas Portuguesas, n.p.). These honors are indicative of Buarque's unique career as a musician, playwright, and novelist whose experiences living, traveling, and performing abroad have contributed to his visibility in Brazil, Latin America, and Europe.

While not as widely recognizable as Buarque, Santiago has gained renown in literary and academic circles in Brazil, the Americas, and Europe for his work as a scholar, essayist, and novelist. He accrued literary prestige as the recipient of Jabuti Prizes in 1982 for *Em liberdade*, 1993 for *Uma história de família*, and 2017 for *Machado*; the Mário de Andrade Prize in 2005, an honor granted by the Brazilian National Library for his literary essay *O cosmopolitismo do pobre*; and the 2013 Machado de Assis Prize, awarded by the Brazilian Academy of Letters. Beyond the Lusophone context, Santiago won the José Donoso Prize for Ibero-American Letters in 2014. He is the only Brazilian to have received this Chilean prize in its twenty-five-year history. This litany of prizes exemplifies the accumulative dynamics of literary and cultural prestige at play in the trajectories of Buarque and Santiago. Not only do prizes beget prizes; they also generate press and heightened interest in the work. Increased visibility can thus result in new editions of books, translations into

various languages, and renewed scholarly attention to their work. Editorial, marketing, and criticism in concert elevate these writers to the pinnacle of literary prestige in Portuguese: the Camões Prize.

When selecting Buarque and Santiago as recipients of the Camões Prize, the juries underscored the diversity of their artistic and intellectual careers. The jury praised Buarque for his “contribution to the cultural formation of different generations in every country where Portuguese is spoken” given the “multifaceted character” of his music, poetry, theater, and novels, noting that “his work crossed borders and remains a fundamental reference in contemporary world culture” (Meireles, 2019, n.p.). In the case of Santiago, the jury similarly extolled his versatility: “besides a writer of literary works with various national and international prizes ..., he is a thinker capable of a civic and cultural intervention of great relevance, with a notable contribution to the projection of the Portuguese language as a language of critical thought, in Brazil and outside of it (in Ibero-American and African countries, the United States, and Europe)” (DGLAB, 2022, n.p.). In the juries’ assessments, the diversity of their artistic and intellectual careers—which span genres, media, and languages to reach a broad public—contributes to their visibility in Brazil, the Portuguese-speaking world, and beyond.

The bio-bibliographic descriptions for a commemorative exhibit of Camões recipients curated by Portugal’s General Directorate of Books, Archives, and Libraries (DGLAB, in its Portuguese acronym) further emphasize the connections between their lived experiences and their artistic and intellectual work. Their time abroad features prominently in both biographies: Buarque’s childhood years in Rome and his subsequent self-exile to Italy emerge as formative moments for the cosmopolitan and politically engaged artist. Santiago’s doctoral studies in France and his academic career at universities in the United States and Canada inform his perceptive writing about Brazil and Latin America. In synthesizing these writers’ merits, this exhibit returns to the variety of their literary and cultural contributions and the reverberations of their works with a wide public. For Buarque, the bio-bibliography surmises, “Writer and performer of live poetry, the humanist sensibility of his songs and his prose express the recent history of Brazil” (DGLAB, 2026, p. 34). The text does not elaborate on the content of his songs given their prominence

within the collective songbook in Portuguese; instead, it stresses the range of his work and the fact that literary production has been a constant in his career. The entry for Santiago, in contrast, provides more details about his critical and creative works to help to communicate their importance to a wider audience beyond the academic and literary circles most familiar with his work. Praised as “one of the most relevant contemporary thinkers of Brazil and Latin America, in the realm of cultural and postcolonial studies, and one of the most distinguished essayists of contemporary Brazilian literature,” Santiago is, moreover, the “author of works that dissolve the border between essay, novel, and biography... and of avant-garde fictions,” leading to their summation that “his pioneering work marked the last decades of Brazilian literature” (DGLAB, 2026, p. 37). The exhibit frames Buarque and Santiago as worthy recipients of the Camões Prize given the insights that their writings offer to Brazilian history, culture, and contemporary society.

When accepting their prizes, Buarque and Santiago expressed a similar sentiment by referencing the current political context and situating their trajectories in relationship to a broader sweep of Brazilian history. The ceremonies granting Buarque and Santiago their Camões Prize both occurred in 2023, even though they had received the honor in 2019 and 2022, respectively. Former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro refused to sign Buarque’s certificate, so the prize could only be given to him four years later after Lula’s election since the document must be signed by the Portuguese and the Brazilian heads-of-state. During the April 24, 2023 ceremony in Lisbon, Buarque acknowledged this politically motivated delay, joking that “it comforts me to remember that the ex-president had a rare politeness in not dirtying the diploma of my Camões Prize, leaving his space blank for the signature of our president Lula” (2023, n.p.). Despite the celebratory moment of Bolsonaro’s electoral loss, he recognized the continued dangers in our global political landscape: “That government was defeated at the polls, but we can’t even distract ourselves with this, since the fascist threat persists in Brazil as well as all around” (Buarque, 2023, n.p.). Speaking about seven months later, Santiago addressed this political context by considering what it meant for him to win the Camões Prize in the second half of 2022. During his November 14, 2023, speech in Rio de Janeiro, Santiago observed, “At the end of the year 2022, the election results brought respite. It brought back to the Brazilian people

the possibility of realizing every day the hope and dream of a more egalitarian and solidary nation. The meticulous reconstruction of a South American country in danger of disappearing into the chaos was urgent” (Santiago, 2023, n.p.).

The instability of the political moment led both Buarque and Santiago to reflect in their Camões speeches on the meaning of Brazil and the role of its literature. Buarque framed Brazil’s diversity in personal terms, quoting lyrics from his 1993 song “Paratodos” (“O meu pai era paulista, meu avô, pernambucano, meu bisavô, mineiro, meu tataravô, baiano”) before explaining that “I have Black and Indigenous ancestors, whose names my white ancestors tried to suppress in the familial history. Like the vast majority of Brazilian people, I carry in my veins blood of the whipped and of the whipper” (2023, n.p.). Further linking his genealogy to Luso-Brazilian history, Buarque mentioned his paternal Jewish ancestors who, as Portuguese New Christians, sought exile in northeastern Brazil during the sixteenth century, a personal anecdote that betrays the forms of violence and oppression that have constituted Brazil’s past and present. Santiago, in contrast, opted to describe this history of violence and diversity in terms of Brazil’s geography and literature: “I step again on my native land, and I cast my eyes toward the immensity of Brazil, enriched to the north by the abundant waters of the Amazon and bathed to the east by the Atlantic Ocean. I don’t ask, I affirm that the time has come to open up Brazilian literature to the Amazonian waters and the African Atlantics and to all the diasporic currents” (2023, n.p.). Santiago gestured toward a more diverse literary future of Brazil as a correction for the centuries of limited citizenship and racialized hierarchies that perpetuated the nation’s colonial underpinnings.

Buarque and Santiago combined their political and historical commentaries with a topic more expected of a Camões acceptance speech: a reverence for literature in Portuguese and writers who have come before them. Both praised prominent Brazilian writers from the twentieth century, with Buarque recalling that he inherited “some books and love for the Portuguese language” from his father, historian and sociologist Sérgio Buarque de Hollanda, composed the musical accompaniment to João Cabral de Melo Neto’s poem *Morte e vida severina*, and received guidance from his literary “godfathers” Rubem Fonseca, Raduan Nassar, and José Saramago (2023, n.p.). With a blend of admiration and comradeship for his fellow Camões recipients, Buarque situated himself—

despite being better known as musician—as belonging to this literary community, either as a friend or reader of award-winning writers from Brazil, Portugal, Angola, Mozambique, and Cape Verde. By delineating the native countries of writers who have received the prize, Buarque commemorated the prize’s coverage to date while also acknowledging that some parts of the Lusophone world remained overlooked by the prize.

Santiago likewise reflected on the award’s significance, especially since he had dedicated his career to teaching literature at the university level with his criticism and fiction secondary—but complementary—pursuits. Given his background, it is not surprising that Santiago cited the opening line of Arthur Rimbaud’s prose poem *Une saison en enfer*—“Un soir, j’ai assis la Beauté sur mes genoux. –Et je l’ai trouvée amère” (Rimbaud, 1873, 3)—and pondered how this feeling of bitter beauty reverberated with his experiences as a Brazilian writer and literary scholar. His broader reflection opened with a condemnation of “one of the best received and most unjust civilizations implanted in the South by the West” before noting that “in national history, a muzzled scream of anguish was heard. Centuries of suffering demand an urgent reparation today” (Santiago, 2023, n.p.). For Santiago, this generational restitution must occur in the literary realm as well: “the Brazilian literature that I expressed, and that I continue to express, in Portuguese is about to pass through seismic shocks that will be lasting. They were desired and awaited. Now, they are demanded and made real” (Santiago, 2023, n.p.). Speaking from “the infinite immensity of this *now*” (2023, n.p.), Santiago concluded his speech by dedicating his prize to Brazilian writer, critic, and musicologist Mário de Andrade who, eighty years earlier, offered a similarly personal reflection on the limitations of a literary career.²

Neither Buarque nor Santiago commented extensively on the thematics and stylistics of their creative work in their Camões speech, an absence that is perhaps telling. Their visibility in Brazil and beyond does not solely depend on the reception of their narratives; their presence as public figures and the related interest of readers in differentiating the fictional from the biographical or the historical contributes to their literary recognition and

² It is worth noting that this affinity between Santiago and Andrade has been observed by other critics. For instance, Lucia Helena ends her 1992 interview with Santiago by noting that “you seem to me to occupy today a place left vacant by Mário de Andrade: that of thinking, with rare density, about the problems of our literature, our society and their articulations with the international social and theoretical panorama” (p. 96).

fame. In referencing prominent Brazilian, Portuguese, and French writers, both speeches provide insight into the personal libraries and varied influences in the formation of Buarque and Santiago as writers and thinkers. The question remains, however, whether an aesthetic motivation or rationale for their success as prize-winning authors exists, which I will explore further in the next section.

III. TOWARD AN AESTHETICS OF LITERARY PRESTIGE

While success in an economy of literary prestige is a key commonality between Buarque and Santiago, similarities also emerge in their subjects, thematic concerns, and, to a more limited extent, stylistic approaches. Both interrogate what it means to be a Brazilian writer in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries via an exploration of shared themes of displacement, personal and collective memories, and the porous borders between history, biography, and fiction. In what remains of this article, I will concentrate on these affinities between Buarque and Santiago to consider how their works offer insight into the current state of Brazilian literature and its global visibility via, primarily, translation.

Both writers began their literary careers in the 1960s and 1970s, with Buarque penning the plays *Roda-viva* (1968), *Calabar: o elogio da traição* (1973) with Ruy Guerra, *Gota d'Água* (1975) with Paulo Pontes, and *Ópera do malandro* (1978); and Santiago authoring the poetry collections *Salto* (1970) and *Crescendo durante a guerra numa província ultramarina* (1978), the short stories in *O banquete* (1970), and the novel *O olhar* (1974). At first, these literary endeavors were secondary to their more established careers as a musician for Buarque and as a literary critic, theorist, and professor for Santiago. As they pursued their professional paths, they performed, taught, and otherwise shared their work in Brazil and abroad, which invited them to reflect on the place of Brazil in the world. Buarque spent part of his childhood in Rome and returned there to live in self-imposed exile from 1971 to 1972 and traveled to Cuba in 1978, which led to him being detained and questioned by the military police upon his return to Rio (Cardoso, 2024, p. 28-35). Santiago similarly spent years of the military dictatorship living abroad as he completed his doctoral studies at the Sorbonne and taught in the United States and Canada prior to returning to Brazil in 1972 (Barile, 2025, p. 189-199). Both writers drew on experiences abroad in later

narratives with autofictional gestures, namely, Buarque's *Bambino a Roma: Ficção* (2024) and Santiago's *Histórias mal contadas* (2005).

This tendency to mine the personal, however, was evident even in their earliest literary publications. Buarque's first play, the musical *Roda-viva*, comments on the vicious cycles of celebrity via the trajectory of Benedito Silva, who introduces himself as "idol and king ... absolute artist, magnificent singer and leading actor" (1968, p. 16). Guided by his manager and "guardian angel," Benedito becomes Ben Silver, a pop star engineered for the television market until backlash from overexposure and excessive commercialization results in another reinvention as folk singer Benedito Lampião before his eventual death. Buarque's rise to fame through the televised music festival circuit helped to inspire the fictional Benedito, but, as Vinicius de Moraes clarified in his preface to the play: "It isn't, literally, his experience, but it also doesn't stop from being it" (1968, p. 9). The play explores concerns—fame, fandom, "selling out", and circulation in global markets—that will emerge as recurring themes throughout Buarque's career.

A decade later, Santiago transformed his experiences of growing up in the interior of Minas Gerais during World War II into his 1978 poetry collection. The poems blend childhood memories with headlines and excerpted news articles about the war and its consequences for the daily economic realities of cities in the Americas, including New York, Buenos Aires, and São Paulo. The poems filter this interest in current events through the lens of comics, which offered the poetic voice—a young Santiago—a simplistic lens to understand the world in terms of good versus evil that justified violence against one's enemies. By integrating quotations from news articles and archival sources alongside allusions to comic book heroes like Batman and Superman into his poems, Santiago crafted a collage aesthetic that anticipated the narrative experiments and metafictional gestures in his subsequent narratives. Moreover, the poems suggest that Santiago's childhood would be a fruitful topic for subsequent narratives, including his 2004 picaresque novel *O falso mentiroso: memórias*—with its hints at autobiographical inspiration for the narrator Samuel—and his 2021 autobiographical narrative *Menino sem passado*.

As Santiago and Buarque deepened their investments in literature in the 1980s and 1990s, respectively, they did not abandon their other professional pursuits. Writing novels

and short stories became yet another component of their multifaceted intellectual and artistic career. For Santiago, this turn toward the literary allowed him to engage further—via metafictional asides and narrative experiments—with theoretical questions about the author’s role and the relationship of the original to the copy and the real to the fictional. During the 1970s, Santiago considered these topics in dialogue with the poststructuralist ideas of French philosophers Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, among others, as he theorized “the space in-between” of Latin American discourse and commented more generally on the state of Brazilian literature in the essays of *Uma literatura nos trópicos* (1978) and helped to synthesize Derrida’s complex ideas for a Brazilian readership via the *Glossário de Derrida* (1976). His narratives in the early 1970s—the short story collection *O banquete* and the novel *O olhar*—experimented with different forms of literary self-representation. The unnamed first-person narrator of “Futebol americano” in *O banquete* is a Portuguese-speaking Brazilian whose memories of a former love interest in Albuquerque and on the road to El Paso likely parallel Santiago’s own experiences (Santiago, 1970, p. 47-57), which he returned to in the stories of his 2005 collection. The self-reflective narrative style and themes of familial dynamics and childhood without defined plot developments in *O olhar* suggest, as Affonso Romano de Sant’Anna posited in his book jacket blurb, a literary work informed by the French *nouveau roman*.

With his 1981 novel *Em liberdade: uma ficção*, Santiago addressed the topic of authorship more directly by crafting Graciliano Ramos’s fictionalized diary of freedom following the author’s 1936 incarceration as documented in the posthumous work *Memórias do cárcere* (1954). By featuring a real-life writer as his fictional protagonist and first-person narrator in the format of a diary, Santiago began to blur the boundaries between character, narrator, and author. In an interview with Lucia Helena from the early 1990s, Santiago explained, “In my way of seeing it, *Em liberdade* goes beyond the mere fiction (poetry)/essay relation. It was (or it is) an attempt at limit-prose” (Helena, 1992, p. 90). In his formulation, the limit-prose of *Em liberdade* has “a tripartite result: the deception in the biography, the factual in the fiction, the subject in the critical theory. The result was a false intimate diary, whose author would be a certain ... Gracilviano” (Helena, 1992, p. 90). The book’s subtitle of “a fiction” underscores its fictionality and literariness while drawing

attention to its metatextual experiments; as Santiago later commented, he had made a postmodern work without realizing it (Helen, 1992, p. 91). Santiago further emphasizes the novel's fictionality in a 2022 interview where he positions *Em liberdade* as the first in a trilogy of writer's fictionalized biographies, with the 1993 book *Viagem ao México* and the more recent *Machado* imagining the lives of Antonin Artaud and Machado de Assis, respectively (Barile, 2022, n.p.). By exploring the relationship between authors' physical—and thus mortal—bodies and their works, which continue to circulate as new generations of readers discover their texts, these biographical fictions rethink the dynamics between work and life. With this playful interrogation of the porous borders between the real and the fictional when constructing biographical narratives, Santiago offers a literary meditation on the theoretical concerns of poststructuralists and postmodernists.

Although not a part of this trilogy of authors' biographies, his 1985 novel *Stella Manhattan* offers another approach to the dynamics of protagonist, narrator, and writer through the postmodern insertion of the narrator as a separate section—"Beginning: The Narrator"—following the first part. Published explicitly as a "novel" with the word emblazoned on the front cover and title page, the book nevertheless resonates with elements of Santiago's biography given that the protagonist Eduardo da Costa e Silva/Stella Manhattan resides in New York in the late 1960s, a moment when the author frequented the city while working at Rutgers and SUNY Buffalo.³ The stories in his 1996 volume, *Keith Jarrett no Blue Note: (Improvisos de jazz)*, similarly draw inspiration from Santiago's years in university towns in the United States to narrate tales of queer romance inflected with the improvisational rhythms of jazz, yet he does not frame these stories as works of autofiction. Santiago's inquiry into the blurred boundaries of the real and the fictional extends to his own life most clearly in the 2005 collection *Histórias mal contadas*, which fictionalizes experiences from his time in the United States during the 1960s. In her study of autofiction in Brazil, Luciana Hidalgo considers Santiago as a pioneer in Brazilian literature for identifying this book a work of autofiction in a 2007 lecture:

³ In the 2017 essay "Hélio Oiticica in Manhattan," Santiago reflects on the cultural milieu of Manhattan in the late 1960s and early 1970s by describing his encounters with Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica, who was self-exiled in New York and living in an East Village loft apt for artistic experimentation and collaboration.

To avoid misunderstandings, I affirm that in no moment of the remote past did I use the category of *autofiction* to classify the hybrid texts written and published by me. When I could, I avoided the word *novel*... Finally, I'll add that I was happily surprised when I came across the information that Serge Doubrovsky, French critic based in the United States, had coined, in 1977, the neologism *autofiction*... In sum, I came to use as mine the later and foreign category of autofiction. (Hidalgo, 2013, p. 220)

As Santiago surmises, his earlier works had explored topics common in autofiction as an expression of literary self-representation, such as experience, memory, narrative sincerity, and poetic license. In *Histórias mal contadas*, Santiago approaches representing the self via a fragmentation of narrators and characters who, in their anonymity, reveal intimate details that insinuate the author's own identity.

Like Santiago, Buarque has increasingly explored the possibilities and limitations of literary self-representation in recent decades. Whereas Santiago employs theoretical concepts indicative of his scholarly background when commenting on his literary practice, Buarque frames his literary endeavors as an extension of his artistic engagement with Brazilian society and history. This broader interest in Brazil becomes, at times, a more specialized concern with his family's stories and personal experiences of living abroad and navigating celebrity. Buarque does not have the same familiarity as Santiago with the critical and theoretical concepts either coined by Santiago—the space in-between and the cosmopolitanism of the poor—or employed by him to characterize his own literary output—postmodernism or autofiction. Despite this difference in how they conceive of their work, both writers demonstrate a preoccupation with what it means to write in Portuguese as a Brazilian author, at both the level of biography and tradition. Buarque may eschew the theoretical concepts and narrative experimentations that populate Santiago's fictions, but he nevertheless reveals a deep engagement with Brazilian literary traditions and a concern with literary self-representation in his writing.

Buarque's novelistic debut, *Estorvo*, and sophomore effort, *Benjamim*, examine forms of memory and mediation in Brazil of the 1990s as the nation and its citizens grappled with the aftermath of a twenty-one-year dictatorship. The cinematic aesthetics of *Benjamim* could resonate with the narrative experiments in Santiago's *Stella Manhattan* as the fragmentary development of the plot corresponds to the limited perspectives of the narrator,

the protagonist, and other characters. By representing the fallibility of memory and perception, both novels engage with thematics and stylistics common in post-dictatorial literature (Avellar, 1999). The events of *Stella Manhattan* unfold in New York in 1969—a moment when both the Brazilian military regime’s repressive apparatus and the United States’s interventionist policies in Latin America were at their heights and, thus, impacted the interactions of the novel’s Brazilian and Spanish American characters. Buarque’s novel remains rooted in contemporary Rio de Janeiro where reminders of the past permeate the cityscape and haunt Benjamim Zambraia, the novel’s eponymous protagonist.

Despite the loose affinities between these novels from the years of Brazil’s democratic transition, it is only with Buarque’s third novel, *Budapeste* (2003), that he hews more closely to themes motivating Santiago’s writing, such as the relationship of the original to the copy, the role of the author, and the reception of literary works. Geographic and linguistic displacements of ghostwriter José Costa from Rio de Janeiro to Budapest and from Portuguese to Hungarian destabilize his sense of self as he becomes known as Zsozé Kósta. This dual identity rooted in experiences of dislocation in *Budapeste* recalls, to a certain extent, the trajectory of Eduardo/Stella in Santiago’s novel. Rejecting the presumed invisibility of the ghostwriter, Buarque’s protagonist demands public recognition for his writerly labor, thus interrogating the meaning of authorship in a manner reminiscent of Santiago’s theoretical inquiries and fictional experiments. His next novel, *Leite derramado*, explores the slippages within historical narratives by crafting elderly Eulálio Assumpção as an unreliable first-person narrator whose failing memory offers a non-linear and piecemeal vision of his family’s rise and decline in relation to key moments of Brazilian history. The political climate of contemporary Brazil serves as the backdrop for his 2019 novel *Essa gente*, which centers on the ordeals of writer-protagonist Manuel Duarte. After publishing a successful historical novel in the 1990s, Duarte is now a recluse in his Rio de Janeiro apartment struggling to develop new characters and narratives. Structured as a diary from 2018 to 2019, the novel contemplates the writer’s role in society during politically contentious times. With writers as protagonists in two of his novels, Buarque ponders the relationship of character, narrator, and author, which Santiago also considers in his trilogy of writers’ fictionalized biographies.

These convergences between Buarque and Santiago are most apparent in their gestures toward autofiction. Blurring the boundaries between history, autobiography, and fiction, Buarque transforms details from his real life, namely, the search for his German half-brother and his childhood adventures in Rome into the respective fictional narratives of *O irmão alemão* (2014) and *Bambino a Roma*. While Santiago opted to fragment the self into anonymous narrators in *Histórias mal contadas*, Buarque's experiments in literary self-representation employ first-person narrators with identities that have strong parallels to or coincide with his own biography. Due to similarities between the plot of *O irmão alemão* and Buarque's own search for his German half-brother, readers can conflate the identities of narrator and author, despite slight differences between the two. With distinct names as the writer Chico Buarque and his narrator Ciccio de Hollander, they also have unique familial compositions in terms of ancestry—the fictional character's mother is of Italian descent—and siblings—Buarque is one of seven children while Ciccio has only one brother. In *Bambino a Roma*, the conflation of author and protagonist-narrator is more complete as they share a name—Francisco Buarque de Hollanda—and the narrative integrates details about Buarque's life that would likely be familiar to a Brazilian reader. To underscore this blurring of the fictional and the real, Buarque employs markers of fictionality, including the reflective past tense or asides on the writing process, alongside the biographical elements. Despite using techniques common in autofiction (Effe and Lawlor, 2022), Buarque does not use the term “autofiction” to characterize his recent literary output. Santiago, however, identifies *O irmão alemão* as a transitional novel toward the autofiction of *Bambino a Roma*. In a 2024 interview, Santiago deems the proliferation of “identitarian” production as proof of the current relevance of Buarque's turn to autofiction. According to Santiago, “it isn't by accident that Chico brings more and more of his own life to the traditional novel” (2024, n.p.). These autofictional gestures exemplify a concern with literary self-representation and, more broadly, with the role of literary fiction today.

Although this recent turn toward the autofictional is one of the most salient parallels between the work of Santiago and Buarque, it is not the feature that has been celebrated by the Oceanos committee nor highlighted by the Camões jury in their remarks. The books that received the Oceanos Prize—Santiago's *Mil rosas roubadas* and *Machado* and

Buarque's *Leite derramado*—offer a broader engagement with Brazilian history and culture. Common life experiences—including coming-of-age, romantic encounters, and fears of death and irrelevancy—mark the characters' trajectories in these works that span the scope of Brazil's twentieth century. Despite a less explicitly self-representational perspective, these works nevertheless draw from their authors' experiences and points of reference, with *Mil rosas roubadas* a fictionalization of Santiago's friendship with musical producer Ezequiel Neves. The three award-winning novels also feature protagonist-narrators nearing the end of their lives and, thus, remembering the past as they observe societal changes and consider their personal legacy. To render these remembrances into literary prose, Santiago and Buarque drew inspiration from esteemed Brazilian writers. As a novel about two young men who became close friends in Belo Horizonte before their lives take them in different directions, *Mil rosas roubadas* dialogues with themes and styles common in writing from Minas Gerais, including the memoir-like poetry of Carlos Drummond de Andrade and the prose of Fernando Sabino. Santiago crafts a Machado-like narrator to represent the fictional Machado as he nears the end of his life. Buarque recurs to the narrative style of Machado in constructing the aging Eulálio Assumpção as he recalls from his deathbed his family's past in *Leite derramado*. By turning toward Brazil's history and literary traditions in a more conscientious manner, Santiago and Buarque constructed narratives that garnered critical attention and were thus honored with literary prizes. Their increased visibility as recipients of the Oceanos Prizes contributed to the greater circulation of their works, which, in turn, functions according to the accumulative logic of literary prestige.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

As contemporary Brazilian writers who have comparatively thrived in the economy of literary prestige, Silviano Santiago and Chico Buarque exemplify how certain genres and styles generate more critical interest and, thus, beget the compounding effects of literary consecration that has culminated in receiving the Camões Prize. Although these literary awards have been granted primarily in Brazil or the broader Lusophone or Luso-Hispanic

contexts, they have contributed, in part, to the more widespread literary visibility of Buarque and Santiago via the translation of their works into English, Spanish, and other languages. For instance, Buarque's *Leite derramado* was translated into Italian in 2010 by Roberto Francavilla, English by Alison Entrekin in 2012, French by Geneviève Leibrich in 2012, Spanish by Rita da Costa in 2013, and German by Karin von Schweder-Schreiner in 2013. Santiago has enjoyed less success in translation; *Machado* has not yet been translated while *Mil rosas roubadas* was translated into Spanish by Florencia Garramuño in 2016 as part of the Argentine press Corregidor's Vereda Brasil series. Translations into Spanish of other works by Santiago—his novels *Em liberdade* and *Stella Manhattan* and his essay *As raízes e o labirinto da América Latina*—have been published in the same series. *Stella Manhattan* has circulated more in translation with versions in French in 1993, English in 1994, and Spanish in 2004.

Translation emerges as an important node in the economy of literary prestige, as do other forms of critical attention and heightened visibility. The artistic and intellectual work of Santiago and Buarque is the subject of scholarly articles, masters' theses and doctoral dissertations, edited volumes, special dossiers, and monographs in Brazil and, to a lesser extent, in the Anglo-American academy. Both have also received the biographical treatment in recent years with Tom Cardoso's *Trocando em miúdos: seis vezes Chico* (2024) and João Pombo Barile's *Presente do acaso: Um ensaio biográfico sobre Silviano Santiago* (2025) establishing links between their lives and their work. Adaptation can also contribute to visibility as the film versions of *Estorvo* (2000, directed by Ruy Guerra), *Benjamim* (2003, directed by Monique Gardenberg), and *Budapeste* (2009, directed by Walter Carvalho) demonstrate. Translation, criticism, and adaptation help to extend the circulation of Buarque and Santiago beyond the scope of their native language and home country. As writers who have experiences abroad and, as a result, have engaged with themes of displacement, their work seems ripe for greater visibility within a global market of literary and cultural prestige. Translation, however, is a prerequisite for international recognition, such as the prestigious awards of the International Booker Prize, the Neustadt International Prize for Literature, and the Nobel Prize for Literature. To date, the only Portuguese-language authors to receive these prominent prizes are Portuguese writer José Saramago,

who was the 1998 Nobel Laureate, and Mozambican author Mia Couto, who was the 2014 Neustadt Laureate. Perhaps the literary prestige that Buarque and Santiago have accumulated in Brazil and the Luso-Hispanic realm will transcend national and linguistic borders to result in further global renown as living authors with a multi-faceted artistic and intellectual corpus that speaks to Brazil's history, culture, and current place in the world.

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