

## Garrett in European Romanticism

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Translated by Alexander Lee

Almeida Garrett was never a clear writer. For example—as I have at times attempted to describe, in my dialogues with the pioneer of modern Garretian thought, Ofélia Paiva Monteiro—there is a deep thematic and structural unity in the apparent disjunction in *Travels in My Homeland*. In Garrett's work, appearance is often a literary device which must be understood in conjunction with other devices, a way of not being merely what one seems to be and of not saying merely what one means to say.

Garrett was the founding father of Portuguese Romanticism. In keeping with the fundamental characteristics of European Romanticism, it is not disputed that what he accomplished in his language and in his country is that which other Romantics accomplished in their respective languages and countries: from the affirmation of the conscience of the individual to the adoption of progressive social causes; from the recovery of national traditions to the experimental search for new aesthetic expressions. In order to classify Garrett's brand of Romanticism, it would seem sufficient to take an inventory of his work and compare it with what other Romantics accomplished, highlighting similarities and commonalities. However, every time I reread my favorite texts of Garrett, I am left more confused. In fact, I do not know whether branding Garrett as the Romantic he no doubt was would aid in delving deeper beneath the surface of his texts. Without a doubt, I will not in the least succeed in suggesting the overhaul of perspectives that his work

might justify. I can at the very least, however, share some of my confusion. And, in doing so, I may also be able to state something about Garrett's position in European Romanticism.

This, in the meantime, compels me to repeat a previous confession: the more I read, the less I know what Romanticism is. Obviously, I am aware of what the reference works say; I am aware of when, where, and why it occurred; I have read some works which well-read popular opinion classifies as Romantic. However, I have also read other works in which the same characteristics appear, written long before and after we, the critics—being the classifiers of literary genius we are—came along to isolate Romanticism from all the various -isms that preceded and followed it. Those categorizations, in fact, only work when they are applied, from a historian's perspective, in terms of what existed earlier or was created later, e.g., Romanticism versus Realism or Classicism. However, from the point of view of the texts themselves, the distinctions are sketchy. It was August Schlegel—adopting the term *Romantisch*, first used in a literary context by his brother, Friedrich—who later came to classify Romanticism in opposition to Classicism. But which Classicism? Certainly not that of Camões, in whom even the brothers Schlegel saw a Romantic spirit close to theirs, and in whom Garrett, the founding father and foremost Portuguese Romantic, saw very little in Romantic terms.

Let us now turn to the relevant passage in Chapter VI of *Travels in My Homeland* where, in the summary that precedes it, Garrett declares "Camões' misfortune in being born before the romantic period" (43).<sup>1</sup> In his text, he then proceeds to defend the hodgepodge of possible meanings that purists—who were knowledgeable in terms of what constituted Romanticism or not—attacked in *The Lusiads*. Garrett sarcastically states that Camões, "the creator of the epic and—after Dante—of modern poetry," saw himself "wedged" between various aesthetic viewpoints and contradictory beliefs, "got confused," and ended up mixing everything up, committing "*tranchons le mot*, a lapse of taste" (45). Garrett, in his ongoing sarcasm, states that the problem lies in the fact that "There were no romantics, no romanticism yet, in those days, the world was very backward" (45). That is the reason Garrett—despite the foreseen "back-stabbing" from critics—on finding himself equally "wedged," would attempt to create at that moment a similarly "tasteless" work in order to get out of a similar "wedge." In other words, in justifying Camões's supposed errors from the perspectives of the Romantic aesthetic—now that the century had caught up with the times—Garrett dubbed the master of

Portuguese Classicism as the modern master of his own Romanticism. That also means, obviously, that there were Romantics even before the period that would eventually be called Romanticism.

As far as the other contrasting category, Realism, is concerned, it was Stendhal—who, on the sole basis of chronology, might be considered a Romantic—who first declared that “a novel is a mirror walking down a road.” This metaphor is based on the impersonal aesthetic of Realism, as defined by Hippolyte Taine when he determined that novels should be “a kind of portable mirror which can be conveyed everywhere, and which is most convenient for reflecting all aspects of nature and life.” Taking thenceforth that lengthy comparison more seriously than Stendhal, in his literary practice and in his succinct metaphor, Realists eventually came to insist on the notion that the author should be neutral and not intervene, so they could ensure the objectivity of *showing* in opposition to the subjectivity of *telling*. The explicit intervention of the authorial I in the work in progress—the Romantic as well as the Camonian way, delightfully developed by Garrett in *Travels*—therefore had to be proscribed as a terrible sin against the truth of Realism. But there are also other truths, among them textual truth, and it is no less true, as Todorov stated, that “all novels tell the story of their own creation, their own history.” That implicit history necessarily includes the history of the author at work and, therefore, even if in disguise, reveals his or her subjectivity. Seemingly not to do this is only a literary strategy, as is the intervening author seeming to carry on a dialogue with a hypothetical reader. Therefore, what the realist novel basically accomplished was to substitute the narrative function of the visible author with the narrative strategy of the implicit author, which seems—and only *seems*—to allow the literary representations that Hippolyte Taine liked to call “significative facts” to speak for themselves in the narrative sequence in which they might be juxtaposed, using a cut-and-paste technique similar to that used by that most manipulative of arts, film. In fact, all it takes is a superficial scratch on the surface of a text to soon notice that the invisible author continues to appear through the structural organization he confers upon it, that he continues to show his subjectivity through the apparent objectivity of the facts he chooses as meaningful, and that he similarly continues to comment on them in the way in which he places them. As Shakespeare well knew, a tragic scene does not have the same meaning if it is placed next to a comical one. Additionally, authorial subjectivity always intervenes—if not in autobiographical disguise—in the choice and placement of the so-called

“significant facts.” This is unavoidable, even if the most fictitious of situations are always the author’s imagination of seeing the unseen, or if the most fictitious of characters are always the author’s memory of being what one was not.

This consequently allows one to suggest that the hidden author’s manipulation in the realist novel might lead to a more false objectivity than the assumed obviousness of an author’s viewpoint that is not hidden from the reader. Or that, on the other hand, the autobiographical appearance of Romantic subjectivism might be used as a literary device to de-personify the author, even in the creation of characters in which the author might seem to project him or herself. Such is the case of Carlos in *Travels in My Homeland*, who, far from being Garrett’s double—as critics have understood—is his semantic opposite. Paradoxically, he is even more so, considering that what we know about Garrett’s life and what Garrett tells us about his character seem, in fact, to converge. Carlos is the alter ego whom Garrett might have become had he not opted to be someone else; he is not the author’s self-portrait. Garrett’s creation was a fictional work equivalent to that which the literarily unclassifiable Henry James—brother of William James, the psychologist, who published pioneering studies about so-called multiple personalities—would create in his novel, *The Jolly Corner*, in which the narrator confronts the monstrous alter ego which he may have also eventually become.

Eça de Queirós, with all the impersonality attributed to his assumed Realism, did not even need to get tangled in such psychological monstrosities to accomplish something similar to Garrett or Henry James. He uses his own personal circumstances and his mother’s adopted name—Eça—transforming it into an almost similar “Ega” to create João de Ega, his at times charming and caricaturesque self-portrait, in *The Maias*. Prior to this, he used the same name as the surname of the character Genoveva in *The Tragedy of Rua das Flores*, the prostitute who had abandoned her child, with whom she would later have an incestuous relationship. I do not find it at all necessary to turn to involved psychological explanations or to revealing hermeneutic analysis based on the fact that Eça de Queirós was also abandoned by his mother, that incest occurred in his work, that the unknowingly incestuous Maria Eduarda inherited some of the characteristics of Genoveva, or even to benefit from João de Ega’s declaration that he wished that his “mommy” had been worldly, like the mother of his friend, Carlos da Maia. Worthy of mention is the self-deprecation, certainly conscious and deliberate, if not entirely meta-literary,



in a way that Romanticism and Classicism had been all along, and Realism liked to pretend it was not.

This all allows one to suggest, I believe, that Garrett embodies a literary tradition that, although including Romanticism, predates him and continued to exist after him, even if there was no name for it in the reference books. Also belonging to this noble tradition are Stendhal's *The Life of Henry Brulard* and Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Through Fielding, this tradition may also be attributed to Cervantes and, through Garrett himself, it was simultaneously attributed to Cervantes, Camões, and Bernardim Ribeiro. This same tradition was, through Machado de Assis, once again attributed to Garrett. Stendhal, alias Henri Beyle, wrote the autobiography of Henry Brulard, alias Stendhal. Stern transformed the fictitious autobiography of Tristram Shandy into a sequence of digressions which, at the same time, supplant and give it meaning. Bernardim, fictionalized in the anagram Binmarder, is a character in a narrative that tells the stories that were told to him by another narrator to represent her own story, also the implicit story of the author, Bernardim. Camões intervenes in *The Lusiads* in order to transform Vasco da Gama's journey into a metaphor of the poem describing the journey and the poem in which he describes the journey into his own autobiography. In *Don Quixote*, Cervantes wrote a novel about a character who believes he is a character in a novel, and Fielding, in *Joseph Andrews*, reverts to Cervantes when he writes a novel about the brother of a character in the novel of another author, *Clarissa*, by Samuel Richardson. In the narration of his autobiographical *Travels*, we have already seen that Garrett intersperses a novel in which he represents himself in a character whose fate is his alternative fate.

How do we then classify this tradition, which parts from Classicism, includes Romanticism, and flows out not only toward Realism but also toward something similar to Surrealism? And where do we place Garrett's Romanticism within this tradition, tied up in detours? There is in Garrett, for example, a sense of irony that is structurally opposite to the Romantic aesthetic, a sort of deconstructive humor deriving from the end of the eighteenth century (Sterne, Fielding) and which, as Maria Fernanda Abreu has shown, likewise reverts to Cervantes. From a historical perspective, Garrettian irony would thus reflect a state of being in the world which, at the time, had nothing to do with Byronian sarcasm or with the corresponding melancholy of a Shelley, a Keats, or a Chateaubriand. The truth is, however, that this is very much related to the deconstruction of literary texts that has been practiced

by some of our contemporary writers. It might thus be tempting to label Garrett in terms of his literary practice—not only in terms of aesthetics—and bring forth now what is fashionably called “Postmodernism,” that great broken basket in which nothing fits, if the label meant anything. I believe the label means little, beginning with the name of that which it supposedly comes *post*-, i.e., Modernism. Being a concept of temporal meaning, “modern” merely means that which is current—or it may no longer mean what it once meant, since Modernism occurred sometime at the beginning of the century, or it would mean that after it there could be no possible modernity. However, that inevitably would result in an inconsistency of that recent pathetic kind, declaring itself “the end of history,” turning Postmodernism and all of us who live within it into Sebastianic ghosts like Garrett’s Romeiro, knocking at the door and proclaiming he is a nobody. Or Postmodernism may be, after all, that which Friedrich Schlegel had said Romanticism ought to be—but never was—when he wrote that “no theory can exhaust it [. . .] its supreme law is that the caprice of the author shall be subject to no law.” But more important than finding the correct label, I believe, is for us to understand that all literary genius is made up of interrelations and of continuums, even when these might seem to take on the appearance of conflict or rupture. I also believe that this is what James Joyce wished to point out when he described the internal process of literary creation in the following terms: “Every life is many days, day after day. We walk through ourselves, meeting robbers, ghosts, giants, old men, young men, wives, widows, brothers-in-love, but always meeting ourselves.”

There once was a professor of Portuguese at Oxford—a brilliant man, but notoriously lazy—whose career was based on a conference about Almeida Garrett: the same conference, in fact, for thirty years. In short, he would say that Garrett was a bundle of contradictions, a sort of walking oxymoron: conservative revolutionary, classicist romantic, aristocratic populist, narcissistic altruist, puritan sensualist, moralist without morals, and so forth. All of this was partially true, but in the end it was a lie because the lecturer stopped there, at these and other personal contradictions of Almeida Garrett the human being, without going into the literary representations of the author. In fact, I believe that the capacity to literarily represent the coexistence and simultaneity of opposites is precisely one of Garrett’s most notable qualities. I will try to show how he achieves that, in terms of literary functionality, through the specific example of his treatment of Sebastianism—there simply is no room for more—knowing nonetheless that that same example can be

contradicted with others. This would in fact only confirm the difficulty of categorizing Garrett rigidly in terms of literary tendencies.

Garrett's capacity for pointing out psychological states resulting from the coexistence of opposing demands seems to correspond to a Romantic ideal. It might even be related to Keats's "negative capability," which values the artist's ability to live in uncertainty, in mystery, and in doubt as an essential quality, without trying to neutralize the receptive truth of these states of being, resorting to the plausibility of facts and the rawness of reason. Garrett's apparent convergence with this Romantic position is, in the meantime, deceiving; it distances him from those Romantics who saw in "capability" or "negative capability" a positive way of communing with the Universe. Garrett was a political volunteer, the author of "revolts" that attempted to inspire active intervention instead of acquiescent contemplation. It turns out, however, that he saw himself before a fallen Portuguese nation, fallen into another type of "negative capability" even before such an expression was conceived or before Garrett had come to know of it. That "negative aptitude" corresponds, in terms that include the public as well as personal sphere, to a Sebastianic overflow that would eventually become Portuguese Romanticism. For Garrett, in the meantime, such latencies of the national psyche would be naught but ideals that had to be cultivated. These latencies, however, were the product of an idealization that had to be assumed in order to be corrected. Thus, in *Frei Luis de Sousa*, he wrote a work about a state of hidden Sebastianism which, so long as it remained ambiguous, would succeed in hindering the unraveling of the tragedy. From that point of view, the gentle state of delightful guilt in which Dona Madalena de Vilhena lived and loved was destroyed at the moment at which her second husband, D. Manuel de Sousa Coutinho, voluntarily—insensibly, in fact—stacked upon her the evidence of facts and reason. Garrett makes it clear that D. Manuel was right, but also shows that he was foolish in ignoring the reality of that hidden fact because he opened the irrational abyss that lay under him and from which the spectral Romeiro would emerge. The play therefore suggests, subtly and complexly, that the necessary rupture with the specters of Sebastianism cannot ignore their real existence. Thus, only one qualitative change that could embrace them would be able to free the country from the deadly persistence of Sebastianism. Otherwise, Romeiro would continually return, and his return would never restore the life he might have had. In fact, his return would continually represent the death of the life that he could have had, the victory of the specters. The

necessary reconciliation of opposites in the plane of action thus suggested corresponds to the crucial moment in *Travels* in which Garrett, assuming the role of his character Carlos, agrees and states along with Frei Dinis, the embodiment of the past opposing the present, that “we have both erred.” The subtle complexity of Garrett, in the meantime—whether in *Travels* or in *Frei Luis de Sousa*—is that tragedy is simultaneously in process in two opposite yet complementary directions on the political plane and on the plane of individual feeling. This allows one to empathize with the ambiguities of a love that cannot continue to exist in its necessary ambiguity, whether in the case of Dona Elena in relation to Dom João de Portugal and Dom Manuel, or in the case of Carlos in relation to Joanninha and Georgina.

I have already suggested in another context that the dynamic tensions portrayed in *Travels in My Homeland* form a chiasm. Those tensions underlying the symbolism of *Frei Luis de Sousa* likewise result in a precarious chiasmic balance of opposites. In fact, I believe that, from a semantic perspective, chiasm is the dominant technique in Garrett’s work, including his poetry, when it results in the unresolved tension between sex and love, as in the poem “Não te amo, quero-te” (“I don’t love you, I want you”). Garrett often approaches Byron, both in terms of political idealism as well as in a supposedly similar Don Juanism. Byron, however, was an expatriate even when in his own country, and Garrett a nationalist even when in exile. And the Don Juanism of Byron is highly disguised—as was his ambivalent sexuality—while Garrett always exposes the ambiguities of love. If we had to compare him to another European Romantic writer, Garrett would have more in common with Pushkin than with Byron. Pushkin, like Garrett, was determined to forge a new national identity through literature, creating in *Eugene Onegin* a character who, like Carlos in *Travels*, starts out as a Byronic hero. However, both become powerless when they place desire above feeling, resulting in the unraveling of potential love and of their characters, eventually losing their substance.

This theme—the unraveling of love—which underlies Garrett’s message in *Travels* and *Frei Luis de Sousa*, is perhaps expressed most emotionally in Garrett’s master poem, “Cascais.” Poetry in all its forms—Romantic or not—is full of poems dealing with love unleashed and passions restrained. In “Cascais,” Garrett expressed, with insuperable integrity, the inverse process for which there is currently no name, but which is no less common and true: let us call it “falling out of love,” “going one’s separate way.” This process, it should be stressed, results from a process different from satiated Byronian



Don Juanism and also, I want to believe, produces an emptying different—and, metaphorically, more alarming—from that resulting from Carlos' romantic "splits" in *Viagens*, or between Onegin and Tatiana in Pushkin's lyrical novel. In "Cascais," the extinguishing of love is mutual, without guilt or remorse; it is a new encounter in separation, a product of shared excesses and not of unspoken needs. All this is accomplished without any sentimentalism, de-romanticized in the coldest of rationality. Garrett, a Romantic? Undoubtedly, yes. But what I do not know is whether any other European Romanticist writer might have transformed that literary movement into an expression that so deeply questioned its own roots.

### Note

- <sup>1</sup> All quotations in English are adapted from John M. Parker's translation.

### Work Cited

Garrett, Almeida. *Travels in My Homeland*. Trans. John M. Parker. London: Peter Owen/UNESCO, 1987. Print.

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