"We made the barons, and we shall die by them": The Evolution of Garrett's Conceptions of Society

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Introduction

Due to its inner complexity, *Travels in My Homeland* lends itself to multiple readings. It is a novel about the love of the innocent Joaninha and her cousin Carlos, the unfortunate poet, who in despair becomes a despicable baron; it is a journey to the ruins of a glorious past, but it is also the denouncement of the "shameful degeneration" of the present (Garrett 149); it is the account of a journey to Santarém to pay a visit to the leader of the Progressive Party, but it is also a journey into the realms of two opposed principles, spiritualism and materialism, whose endless march and alternate dominance make possible human progress (28). The materialism in question is one that Almeida Garrett had already combated in 1837, when he criticized those who renounced the memories of the empire, or in 1841 when he fought against the closure of the theater school (Amorim 2: 283, 632). Materialism, according to Garrett, is the denial of the "religion of Christ [. . .] mother of Liberty" and of the "religion of Patriotism, her companion" (191), whose absence would inevitably lead to the death of a small nation like Portugal (217). Thus we may say that *Travels in My Homeland,* among other possible readings, is a book on love, on politics both in its narrow and wider sense, and on society. In fact, the struggle between spiritualism and materialism has a counterpart in the fight between the monks and the barons, "the most inelegant and stupidest animal[s] in creation" (80); materialism turned into flesh.

"We made the barons [. . .]" (81). Almeida Garrett certainly contributed to the creation of Portuguese liberal society, the same society that he so harshly criticized in 1846. He did it through his political action and through his writings. As we already know, Garrett was politically engaged with the revolution from the time of his youth. Not many sources exist in terms of the study of his political ideas in these early years, but we know that as early as 1823 he was already criticizing the radicalism of the first liberal regime and defending the adoption of a moderate constitution in Portugal, similar to the future Constitutional Charter (Garrett, "Constituição" 289–98). From 1826 onwards he consistently fought for the latter or for moderating the radical impulses of the Constituent Assembly in 1837–38, where he played an important role. He participated in some of the key moments of the foundation and early troubled decades of the constitutional monarchy and died in 1854 when political peace and the liberal conservative regime he had fought for were firmly established.

But Garrett also intervened through his writings. In this way he created an image of his society adopted by future generations and by historians of the twentieth century. The pages on the barons in his *Travels in My Homeland* played a decisive role in the diffusion of the idea of a post-revolutionary backward society dominated by the nobility, both of the old and the new regimes. Despite the results of recent historical research, this image is still taught in high school. I will return to this topic later.

Language of social description

I shall now consider the contribution of Garrett's writings to the evolution of the social vocabulary of his own era, which was another way of helping to form Portuguese liberal society. An American historian wrote some years ago: "Historians have accurately sensed that the 'linguistic turn' challenges [the] ethical foundation for the practice of history by problematizing not merely the methods historians have traditionally used to study it, but the very notion of the past as a recuperable object of study" (Spiegel, "Post-Modernism" 197). I do not want to get into a close examination of the so-called "linguistic turn." However, it is indisputable that in the last two decades, under the influence of linguistics, historians have become increasingly aware of the importance of language, as attested to by the vast bibliography published so far in different countries. I do accept that language "is not a simple 'mirror' to a separate 'reality.' It is part of that reality, and therefore part and parcel of all its complexities" (Corfield 72). Applied to social analysis, I can also accept that

language "is a constitutive element of social practice" (Spiegel, "Historicism" 72). But I also believe that "concepts acquire meanings not simply in relation to other concepts but in reference also to contexts" (Corfield 28). Therefore, I would not go so far as to reduce History to discourse analysis, although I recognize the importance of the latter in our discipline.

"Society is no longer what it was, it cannot go back to the way it was, but still less can it stay the way it is" says Friar Dinis (Garrett, *Travels* 245). Contemporaries felt that they were living in a changing society, and Garrett contributed to the making of a new language of social description. There were moments, especially in 1837–38, when he helped to transform these new concepts into constitutional norms with all their political and social consequences. After all, "words are not such an indifferent thing," as he wrote in 1826 and as he showed on several occasions in his *Travels* (*Obra* 184).[1] As for the evolution of social vocabulary, my basic assumption is that the period from 1820 until the mid-1840s corresponds to the transition from the traditional social stratification concept, based upon the words "nobility," "clergy," and "[the] people," to a new one built around the notion of a middle class, also including an aristocracy and "[the] people." The diffusion of the expression "middle class" is the key element in this evolution, though the word "aristocracy" also suffered a significant change in meaning, as we will see.

The first liberal revolution (1820) ushered in a period of intense linguistic innovation associated with the expression of a new ideology under new conditions: freedom of speech and press led to the explosion of written communication under a variety of forms (Santos 433). People were generally aware of the change that was taking place, but the opponents of the liberal regime were those who felt it in the most acute way. In the press, "the awareness of this new language is frequently expressed. The 'sentences and words in fashion' are referred to as indispensable in the style and doctrine of the revolutionary system" (21).

Words like "society" or "citizen" acquired new meanings. "Class" was frequently used to denote a group of individuals: one spoke of the "noble class" or the "scientific classes." Class was also employed to build some antitheses such as "productive class/consumer class" or "privileged class/industrial class" (*classe industriosa*). Associated with the adjective "social" it gave birth to "social class," and, combined with the word "middle" to form the expression "middle class," it created an important novelty scarcely used (Santos). According to Manuel Vaz, parson of Couto do Mosteiro, diocese of Coimbra, the latter was a new expression. Writing in 1823 in favor of censorship, he informed us that this class was

new and distinct from "the clergy, the nobility and the people," the traditional social stratification still in use. The middle class would aspire to be "supreme and unique in supremacy": it was the revolutionary class, which possessed its own ideology (liberalism) and opposed the Catholic religion (Santos 77–78).

Some of the best sources for the study of social vocabulary are parliamentary debates on the right to vote, when MPs had to go beyond vague statements or the ambiguous use of words in order to clarify their meaning. One of the most remarkable features of the debate that took place in 1822 is the absence of the expression "middle class." Parliamentarians used the words "property owner" and "rich man" as opposed to "day-laborer" (*jornaleiro*), sometimes also called a "worker." Here and there the word "proletarian" appeared, but MPs did not seem to have a clear notion of its meaning and argued about it. "Aristocracy" was used to describe an ill-defined group and "class" was also employed, but not "middle class." Clearly, the concept of "the citizen" prevailed in the outcome of this debate, as evidenced by the recognition of the day-laborer's right to vote.

Garrett's writings during this period reflected his recognition of the traditional stratification. In an important essay published in 1821—*O dia vinte e quatro de Agosto*—the author defended the legitimacy of the revolutionary government formed in 1820, immediately after the military parade, on the grounds that it included members of the "by now existing different classes of the nobility, the clergy, and the people" (*Obra* 219). Moreover, a proclamation published in 1820, written by Garrett, in which university students protested against an attempt on the part of the municipality of Coimbra to deny their right to vote, revealed prejudices against the "mechanic" (*mecânico*), a person who works with his hands and to whom the right to vote was conceded. It is important to remember that in Portugal manual labor established an irrevocable frontier between the noble, in its largest sense, and the plebeian. Yet another proclamation exposed the existing tension between those prejudices and the egalitarian notion of the citizen, which embraced both students and "mechanics" (*Obra* 164, 168).[2] On the other hand, in 1822, in the *Jornal da Sociedade Literária Patriótica*, Garrett used, probably for the first time, the expression "middle class" when he wrote: "the ultimate class of the Portuguese people and a large part of the middle is [sic] completely ignorant" (258).

The year of 1823 marked the end of the first liberal experience and Garrett's departure to exile in Britain and France. It is precisely in a manuscript written in Birmingham and dated November 1823, which I mentioned above,

that Garrett condemned the Constitution of 1822, saying that it gave "too much to democracy, nothing to aristocracy." He meant that only the king and the people (the latter through the "middle class") were represented in the constitution. The exclusion of the aristocracy, which forced it into opposition with the liberal regime, had been a mistake. In the same text, Garrett also confessed his admiration for the English system and expressed his belief that the reestablishment of peace depended upon the king's ability to give his people a moderate constitution. Garrett was foreseeing the need for a constitution able to reconcile the various classes, one similar to the Constitutional Charter that Pedro IV would actually deliver in 1826 ("Constituição" 295–98).

The defense of the latter was the central idea of his political writings between 1826 and 1830. Therefore it is no surprise to see him in the pages of *O Português* extolling the "ancient and true nobility," in whose affection for the Charter the "middle class" rejoiced. Here the word nobility was a synonym of aristocracy and "hidalguia" (Garrett, "O Português" 290–313). Nevertheless, for our purpose the most interesting of all the articles he wrote for the same newspaper was the one published on 23 July 1827, where he glorified the middle class, a "new nation" produced by Portuguese overseas expansion, whose development provoked the fall of feudalism and the need for representative governments, a class that supported the State and took away from the "clergy" the privilege of knowledge and from the "nobility" the monopoly of arms (Garrett, *Obra* 448–49). "Class spirit" compelled him to recommend to constituents that they refuse to elect people "ashamed of the class into which they were born and who want to be noble at any price" (Garrett, "Carta" 139).

Some years later, in another important political essay, Garrett wrote that a convenient constitution "shall take as its main basis the democracy of its bigger and more important population; shall modify it afterwards with the aristocratic element which is rooted in its nature and in the end shall accomplish that building with the crown which forms the apex of a pyramid, the perfect emblem of a well established and regular representative monarchy." Such a constitution was the only way to establish freedom, an essential condition of national independence. Without freedom Portugal would be united with Spain, a possibility that Garrett repudiated, though admitting it might come about. Once again, as he also explained, the democratic element resided in the "middle class," which should be the foundation of political institutions (*Portugal* 205–6, 220).

As time went on, "middle class" became a frequent concept in Garrett's writings, increasingly assuming a central position in his political and social thinking. At the same time, as a consequence of political evolution—the support of almost all the nobility for King Miguel I and his absolutist regime—the meaning of the word "aristocracy" began to change. Otherwise, how could Garrett have defended an aristocratic second house in parliament after 1828? Who, then, was the aristocracy for him? Garrett did not give an explicit answer to this question, but the aristocracy likely included the handful of nobles faithful to liberalism in addition to other unspecified distinguished individuals.[3] By the time of the civil war (1832–34), the concept of middle class was used not only by the liberal elite but also, albeit infrequently, by counter-revolutionary writers (Lousada, *O Miguelismo*). Among the latter I have to mention Alvito de Buela, who published a violent article in which he condemned the methods employed by the people in an effort to attain the status of "middle class," all of them involving the abandonment of agriculture, and denounced the popular origin of "middle-class" members and their attack on "aristocracy" (*Defeza*).

Garrett was Mouzinho da Silveira's friend and, though overstating his own participation, collaborated with the minister in the preparation of an important collection of laws published in 1832, which the liberals believed would help them to win the civil war. On the report of the decisive law on the abolition of crown properties and seigniorial rights, Mouzinho justified such a painful measure with the need to stop the destruction of the "middle class's" subsistence. Moreover, the report revealed that one of the main purposes of the law was the punishment of the "privileged people" and the creation of an "aristocracy" independent of the crown and worthy of sitting in the House of Lords. The word aristocracy had here the same connotation as in the above-mentioned text by Garrett (Silveira 213–14).

After the civil war the concept of "middle class" was commonly employed. In a textbook used in the University of Coimbra, law students learned that after 1823 the liberal party "generally comprehended the illustrated middle class, with the exception of those who sacrificed their beliefs to their interests; the manufacturing and commercial classes also belonged to it and therefore it prevailed in the city of Oporto and was strong in Lisbon" (Rocha 174).

Moreover, together with Pedro IV, the king-soldier to whom Garrett paid homage in several beautiful texts, the middle class was at the core of a myth surrounding the foundation of the new regime. In fact, how could people explain the victory of a handful of liberals over King Miguel's regular army? In 1840,

the Count of Taipa answered this question by declaring: "it was not the 7,000 men who won over the 80,000; that was impossible and never happened; it was the efforts of that middle class today called to the elections" (*Diário* 4: 305).

The political behavior of the old nobility created a serious problem for the new regime. As a matter of fact, when the parliament opened in 1834, only 13 of the 73 peers created by King Pedro IV in 1826–27 were present in the House of Lords. Therefore the liberal regime urgently needed to create a new peerage. Indeed, between 1834 and 1842, the upper house underwent a vast renewal with the appointment of 68 people. The new members were army officers, property owners and capitalists, judges, professors, diplomats, politicians, and bureaucrats. The majority had noble titles, mostly created after 1832 by the new regime itself, but a significant number did not (Espinha, "Revolução" 329–53).

The Count of Palmela, an influential liberal politician, summarized the overall change in the following terms: "[A]fter the restoration of the Queen's throne, in order to fill the House of Lords, the Regent looked for latter-day luminaries (though neither less conspicuous nor less worthy than the old ones); he looked for landowners in the various provinces of the kingdom and also for worthy notables and for the ability to fulfill this charge. From all this formed the new chamber which must, as a result, have lost that character that I called feudal and which marked its primitive organization" ("Revolução" 344–45).

In 1836, the Constitutional Charter reestablished in 1834 was again suppressed by the September Revolution. Recently returned to Portugal, Garrett joined the new situation. Like many other people, he did it not for ideological reasons—the revolution did not have a clear-cut program—but because he disagreed with the dismissed government. He personally considered unfair the abandonment and the economic difficulties he had suffered in Belgium, where he lived in 1834–36 as a diplomat, and could not stand to see some opportunists being rewarded by what he called the "party that eats" (Amorim, vol. 2).[4]

In the Constituent Assembly in 1837 he made an important and polemic speech on the formation of the second chamber of parliament, consistent with his previous writings. According to what he wrote in *Portugal na balança da Europa* in 1830, he declared his preference for a hereditary chamber, although he recognized that "in Portugal there is neither the will, nor are there sufficient elements to form such a chamber." The few "shadows of the old grandees of the kingdom" that existed "committed suicide in 1828" (Garrett, *Discursos* 21–22). Under these conditions he defended a mixed process,

with the king's appointment of a certain number of candidates that would then be submitted to popular vote.

But for our purpose the most relevant pages are those in which he vigorously argued against a purely elective senate. Confessing himself to be a "middle-class" son, proud of "his good and noble mother" (51), he urged his fellow MPs not to deliver the second chamber to their "triumphant" and "winning" class, already in control of the lower house (46–47). Such a decision would make "of our happy and beloved class a hateful aristocracy more unpopular than any other that still might have existed" (47). The "middle class cannot exist without extremes" (41). Developing his belief in social inequality, he explained that "the larger number of the inhabitants of a country will always be condemned by social demands, to the exhausting and material jobs that brutalize and subdue; the benefits of that work will always belong to the smaller number; and when there are no slaves that unfortunate larger number must be citizens." This is the "inevitable fate of the people" (45). In spite of all his eloquence, Garrett was not able to convince MPs and the Constitution of 1838 stipulated the existence of a senate whose members would be elected from among certain categories: rich property owners, merchants and manufacturers, and people in several top state careers.[5] The latter were very similar to the ones mentioned above in reference to the peers created after 1834.

Years later (1856), in some decisive pages of his essay on entailments, Alexandre Herculano would give a name to and theorize on the existence of this high-status group. He wrote: "civil equality is not only possible, but necessary" (40); "Nevertheless civil equality imports social inequality" (41); "Inequality is the law: aristocracy its indestructible manifestation" (43); "Inequality is not of generations, of predestinate lineages; it is of individuals" (42); it doesn't matter if its origin is "in work, intelligence, or in the cradle" (42) and, last but not least, that "the mistake of the democrat writers who think that the actual destruction of an aristocratic class is possible proceeds from the fact that they confuse the hereditary *hidalguia* and the aristocratic body: they take the species for the genus" (43).[6]

Conclusion

"We made the barons [. . .]." Garrett did indeed help to make them. They were part of the nobility that the constitutional monarchy had to create for its own sake in order to satisfy the ambitions of those who had been with the liberals during the civil war: military men, property owners, merchants and capitalists,

diplomats, and bureaucrats (Diogo 139–58). Some of them belonged to the aristocracy about which we spoke and which Garrett helped to place on the throne. In *Travels*, when he attacked the barons, he was condemning above all materialism and the *nouveau riche* character of this new nobility, but not nobility itself, not even all of the barons. He made this point clear when he wrote:

> On the way we met our old friend the Baron of P.—a baron of a different genus, not a member of the Linnaean family which I have tried to classify in this work for the enlightenment of our century—an honourable gentleman, a rarity nowadays, typical of our old provincial nobility, with all their old-world dignity and courtesy, which distinguishes them so sharply from the ill-mannered vulgarity of our improvised notables. (*Travels* 188)

The whole book reveals a certain enchantment that the idea of nobility, in fact of an old and genuine nobility (62) associated with a glorious past, provoked in him.

Garrett also cherished all sorts of decorations and distinctions: he collected and even begged for them in such a way that his friend and main biographer could not help but disapprove (Amorim). In 1845, the year before the publication of *Travels*, Garrett wrote an article on the Order of the Bath. Declaring that he was describing no more than the facts, he wrote: "We live in a democratic century: it is true; social distinctions have never been so hateful, never has such little value been given to them—but they have never been so sought after. The middle class, which invades everything and which is far from being disposed to allowing the plebs to aspire to her, nevertheless wants to keep abreast of the old nobility."

Later on, he continued with this beautiful image: "Democracy invaded the wardrobe of feudalism." From this followed an immense number of applicants and the need to reduce or completely suppress the old forms and ceremonials of the investitures. "Today from St. Petersburg to Lisbon one does everything with a sheet of paper." Garrett seemed to be complaining about this fact, and the rest of the article is a detailed description of a picture representing the Queen of England investing a knighthood (Garrett, "A Ordem" 21). According to Amorim, Garrett looked like a gentleman and, as we know, ended up as a viscount in 1851 (3: 193).

Literature, and in this case *Travels in My Homeland*, played an important role: the growth of the number of titles after 1832 and the middle class's

attitude towards them helped to create an image of a post-revolutionary soci-
ety dominated by the old and new nobility with a feeble and insecure middle
class. An exotic society, historians thought, compared to its European coun-
terparts with their victorious bourgeoisies.[7]

When Garrett criticized the barons, he was also condemning what he and
his contemporaries viewed as an artificial, speculative economic activity. In
fact the barons were at the center of several financial companies beginning
in 1838 and which remained very active and prosperous during the 1840s.[8]
Some were among the most important buyers of monastic land, though these
were a minority (Espinha, "Desmortización" 29–60). They were also among
the shareholders of the Companhia das Lezírias, a huge agricultural com-
pany created in 1836 with crown and church properties. In addition, this
new nobility was dominant in the upper house of parliament (Espinha, "Rev-
olução"). Despite all this, is it possible to say that the nobility dominated
Portuguese society? It doesn't seem so. Recent research shows that, compared
with other European countries, noble representation in government, in the
lower house of parliament and in high bureaucracy, irrespective of the antiq-
uity of the titles, was very small in the second half of the nineteenth century
(Almeida, "Construção" and *Eleições*), and already in 1884 the nobles were a
minority in the upper house.

What we should underscore about the Portuguese Liberal Revolution is
the radical punishment of old nobility, of all those, and they were the vast
majority of the nobles, who followed D. Miguel. The revolution extinguished
the main sources of income (seigniorial rights and commanderies) of a nobil-
ity seriously indebted during the absolutist regime (Monteiro), excluded trai-
tors from the respective indemnities, and expelled them from the upper house
of parliament: those who remained in the chamber were a minority as early
as 1851. In this regard, one cannot even compare Portuguese figures with
French ones, since in this country the old nobility recovered its influence in
the nineteenth century and was well represented in the upper house until
1848 (Espinha, "Revolução"). Concerning old nobility, the radicalism of Por-
tuguese liberal revolution cannot be compared with the Spanish case either.

Finally, what is the meaning of the prestige of noble titles among the
middle class? Has it any consequence on its political and economic behavior?
Garrett's snobbery did not prevent him from struggling for the liberal victory,
from participating in the preparation of anti-noble laws, and from promoting
the middle class, as we have seen. Sometimes begging for a distinction can

also be instrumental in achieving some real plebeian goals. In 1840, Garrett suggested to his friend and minister, Rodrigo da Fonseca, that the office of chronicler should be honored by her majesty's government; later on he explained in a letter to his friend that his demand had nothing to do with either "vanity nor with parvenu's presumption" but rather with the need to show that rumors about her majesty's indisposition towards him were vain (Amorim 2: 422–23). The article on the Order of the Bath is perfectly consistent with his concept regarding the place of the aristocracy, the middle class, and the king in the political system.

As for economic behavior, contemporary descriptions of the barons show that they had nothing to do with the old nobility. In the beginning of the second half of the century, an Englishman described them with the following words: "Shrewd and diligent" and "never losing sight of the main chance," they were "accumulating rapid fortunes, from which, no doubt, a future wealthy and important aristocracy will spring" (Forrester 3). Portuguese economic problems probably derived from not having more barons or from the fact that the barons did not invest in industry. But that is another question altogether.[9]

Notes

[1] "I shan't say the notables, which is an affected word for which I have an insuperable aversion" (*Travels* 197).

[2] On the notion of the noble, see Nuno Gonçalo Monteiro's work: *O crepúsculo dos grandes (1750–1832).*

[3] On the nobility's political behavior, see Maria Alexandre Lousada's article "D. Pedro ou D. Miguel?: as opções políticas da nobreza titulada portuguesa" (82–111). On the meaning of aristocracy, see *Portugal na balança da Europa*, pp. 213–15.

[4] On the September Revolution, see Maria de Fátima Bonifácio's *Seis estudos sobre o liberalismo português* and "O setembrismo corrigido e actualizado."

[5] On the debate, see Júlio Joaquim da Costa Rodrigues da Silva's *As cortes constituintes de 1837–1838: liberais em confronto* and Benedita Maria Duque Vieira's *A revolução de Setembro e a discussão constitucional de 1837.*

[6] The following extract of the speech made in 1844 by Manuel Passos, the leader of the progressive party that Garrett supposedly visited in his *Travels,* also illustrates the evolution of the concept of aristocracy as we have been describing it so far. He declared: "Pedro with his magnificent and civilizing laws destroyed the old institutions, [and] founded that middle class which is already today very potent in Portugal. Before it came an aristocracy fed by the Crown and dependent upon it. That aristocracy does not exist anymore with the same force because the Emperor, by abolishing the tithes, the seigniorial rights (*forais*), and the commanderies, reduced it to much smaller proportions. It kept its personal merit, which is great in many individuals; it kept the memories of the great achievements of its ancestors; but it does not today have

the wealth, which is one of the conditions of the aristocracy, that it had before the Emperor's reforms. There are rich hidalgos as individuals, but the *hidalguia* is poor as a class. Many old gentlemen, in relation to their fortune[s], don't belong to the aristocracy, but rather to the middle class" (*Diário* 2: 195).

[7] See Chapter 5 of Vitorino Magalhães Godinho's *Estrutura da antiga sociedade portuguesa*, as well as Joel Serrão's "Burguesia na época contemporânea," "Nobreza na época contemporânea," and "Das razões históricas dos fracassos industriais portugueses."

[8] See Jaime Reis's *O Banco de Portugal das origens a 1914*. One of the most relevant individuals involved in these companies was Carlos Morato Roma, Garrett's close friend dating from at least 1821.

[9] On Portuguese economic backwardness, see Jaime Reis's study *O atraso económico português em perspectiva histórica: estudos sobre a economia portuguesa na segunda metade do século XIX: 1850–1930*.

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