

Encyclopedia of Romantic Nationalism in Europe

Almeida Garrett, João Baptista

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Title: Garrett, Almeida (João Baptista da Silva Leitão)

Almeida Garrett (João Baptista da Silva Leitão de Almeida Garrett (Porto 1799 – Lisbon 1854) is still considered one of the key names of Portuguese Romanticism and of 19th-century liberalism; the two are deeply associated in his political, civic, literary and cultural biography. “Poet-citizen-dandy”, his stance (resembling that of Chateaubriand and Mme de Staël) embodied a strong interaction between his literary writing, his intervention in public life and his personal relationships.

Born into a noble family which fled from Napoleonic rule to the Azores, he began publishing poetry after enrolling in the University of Coimbra in 1818; their liberal-patriotic tone rendered some poems popular during the liberal revolution of 1820. The reactionary *coup d'état* of 1823 forced him to take refuge in England, where he was introduced to Shakespeare, Scott and Gothic Romanticism. In exile, he published the poems *Camões* (1825) and *Dona Branca* (1826), both set in key periods of the past and considered the first manifestation of Portuguese Romanticism; they are imbued with a [patriotic applicability](#) to contemporary national issues and by a critical disenchantment with Portugal's political situation.

After a brief return to Portugal in 1826, he reverted to his English exile in 1828, from where he took active part in the Liberal Wars of 1828-34. Afterwards, he settled in Portugal, in favour with the regime; his most important publication from the 1840s being the folksong collection *Romanceiro e cancionero geral* (1843-51), whose initial gestation dates back to the exile period and to *Adozinda* (1828), and which stands out as the pioneering work of Portuguese cultural Romanticism, case seeking to collect, systematize and disseminate a canonical repository of [traditional Portuguese folk-poetry](#). In contrast to earlier examples of this type of enterprise, Garret has greater attention to variants, and undertakes a [source criticism](#) of the oral and the written provenance. He is not afraid to see contamination as a hallmark of national repertoires, resulting from the mobility of poets and texts, and develops a comparatist view in linking Portuguese tradition with the [Castilian](#), [English](#) and [German](#) ones. Even so, his conclusion vindicates the superiority of Portuguese poetry. The Medievalism, which sees the Middle Ages as the nation's cultural bedrock, is part of an established [European pattern](#).

Himself an adept of literary historicism, Garrett adopted drama and romance as the best models for modern literature to emulate. His *Um auto de Gil Vicente* (1838), and *Frei Luís de Sousa* (1843) celebrate great figures in Portuguese literature and key episodes of national history, while intending to provide national drama with a new model. Garrett's theatrical mission was also pursued through his newspaper *Entre-Act* (1837) and his foundation of the

National Theatre (1836). He also published two novels, the seminal *O arco de Sant'Ana* ("The Arc of Saint Anne", 1845-51) and *Viagens na minha terra* ("Travels in my homeland", 1843 and 1845-46), the former a **historical novel** in the **social-Romantic mode** of Victor Hugo's *Notre-Dame de Paris*, the latter combining different registers and genres (philosophical reflection, written correspondence, novel) to present a saturnine view of the nation's greed, spiritual apathy and tastelessness.

His political writings include the influential *Portugal na balança da Europa* ("Portugal in the European weighing-scale", 1828) and *Da educação* ("On education", 1829), proposes a liberal, if slightly elitist, programme of national regeneration along constitutional-monarchist lines.

This vision also inspired his intense public activity as journalist / publicist and in his political career as a diplomat (1832-33), parliamentary delegate (1837), legislator (co-author of the Constitution of 1838) and Foreign Minister (1852). His view on public affairs are expressed also in his *Carta de guia de eleitores. Em que se trata da opinião publica, das qualidades para deputado, e do modo de as conhecer* ("Instructive charter for voters, concerning public opinion, the qualities for parliamentary delegates and how to recognize these", 1826) and *Discursos parlamentares e memorias biográficas* ("Parliamentary Speeches and biographical memoirs", 1871, posthumous).

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