

The Voice of the People

Writing the European Folk Revival,
1760–1914

Edited by
Matthew Campbell and Michael Perraudin



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Chapter 6

THE ORAL BALLAD AND THE PRINTED POEM IN THE PORTUGUESE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT: THE CASE OF J. M. DA COSTA E SILVA'S *ISABEL OU A HEROÍNA DE ARAGOM*

J. J. Dias Marques

For social, political and even geographical reasons, Portuguese Romanticism arrived late, especially when compared with that of Germany or Great Britain. As far as its literary aspect is concerned, Romanticism cannot be said to have existed in Portugal before 1825, the year in which J. B. de Almeida Garrett published *Camões*, a long narrative poem in ten cantos. The main romantic characteristic of this poem is the fact that it is not on a Greek or a Latin theme, but has instead a Portuguese sentimental theme: the adventurous and unhappy life of Camões, the Renaissance author considered to be the national poet of Portugal. Nevertheless, Garrett's *Camões* has both language and versification that are still strongly neoclassical and far removed from what is expected from a romantic poem.

The first thoroughly romantic work of Portuguese literature was published three years later, in 1828 – namely, *Adozinda*. This is a mid-sized poem (the original, octavo edition was 60 pages long), also written by Almeida Garrett, and it has a truly romantic feature: obeying Herder's theories, it takes folk literature as its model.¹ In fact, not only is the story that the poem narrates based on a traditional ballad, but also the language used in it clearly differs from neoclassical style, and its versification is markedly influenced by Portuguese folk poetry, *Adozinda* being almost entirely written in lines of seven feet, the metre of most Portuguese oral poems. *Adozinda* is preceded by an introduction in which Garrett defends Romanticism as the true national poetry, a poetry inspired by national traditions and displacing the classical poetry modelled

on Greek and Latin authors. In the endnotes of his introduction, Garrett publishes the original version of the folk ballad which inspired him to write *Adozinda*.

Despite the publication of this work in 1828, Portuguese literature changed little in the years that immediately followed, and the works published at the period continued to be predominantly neoclassical. The fact that *Adozinda* was published in London – where Garrett was then living in exile on account of his liberal beliefs – explains a good deal about why his poem had little resonance in Portugal. It should also be stressed that it was precisely in 1828 – the year in which *Adozinda* was published – that Portugal fell under the despotic rule of the ultra-conservative King Miguel I. The country was thus not at all receptive to the adoption of Romanticism, the new aesthetic which Victor Hugo called ‘liberalism in literature’. In addition, the subsequent Civil War between ultra-conservatives and liberals (1832–34), with its very practical and direct consequences for everyday life, was not fertile ground for the adoption of new literary ideas. Only after 1835 – once the Civil War had finished, the liberals had won and a constitutional government had been installed – could Romanticism in its different forms have a chance truly to begin to expand within Portuguese society.

In the meantime, however, in 1832, a new book had appeared with an oral ballad as its model: *Isabel ou a Heroína de Aragon* (Isabel or The Heroine of Aragon), by J. M. da Costa e Silva.² This is a very substantial poem, of six cantos, 113 pages (in-8^o) in length. Rather like Garrett’s *Adozinda*, *Isabel*³ begins with an introduction in which the author defends Romanticism as the only genuine national literature, since the neoclassical style then common in Portugal was entirely beholden to Latin and Greek models:

I do not wish to argue about the preference between classical and romantic poetry that is causing such fierce debate in our literary republic these days. However, I believe it would be good if romantic poetry became generalised in Portugal, so as to free our Poets from the miserable oppression which for centuries has diminished the best of our talents, causing them to produce paraphrases or free translations of the poems of Antiquity, instead of producing original compositions.

Poetry should be national; [...] local colour is the best asset of poetry, and the lack of it is the defect that most catches the eye in our ancient poets.⁴

Silva contends that the imitation of oral poetry is the way to nationalise written poetry, and he cites Sir Walter Scott as a model: ‘Walter Scott, [...] using the folk ballads of Scotland and reworking them, has created skilful and sublime poems that made him famous throughout Europe.’⁵ Here, Silva

obviously refers to the long narrative poems, in several cantos, which Scott called 'metrical novels', and which were said to have been inspired by Scottish oral ballads. It should be stressed that this mention of the works of Sir Walter Scott is not a second-hand reference. Silva seems indeed to have read Scott's poems; he certainly read at least one of them, *Marmion*,⁶ four verses of which he uses fittingly as the epigraph of *Isabel*.⁷

Later in his introduction, Silva also refers to the example of Garrett: 'One of the few authors who at the present time honour our poetry, Garrett has decided to follow in the path of Walter Scott, using our ballads as Scott used the Scottish ones.'⁸ Then Silva reminds the reader that Garrett collected folk ballads himself and used one of those ballads in order to write *Adozinda*, 'an excellent poem [...], full of emotion, interest, and sensitivity'.⁹ Silva confesses that he first encountered *Adozinda* through a friend, who also recommended that he follow Garrett's example: 'He insisted that I write something similar or along the same lines, and offered to help me collect the necessary ballads'.¹⁰ This is indeed what occurred. And Silva continues:

Of all the ballads collected by the two of us, that about *Count Galhardo* was the one that inspired me most to use it, because of its dramatic situations. However, the preference which my friend showed for the ballad about the heroine of Aragon forced me to give in and compose that poem first. I publish it here, together with the original ballad, so that readers may better judge the work I undertook in its production and evaluate the ornaments that my small ability added to the folk poem.¹¹

In fact, following Garrett's example in *Adozinda*, Silva, at the end of his introduction, transcribes the version of the oral ballad by which he was inspired. It is a version of the ballad that Portuguese scholars call *A Donzela Guerreira* (The Warrior Maiden), a ballad which also exists in other European countries.¹² The version collected by Silva tells the following story: there is war in Aragon (an ancient kingdom near the Pyrenees, which is today part of Spain). An old man laments that he has to go to war, an endeavour that, given his age, is likely to kill him. Although not spelled out in this version, it is understood that, if he had a son, this son would go to war in place of the father (an elucidation explicitly given in many other versions of the ballad); but he only has three daughters. When the eldest hears her father's bitter laments, she offers to go to war in his place.

A series of formulaic lines follow: the father objects, claiming that his daughter's beautiful eyes, her high shoulders, her large breasts, her small hands and her delicate feet will disclose her feminine identity, while the daughter opposes each objection, explaining how she will conceal each one of these

aspects of her body: she will always look down towards the floor; the heavy weapons which she will carry will cause her shoulders to slouch; she will wear a tight vest which will conceal her breasts; she will put on large gloves; and she will wear heavy boots on her feet.

In the following scene the characters are already at war. The young girl is now a soldier in disguise, using the name of Marcos, and she serves under the orders of a captain. The latter complains to his own parents: the eyes of Marcos, he says, 'are the eyes of a woman, not those of a man'. And we come to understand that the captain is in love with the girl, but he does not know how to persuade her to admit that she is a girl, not a man. The captain's parents suggest that their son submit Marcos to a series of tests, in order to reveal the girl's gender. This is an interesting aspect, which shows the differences understood to exist between the sexes in ancient societies, differences that are mostly concerned with the specific social roles that each sex should play. The captain accordingly tries the tests suggested by his parents; but the girl knows full well how society expects a man to behave. She is therefore able to overcome the difficulties and choose the most appropriate manly behaviour in each test. In the version Silva collected there are three tests. First, the captain invites Marcos to go to the orchard to pick fruit. If he is a woman, he will pick apples; Marcos picks limes instead.¹³ Second, the captain invites Marcos to dinner, at a table surrounded by chairs, some high and some low. If Marcos is a woman, she will sit on a low chair; however, Marcos sits on the highest of chairs. Third, the captain invites Marcos to go to the market. If Marcos is a woman, she will buy ribbons; Marcos buys a dagger instead.

After these mishaps, the captain's parents suggest a radical test: their son must invite Marcos to go swimming, so that 'he' has to undress before entering the water. Marcos accepts the invitation. Meanwhile, as he prepares to disrobe, a messenger arrives with a letter purporting to be from his family. When Marcos reads the letter (a fake, written by Marcos, as the story will later show), he begins to weep and says that his mother has died, his father is to be buried and his two sisters are alone and without support. He must therefore return home immediately. So Marcos and the captain ride on horseback until they reach the girl's castle. Once there, Marcos reveals himself as a girl and asks her father to accept the captain as a son-in-law. This version ends with the father saying that his daughter was able to fight in the war for seven years, without anyone except the captain suspecting her sex. And the captain explains that he was only able to recognise her because of the excessive beauty of her eyes. The oral version of the ballad collected and transcribed by Silva has 126 lines, and it was on the basis of that version that he wrote his poem *Isabel*, which has 3,630 lines. Thus, as may be imagined, *Isabel* has numerous new details that do not appear in the oral ballad.

To gain an idea of the innovations introduced by Silva, even in those parts where the folk ballad's influence is more evident, let us look at the scene in which the captain invites the disguised girl to go with him to the orchard. In the ballad version collected by Silva, this episode reads as follows:

– Senhor Pay, Senhora May, Grande dôr de coração, Por que os olhos de Dom Marcos São de Mulher, d' Homem não.	– Father, Mother, My heart is aching, For the eyes of Sir Marcos Are those of a woman, not of a man.
– Convidai-o vós, meo Filho, Para hir comvosco ao Pomar; Porque, se elle for Mulher, Á maçan se ha de pegar.	– Invite him, my son, To go with you to the orchard; For, if he is a woman, He will pick an apple.
Dom Marcos, como discreto, Huma Lima foi mirar; – Oh que bella Lima he esta Para hum Homem cheirar! Lindas maçans para Damas, Quem lhas podera levar!	Being as intelligent as he was, Sir Marcos turned to a lime. – Oh what a wonderful lime For a man to smell! These beautiful apples so fitting for ladies, How I wish I could take them to a maiden. ¹⁴

(*Isabel*, xii–xiii)

When it recurs in *Isabel*, this scene has changed. In Silva's poem, the interlocutor does not address his parents as in the ballad, but rather, in a more dignified (and fittingly medieval) way, his squire. As we will see, the squire's personality is comical, which contrasts with the captain's excessive sensitivity. In this scene, the squire suggests to the captain the walk to the orchard with Marcos. The next day, the captain tells him what has happened. To understand the following lines it is necessary to know that, in a previous conversation, the captain has told Marcos that a wizard has prophesied his marriage to a beautiful woman, whose face the captain has later seen in his dreams. Since then, he has been seeking this woman in various countries, but has been unsuccessful in finding her. The captain failed to tell Marcos an important detail that the reader knows through the narrator's voice: Marcos's face is very similar to the one the captain has seen in his dreams as that of the woman he will marry.

The captain now tells the squire about his walk to the orchard with Marcos:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>– Com Marcos passei a tarde inteira
No vistoso Pomar; fez mil perguntas
Do meo amor á cerca, e parecia
Que alto interesse em me escutar tomava!
– Garcia – alfim me diz – si, como espero,
Deparares a Dama, que assim buscas,
Muito a amarás? sempre serás constante?
– Si a amarei? (respondi) mais que a mim proprio,
E so menos que a Deos! hum pensamento
Nom terei, mesmo em sonhos, com que a offenda.
A ouvir tal, scintilar vi em seos olhos
Hum fogo de prazer, que me cegava.
– Eis dos amantes a usual linguagem,
– Respondeu com desdém –, mas corre o tempo,
E a posse extingue o amor. – Ao replicar-lhe,
Mudou de assumpto, e me atalhou arteiro.
– Pera fructa colher convido-o, e elle Prompto mão lansa de formosa Lima,
Mirando-a diz : “Que bella Lima he esta
Pera um homem cheirar!” – logo apontando</p> | <p>– I spent the entire afternoon with Marcos
In the lovely orchard. He asked a thousand questions
About the woman I am destined to marry and he seemed
To be listening with great interest!
‘Garcia,’¹⁵ he said at last, ‘if, as I hope,
You find the lady you are looking for,
Will you love her greatly? Will you always be faithful?’
‘Will I love her?’ I answered,
‘More than myself!
And only less than God! I will not have,
Even in dreams, a thought that will offend her.’
When she heard this, I saw in her eyes
A fiery pleasure that blinded me.
‘That is the usual language of lovers’,
She answered with disdain, ‘but times goes on,
And possession puts out the fire of love’. When I tried to reply,
She changed the subject, and cut me off skilfully.
I invited her to go and pick fruit,
and
She immediately reached for the beautiful lime,
And looking at it she said: ‘What a beautiful lime this is
For a man to smell!’ Then, pointing
To the plentiful apple tree that was bending under the weight</p> |
|---|--|

A viçosa Maceira, que vergava
 C'os bem-corados, bem-redondos
 pomos
 De suave perfume enchendo os ares,
 "Lindas maçãas (exclama) pera
 Damas,
 Quem podera levar-lhas!" – parte,
 e deixa
 Dentro em meo coração da morte
 o gelo.
 Mas tu ris? – Porque nom? tanto
 alvoroço
 Tal desesperaçom, tendo a certeza
 De ser amado amando? – De que
 sorte?
 – Sabe muito o Diabo, porque he
 velho,
 Nom por muito estudar, e eu sou
 já ruço!
 Pois que querem dizer tantas
 perguntas?
 Tanta curiosidade em teos amores?
 Tal gosto si protestas ser constante?
 Tanto afirmar que has de
 encontrar a Bella?
 Mordida está da Bicha a tal
 Moçoila,
 E, por bem te prender, te faz
 fosquinhas.

Of its rosy, well rounded apples,
 Filling the air with a slight perfume,
 'These beautiful apples', she said,
 'so fitting for ladies,
 How I wish I could take them to a
 maiden.'
 She departed and left behind
 The ice of death inside my heart.
 'Are you laughing?' 'Why not? Why
 such concern,
 Such desperation, when you are
 surely
 Loved?' 'Why do you say that?'
 'The devil knows much because he
 is old,
 Not because he studied much, and
 my hair is grey!
 What do you think she meant by all
 those questions?
 So much curiosity about your love
 life?
 Such pleasure when you promised
 to be faithful?
 So much certainty that you would
 find your love?
 That damsel has fallen head over
 heels,
 And, to keep a strong hold over
 you, she teases you!'¹⁶

(*Isabel*, 92–93)

Unsurprisingly, there are many passages in *Isabel* that bear no relation to the oral ballad, having been entirely invented by Silva. One of the most interesting is Isabel's speech in defence of women, when she addresses her father, after hearing him complain of his lack of a son:

Isabel, que theli guardou
 silencio,
 Na idea revolvendo alto projeto,

Isabel, who up until then had kept
 silent,
 In her mind thinking of a high
 decision,

Com magestoso passo para o Pay caminha,	Walked with majestic steps towards her father,
E com solemne ton assim lhe falla:	And with a grave tone of voice said:
– Todo o orgulho dos Pays nos filhos libra,	– The pride of fathers is always their male children,
De ha muito o sei; o seo affecto inteiro	I have long known this. Their entire affection
Nelles se reconcentra; elles so amam,	Is placed upon their sons; them alone they love,
Nelles so vivem! Cargos, Dignidades,	For them they live! Posts, dignities, Titles, possessions, surnames are
Titulos, Possessoes, Nomes, são delles!	theirs!
N' arvore da Familia inuteis Folhas	In the family tree, we daughters are seen
Somos julgadas! Que as desperse o Vento,	As useless leaves! The wind may spread them out,
Que o Sol as seque, isso que val? na infancia	The sun may dry them up, what does it matter? In childhood,
Tenue riso nos dam; crescendo a idade,	A weak smile is given to us; as age increases
Do Solar desterradas nos enviam Buscar estranho nome em casa alheia!	We are sent far from the paternal manor, In search of another family name in a stranger's home!
Homens, que injustos sois! o sangue vosso	Men, how unjust you are! Does not your blood
Nom gira em nossas veias? porque o Sexo	Run in our veins? Why do you give
Menoscabaes, a que deveis a vida? Somos fracas, dizeis; nossa fraqueza Da educaçom, que vos nos daes, dimana.	Less importance to the sex to which you owe your life?
Ella nos debilita os membros, ella Nos amesquinha o espirito, apagando	We are weak, you say. Our weakness Comes from the upbringing you give us.
Quasi o fogo celeste, que Natura Em nós despoz, e que em vos, e que nos Homens	It weakens our limbs, it belittles Our spirit, almost putting out The celestial fire that Nature
Procuraes augmentar com todo o esmero.	Instilled within all of us, but that you strive to increase
Vede os diversos annimaes da Terra,	Within yourselves and within your sons.

Do Sexo a diferença o que influe nelles?	Observe the various animals on earth.
He mais bravo o Liom que a sua esposa?	Does gender make them different? Is the lion stronger than the lioness?
Cede ao Tygre em fereza, em força, a Tygre?	Is the tigress less ferocious than the tiger?
E porque em mim se falle, ha hi Mancebo,	And speaking of me, is there a young man
Que, mais agil do que eu, floree a espada?	Who uses the sword better than I do,
Que mais longe arremesse o dardo, a setta?	Who throws the dart, the arrow further than I do,
Que mais firme na sella aguentar possa	Who can more firmly withstand The gallop of the horse, the blow of the spear?
Galope do Corsel, da lansa o encontro?	What else would a son do? Why do you
Um Filho Barom que mais fizera? a falta	Lament his non-existence? From this day forward
Delle porque assim choras? De hoje avante	I am a son, not a daughter!
Filho, e nom filha sou! Cavallo, e armas	Make ready horse and arms! To war I go!
Já me apromptem, para a guerra eu marchou!	

(*Isabel*, 9–10)

As we can see, there is no hint of humour or irony in this lengthy scene. In a country where declarations of egalitarianism between the sexes in works by men are a recent phenomenon (an exception being certain celebrated references in the sixteenth century), this passage in *Isabel* undoubtedly deserves to be stressed, and only the fact that the work and its author are practically unknown today may explain why no attention has been drawn, as far as I know, to those lines.

Following our comparison between *Isabel* and the oral ballad on which it was based, it should be noted that almost all the plot elements that really matter for the story Silva narrates are already present in the ballad. Silva's enlargements are, most of all, details embellishing the main action, secondary actions, some secondary characters, and various descriptions; these add little to the main action, though they take up much space. A truly important innovation by Silva, though, is the character of Elphyra, a fairy who was present at the time of Isabel's birth and predicted a brilliant and happy future for the girl. The creation

of Elphyra has vital consequences for the poem's plot. It is, in fact, thanks to her actions that conditions arise to make it inevitable that Isabel goes to war. That departure is necessary so that the girl may perform the heroic actions that the fairy had predicted. And above all it is in the war that she will meet the man whom she will marry. The happy ending of *Isabel* is thus a consequence not of the two protagonists' free actions but, on the contrary, of Elphyra's will.

The inclusion of the fairy is presented by Silva as one of the most romantic aspects of his poem, mainly because a quality termed 'the marvellous' (*o maravilhoso* – in French *le merveilleux* – denoting a combination of the supernatural and the fantastical) is ascribed to her. In the epic poems of Classical Antiquity, human actions are set in motion by Graeco-Latin gods. In the Renaissance, Tasso in his *Jerusalem Delivered* had favoured the 'Christian *maravilhoso*' ('le merveilleux chrétien'); but in *The Lusíads* (Portugal's epic *par excellence*), Camões had persisted in using the 'pagan *maravilhoso*' ('le merveilleux païen'), even though the action took place in Christian times. Silva deals at length with the question of *o maravilhoso*, to which he devotes almost half of the six-page prose introduction to his poem. In a clear criticism of Camões, he writes: '[...] it seems to me that, in an epic poem, to put pagan deities into the action along with Christian heroes is an error, an incongruity and a folly'. Silva then asks, 'From where is the *maravilhoso* of romantic poetry to be drawn? From folk traditions and superstitions – from magic, from fairies'. And he later adds: 'Magic is a folk tradition, and poets should resort to it for their inventions, in particular when they portray the customs and opinions of the Middle Ages, to which this belief belongs'.¹⁷

In the oral ballad which is the source of *Isabel*, there is no fairy – a figure who, for that matter, is almost non-existent in Portuguese ballads, in contrast to the ballad poetry of other European countries. The 'folk traditions' that Silva invokes to justify his choice of fairies as a representation of *o maravilhoso* in his poem cannot therefore be that of oral balladry. It is true that, in Portuguese folk tales, fairies appear often, which could be what Silva had in mind when making such claims. But the fairies of Portuguese oral tradition do not look at all like the fairy Elphyra who features in *Isabel*. Elphyra is the queen of the fairies (a title that does not exist in Portuguese folk tale); she lives in an enchanted underground realm, of fantastical forms and abundant riches (unlike the Portuguese fairies, of whose abode nothing is recounted); she is served by elves (unknown beings in Portuguese tradition); and it is she who decides Isabel's destiny, establishing its stages until the happy marriage to the captain whom she meets in the war – an omnipotent role which fairies in traditional folk tales do not have.

Later on in the book, at the outset of Canto II, Silva points out another source for his fairy, more plausible than the 'folk traditions': namely,

sixteenth-century Portuguese chevaleresque novels. Romantic poets were able to find in such novels the ‘national’ form of *o maravilhoso* that was to replace the Graeco-Latin variant used in Portuguese literature since the Renaissance:

Os Modernos Poetas, que em crearem	Modern poets, who struggle To create a national poetry,
Huma Poesia Nacional trabalham,	[...] will find in those despised books A new <i>maravilhoso</i> , typical of it,
[...] acharaõ nesses Livros despresados	In consonance with the ideas and the customs
Novo maravilhoso, proprio della, Comsono co’ as ideias, e os costumes	Of the common people, who believe in fairies, magicians,
Do Vulgo, que cre Fadas, Nigromantes,	And not in Mars, Minerva, Juno, Nor in Jupiter, in Venus, and the other Gods
E que em Marte nom cre, Mynerva, Juno,	Which Greece produced and Rome adored!
Em Jupiter, em Venus, e os mais Deoses,	
Que a Grecia produziu, e adorou Roma!	(<i>Isabel</i> , 17)

The introduction of a fairy in *Isabel* and the important role that Silva assigned to her, as well as the romantic and national character that this new *maravilhoso* would represent, may also be an effect of his reading of *Dona Branca*, a long narrative poem in ten cantos by Garrett, published in 1826, a work which Silva in fact refers to in the introduction to his *Isabel*. In *Dona Branca*, we also find an enchanted realm full of wonders, governed by Alina, the ‘Queen of the Fairies’, whose magic craft causes the Christian princess and the Moorish king, the poem’s protagonists, to fall in love. As in *Isabel*, the narrator in *Dona Branca* underlines the national character of the fairies and the need for them to supply the dimension of the *maravilhoso* that romantic poems demand:

Vivam as fadas, seus encantos vivam!	Praise to the fairies, praise to their charms!
Nossas lindas ficções, nossa engenhosa	May our pretty fictions, our ingenious
Mitologia nacional e própria	National mythology, our own,

Tome enfim o lugar que lhe usurparam	Take at last the place which was stolen from them
Na lusitana antiga poesia,	In old Lusitanian poetry,
De suas vivas feições, de sua ingénua	Of its true features, of its naive Natural beauty dispossessed
Natural formosura despojada	By Greek gods, by druidic spectres.
Por gregos deuses, por espectros druídicos. ¹⁸	

And, in one of the endnotes, Garrett underlines what is for him the main novelty of this book: the fact that ‘all its *meravilhoso* quality is taken from folk stories, beliefs and national superstitions’.¹⁹ This declaration has since been accepted without discussion by every author who has written about *Dona Branca*,²⁰ though it has very little basis. In fact, besides a few ‘folk superstitions’ (like the belief in witchcraft) that appear now and then in the book and have limited importance in it, the most visible ‘folk’ influence we find in *Dona Branca* is the queen of the fairies, a character whose features and actions (like those of Elphyra in *Isabel*) are by no means typical of the Portuguese tradition. In the case of *Dona Branca*, as Garrett himself admits in an endnote,²¹ the fairy probably has her immediate source in a written text, namely Wieland’s *Oberon*, which he will have read in a Portuguese translation by a poet he greatly admired.²²

Returning to the analysis of Silva’s innovations, we should note that Cantos II and III of *Isabel* are filled with actions concerning the fairy Elphyra, none of them related, of course, to the original folk ballad. At a particular moment, Elphyra leaves Europe to attend a fairy assembly, conjured up by the Supreme Spirit, in the Andes Mountains. Her voyage through the skies is a pretext for a lengthy description of various regions around the globe. While flying over Africa, the fairy sees the continent’s inhabitants, ‘barbaric, but peaceful and happy’, who hardly suspect the destiny awaiting them. So, crying bitter tears, Elphyra tells the Africans:

[...] os vossos campos	[...] Plough your fields,
Lavrai, pastoreai vossos	Tend your sheep
Rebanhos	While this is still permitted
Em quanto vo-lo outhorga o Fado	by Fate.
amigo!...	It will not be long now before
A Cobiça d’Europa desbocada	Europe’s obscene greed will come
Nom tarda, que nom venha erguer	to inflict
o facho	Discord and war upon your homes.
Da Discórdia, e da Guerra em	Pleased with their light skin and
vossos Lares.	long hair,

Ufanos co' a alva cor, longos cabellos,	Men as civilised as inhumane
Homens, quanto polidos,	Will come and take your sons and daughters
deshumanos,	To foreign lands by means of purchase or seizure,
Levaraõ vossos Filhos, vossas Filhas	Where harsh labours will torture their
Por compra, ou roubo pera estranhas terras,	Precious life in hard chains!
Onde asperas fadigas lhe agorentem	
A preciosa vida em duros ferros!	<i>(Isabel, 38)</i>

From the tears the fairy sheds, flowers grow. As the narrator explains, these flowers will in the future adorn the heads of those ‘magnanimous, eloquent [ones who] / Will defend the cause of the enslaved Black Man’ (‘magnanimos, facundos / Do escravizado Negro a causa advoguem’). He especially addresses ‘the Singer of Nature, / Harmonious Darwin’ (‘Cantor da Natureza, / Darwin harmonioso’), that is, Erasmus Darwin, the famous English eighteenth-century scientist (and grandfather of Charles Darwin), author of various works on Natural History, some of them in verse form, notably the long narrative poem *The Botanic Garden* (hence the adjective ‘harmonious’, implying melodious and pleasant to the ear). Erasmus Darwin was also a noted abolitionist, and in *The Botanic Garden* (1789–1791) we find several lines on this subject, as he criticises ‘Britannia’ in the strongest terms for allowing her citizens to invade Africa and enslave its inhabitants.²³ It must be those passages which Silva had in mind when, addressing Darwin, he wrote the following lines (the last being a direct reference to Darwin’s ‘Earth! cover not their blood’²⁴):

[...] Tu, que primeiro	[...] You, who first
Da soberba Britania nos ouvidos	In arrogant Britannia’s ears
Fizeste resoar em aureos versos	Echoed in golden verses
Do oprimido Africano ais, e queixumes,	The woes and laments of the oppressed African,
Da Raynha dos mares atterraste	And horrified the fierce heart of the Queen of the Seas,
O fero coração, pedindo á Terra	When you asked the Earth
Que do Negro, nom cubra, mostre o sangue!	To cover not, but to show the Black Man’s blood!
	<i>(Isabel, 38–9)</i>

Considering the time and place in which the fairy's address to the Africans and the narrator's subsequent commentaries were written, those passages are remarkable. In fact, in 1832, when *Isabel* was published, the problem of slavery and the slave trade was by no means a topic which Portuguese politicians felt concerned them. Only in 1836 was the law prohibiting the slave trade passed, and it took several years for it to be firmly enforced, due to the lack of resolve of successive governments. Only after 1842 – through pressure from Britain, which had prohibited the slave trade in 1807 – did the Portuguese authorities begin actively to pursue slave traders in its African colonies.²⁵

The Portuguese public were no more interested than Portuguese politicians. In fact, there was in Portugal nothing equivalent to the abolitionist organisations which had existed in Britain or the United States since the 1770s and which had had such an influence on the creation of anti-slavery laws in those countries. As a consequence, there are exceedingly few written works, literary or otherwise, in Portuguese in which a position of unequivocal antagonism towards the slave trade can be found,²⁶ and hence the importance of the above-mentioned lines of *Isabel*. Just as with the proto-feminist passage we saw before, only the fact that Silva's poem is today a forgotten work explains why it has not, as far as I know, been referred to by modern authors who have studied the history of opposition to slavery in nineteenth-century Portugal.²⁷

To finish, it should be noted that, notwithstanding Silva's statements about the romantic nature of his poem, the neoclassical heritage is overwhelming throughout the book, as regards both language and versification. Linguistically, *Isabel* is clearly neoclassical, with frequent lexical and syntactic borrowings from Latin; and it is written in lines of ten feet with no rhyme, that is to say, in the most characteristic verse form of Portuguese neoclassical poetry. This is the same type of versification that we find in Garrett's *Dona Branca* – which, as we have seen, may be at least partly responsible for the inclusion of the fairy in *Isabel*, and for the idea that this inclusion would confer on the poem the status of romantic writing.

From the point of view of its language and versification, *Isabel*, though published in 1832, is clearly a step backwards as compared with Garrett's *Adozinda* (1828). In fact, as far as those features are concerned, *Adozinda* is much closer to the romantic and folk tone. And, even though in the introduction and in various parts of the poem's text Silva boasts that *Isabel* is a true romantic work, it would be more accurate to describe it as a neoclassical poem based on a folk text.

Born and raised in a country where Romanticism was virtually unknown, Silva never managed to free himself from the neoclassicism that nourished him in his youth, and all his lyric poems²⁸ are neoclassical. He was already

forty-four years old when he wrote *Isabel*, and it was probably too late for him to become an unequivocal romantic. The same contradiction – a subject taken from a folk ballad but developed in a neoclassical language and versification – is found once more in two further long narrative poems in several cantos which Silva published some years later: *Emilia e Leonido ou os Amantes Suevos* (Emilia and Leonido or the Swabian Lovers, 1836) and *O Espectro ou a Baroneza de Gaia* (The Spectre or the Baroness of Gaia, 1838). It would seem that to write a romantic poem was easier said than done.

(Translated by Neuza Costa and Simon Furey)

Notes

- 1 Concerning *Adozinda* as a re-elaboration of a folk ballad, see my article ‘The Oral Ballad as a Model for Written Poetry in the Portuguese Romantic Movement: The Case of Garrett’s *Adozinda*’, in *35th International Ballad Conference SIEF Papers and Materials*, ed. Inna Golovakha and Larysa Vakhnina (Kiev: National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, Rylsky Institute for Art Studies, Folklore and Ethnology, 2009), 145–159.
- 2 Joseph Maria da Costa e Silva, *Isabel, ou a Heroína de Aragom* (Lisbon: Impressão Regia, 1832).
- 3 *Isabel ou a Heroína de Aragom* will henceforth be abbreviated as *Isabel*.
- 4 *Isabel*, v.
- 5 *Ibid.*, iii.
- 6 Curiously, Garrett, in *Adozinda*, had also transcribed a few lines of *Marmion*, the only ‘metrical poem’ by Scott that he cites.
- 7 ‘So shall he strive, in changeful hue, / Field, feast, and combat to renew, / And loves, and arms, and harper’s glee, / And all the pomp of chivalry.’ Beneath these lines, Costa e Silva writes: ‘Walter Scott. *Marm.* Cant. V’. These are, more precisely, the last lines of the ‘Introduction to Canto Fifth’. See, for instance, *The Poetical Works of Sir Walter Scott, complete in one volume* (Paris: A. & W. Galignani, 1827), 90.
- 8 *Isabel*, iii–iv.
- 9 *Ibid.*, iv.
- 10 *Ibid.*, iv.
- 11 *Ibid.*, iv–v.
- 12 At the very least in Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Slovenia, Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic, Serbia, Albania, and Bulgaria. See Samuel G. Armistead, ‘Pan-European Analogues’, in Manuel da Costa Fontes, *Portuguese and Brazilian Balladry: A Thematic and Bibliographic Index* (Madison, Wisconsin: The Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1997), II, 633.
- 13 This social rule, stating that apples are fit for women and limes for men, is not wholly intelligible today. Perhaps Eve and the apple in *Genesis* are its origin – together with a traditional association of women with sweetness and men with acerbity.
- 14 This, like other translations from Portuguese in the present article, are the translator’s own.
- 15 ‘Garcia’ is the captain’s name.

- 16 It should be noted that *Isabel* is written in an overblown language, full of hyperbata and Latinisms, which reverts at least to the eighteenth century and is not easily rendered into English.
- 17 *Isabel*, vi, viii.
- 18 Almeida Garrett, *Dona Branca*, in *Obras*, vol. II (Porto: Lello & Irmão – Editores, n. d.), canto III, 7, 502.
- 19 *Dona Branca*, 606.
- 20 For instance, the most important modern specialist on Garrett writes that, in *Dona Branca*, he ‘meaningfully employs the national folk *meravilhoso*’: Ofélia Paiva Monteiro, ‘Garrett’, in *Dicionário do Romantismo Literário Português*, ed. Helena Carvalhão Buescu (Lisbon: Caminho, 1997), 205.
- 21 ‘In this composition [*Dona Branca*], we have visibly followed the example of Wieland in *Oberon*’ (*Dona Branca*, 606).
- 22 That poet was Filinto Elísio, whose translation appeared in Paris in 1802.
- 23 See [Erasmus Darwin], *The Botanic Garden*, I, 4th ed. (London: J. Johnson, 1799), canto II, ll. 313–316 and 421–430, 101 and 110.
- 24 *The Botanic Garden*, canto II, line 430.
- 25 See João Pedro Marques, *Os Sons do Silêncio: o Portugal de Oitocentos e a Abolição do Tráfico de Escravos* (Lisbon: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais, 1999), 203–50.
- 26 The short play by José Agostinho de Macedo *O Preto Sensível* (The Sensitive Negro, 1836) is generally mentioned as one of the very few examples, though to a dispassionate eye its anti-slavery position does not seem wholly consistent. In any case, this work is to be disregarded as Portuguese literature, since it has recently been discovered to be merely a free translation of a Spanish play of 1798. See Anne-Marie Pascal, ‘A Abolição da Escravatura e o Teatro Português (XVIII–XIX)’, *Sexto Congresso da Associação Internacional de Lusitanistas*, http://web.archive.org/web/20010804142333/http://www.geocities.com/ail_br/ail.html (accessed 15 January 2010).
- 27 For instance, there is no mention to it in J. P. Marques’s *Sons do Silêncio* (Lisbon: ICS, 1999), the most recent and thorough book on the subject.
- 28 Initially published in journals, these poems were collected in a late publication, *Poesias* (1843–44, 5 vols).