

ASK HIM FOR A CROQUIS!

Miguel Teotónio Pereira

Abstract

I have a daily relationship with my father that wakes up with me every morning. The house where I live, where I chose to live, is my father's. It is my father's because he bought it and because he has shaped it and filled it with images and with life. The last link in a chain started in the late sixteenth century. It was in 1966, in a remote (truly, at that time) place, almost inaccessible and almost deserted of people - Marvão - that my parents bought a house that is (now) over four hundred years old.

A house that welcomed many people, from the most varied origins and in the most varied circumstances, in a movement that, until 1974, was tightly watched; This house had, moreover, the honour of opening its doors to PIDE. And surely some of the many white hairs that today dignify the head of Mrs. Joaquina, Cuco's wife, had their origin in those events.

The watchmen had a few reasons to watch: on three or four occasions, Marvão's house served as headquarters and starting point for clandestine expeditions, mostly done on foot, to the Spanish "side", by the Galician and the Fontanheira/Fontañera, where the Portuguese young men, refusing to obey the military call that would force them to fight in the colonial war, would have the "first day of the rest of their lives".

Keywords: Father, Teotónio Pereira, Civic, countercurrent, conviction, design and order.

Full text

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From those times, holiday times, walks, village celebrations, mischief and flirtations, meetings and farewells, and also conspiracy, a collection of *Comércio do Funchal* newspaper, the pink coloured one, stands as witness in four heavy drawers of a solid chest of drawers.

Several traits of my father's character have been emphasized, at various times and in various ways. But there is one of his characteristics that is often overlooked: I refer to his sobriety and methodical spirit, both mother and father of



his proverbial patience, perseverance, and ability to work - and I insist on this point because, to my great sorrow, I have been disinherited of such attributes. He loved drawing and order - in life and in the landscape; drawing which, I suppose, as my ignorance of such an art does not allow me to expand further, can be creative and even chaotic, but always ending up uniting points, perspectives, ideas - because it provides them with a common house, rationalizes and integrates them, giving them a voice; order - not the one which is imposed, or which serves as a framework for restrictions on creation, but the one that is constructed, tested, the order that results from the need for things, in their movement, to "rearrange" themselves, and relate themselves from accepted references.

Throughout his eventful life, some habits never abandoned him, such as the *siesta*, to which he paid full cult – a short and intense nap he did while sitting down. He was also a persistent smoker (a bad habit, in this case), a practice he exercised with the most innocuous cigarettes the market had to offer: always no filter cigarettes and brands such as High-Life, Paris, Três Vintes, or the resilient Português Suave. It turned out that my father had a surprising justification for this bad habit: he said that he did not swallow the smoke! How about it?

In this type of testimony, it is common for children to recall the Great Lessons received from their parents. With regard to my father, I am no exception. From him I have received many lessons, big, small, and medium: it is a constellation that would be reductive to rank. But for some obscure reason, there was one that was imprinted in my mind with particular clarity. It involves me and my young sisters, I cannot specify ages; although we had a maid, she was forbidden to make our beds, as this task was exclusively the remit of the respective users. Our mother was especially zealous in overseeing compliance with this rule. Luckily for us, the Great Ally was on our side: the good Maria, the Great Accomplice, was

sufficiently cunning to take such hard work away from us. But there was this occasion, which I remember as if I am seeing an old photograph, where my father came to supervise the execution of this task, and he must not have been happy, because he told me, with a grave and solemn look, more or less the following: "Miguel, when you do something, it must be well done. It may take longer, but at that point only what is being done matters, and it matters that it is well done. The rest comes next".

As I have already said, I don't know why this sentence of my father is recurrent in my memory.

It is worth remembering the countercurrent attitude he has often shown. And it is worth remembering it not because it is a quality in itself, but because it reveals his own ideas and beliefs, ideas and convictions that he has never put on the market.

Born in the midst of a family of the Lisbon bourgeoisie with activities and interests in the industrial, commercial and financial sectors, which in the thirties of the twentieth century was considered a family of power, my father chose a "lesser" artistic profession - the architecture course was not a university degree. He devoted himself, as well-known, to this profession, relegating the management of family assets to second place.

Contrary to the habits of his social class, he married a divorced young woman from a family of the surviving petty bourgeoisie, an atheist (he was a Catholic), independent, with a temperament that totally opposed his own and who moved in intellectual and literary circles (her first husband was Jaime Salazar Sampaio and she mixed with, among others, Luiz Pacheco).



If I remember correctly, it was in his first job, as a civil servant, that my father met this young clerk. A double clash (that of the labour market, the economy and the social reality and my mother's) opened the doors, already open, to the irruption of its third great dissidence: the ideological one.

Whereas in the Spanish civil war he marched on to Seville, in support expeditions to the pro-Franco troops organized by the *Mocidade Portuguesa*, at the end of World War II he was already a man breaking up with his own ideological ballast, increasingly realizing that the lack of connection between reality and official propaganda was evident.

That would be the beginning of a well-known path of civic engagement and which often must have been harshly lonely.

Finally, last but not least, a piece of advice: if someone finds himself lost, ask him for a croquis, a map, guidance! He performs miracles with a piece of paper and a pencil.

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