

## Reminiscences about Hugo Ribeiro

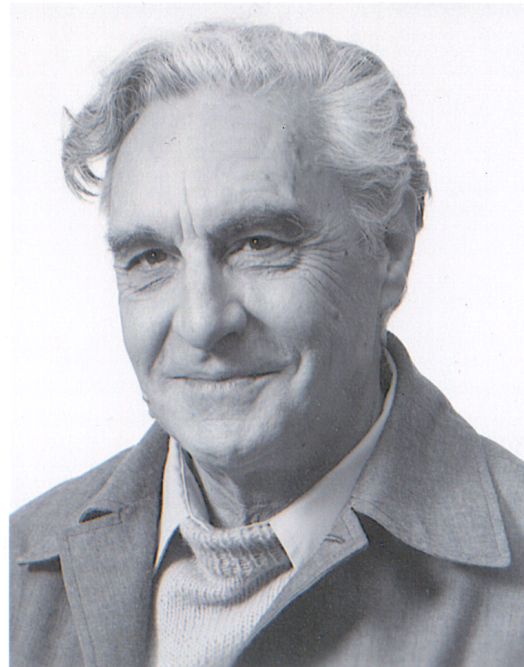
by Jorge Almeida

I met Hugo Ribeiro at the end of 1976 when I first started teaching as a monitor in the Logic course, for which he was responsible. At that time, he had been retired for two years from an academic career in the United States spanning almost thirty years, and the University of Porto was lucky enough to be able to count on his collaboration. I myself was at that time a very young student, and I was immediately impressed by his personality and warm and informal manner, which did not bear the slightest trace of arrogance, in marked contrast with the (real or imagined) distance that I felt from other professors. Although the years had by then begun to take their toll upon his health, and he no longer had much energy for the debates of ideas that he had undertaken in his youth, it was always a pleasure to talk with him, and I gradually went on adopting his vision of the professional world of Mathematics that was serene, yet always deeply concerned and somewhat rebellious.

Through Hugo Ribeiro and his wife Maria do Pilar, I became aware of the obstacles that could confront the most innocent and generous intellectual initiative during the Salazar regime if not promoted by the authorities. During his student career (he graduated at the end of the 1930s), Hugo Ribeiro had been in prison and submitted to a suspension designed to curb the freedom of someone who dared to proclaim his ideas, and attended very few lectures (I, who had never missed a lecture, was shocked by this admission). He quickly espoused the new ideas and the enthusiasm brought to the Lisbon mathematical community by a recent doctorate from the school of Maurice Frechet in Paris, António Aniceto Monteiro. When the university authorities refused them rooms for their seminars for fear of subversion, they met clandestinely in Ribeiro's house in St. Pedro de Estoril. These were pioneering years, which led to the foundation of the Portuguese Mathematical Society and the journals *Portugaliae Mathematica* and *Gazeta de Matemática*. It was also at this time that Hugo Ribeiro began doing research which was then concerned with General Topology.

As I chose to attend a seminar organised by Hugo Ribeiro in the final year of my undergraduate degree, I made contact through him with the works of Garrett Birkhoff, in the foundation of Universal Algebra, and Alfred Tarski in Logic, particularly in the Theory of Models. It was

in fact in Tarski's school in Berkeley that Hugo Ribeiro spent his first three years in America, after having been (unofficially of course) advised to emigrate by the same Institute of High Culture that had financed his doctorate in Zurich during the last years of the war (when he had studied under Paul Bernays). At that time, many academics considered to be opponents of the intolerant regime were expelled from academic life, and many, such as António Aniceto Monteiro and Ruy Luis Gomes, had been forced to emigrate.



Hugo Ribeiro

At the end of the seminar, I realised that I was about to complete my degree without having any clear ideas about what I would do next. It was Hugo Ribeiro who encouraged me to go on to do post-graduate studies in the United States. On his recommendations, my extremely belated application for the doctoral programme of the Pennsylvania State University was accepted in that same year of 1978, and I was exempted from the examinations normally required of candidates. This fact I always took

to be a sign of the respect that Hugo Ribeiro commanded from his former colleagues (he was retired from this university) rather than the result of any personal merit of my own.

Recently, I had the opportunity to visit the department where Hugo Ribeiro had worked from 1950 to 1961 in the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. The department was then celebrating the centenary of the award of its first doctorate in Mathematics. Forty years after the departure of Hugo Ribeiro, I could still find evidence of his involvement in department activities. The centenary commemorative leaflet proclaimed:

*Ribeiro, with his “revolutionary” zeal, hastened the process toward modernizing the [graduate] program and modifying it to reflect the interests and training of the younger faculty.*

I also found a record of the two doctoral theses that he had supervised (amongst five prepared at the department during his stay).

For twelve years, I was lucky enough to have regular contacts with the Ribeiro couple, and our friendship grew, based upon the respect and admiration that both inspired in me. Since the early death of Hugo Ribeiro in 1988, I have continued to cultivate the friendship with

Maria do Pilar, to the extent that growing professional commitments and geographical distance have permitted. It was with her permission that I attributed posthumously to Hugo Ribeiro co-authorship of some lecture notes that I prepared for a course in Logic, in recognition of the profound influence that his ideas had had upon my own approach to the teaching of this subject.

Hugo Ribeiro was certainly the person who influenced me most during my formative years, despite the fact that I did not have the opportunity of attending more than very few lectures given by him. Although my own research has led me through other paths, the studies I did under his supervision have had a lasting effect upon my work. It was also through my contact with him that I learned the overall importance of the values of freedom, respect for others, and humility.

Despite my lack of vocation and initial reluctance to accept the task of writing this text, the sense of gratitude and indebtedness that I feel towards Hugo Ribeiro have meant that I was unable to refuse to pay homage to him in this way. In a work published in 1995 in the journal *Portugalíæ Mathematica*, which he co-founded, I have concentrated more specifically upon his scientific work. In this text, I have been content simply to reminisce in a personal vein, in the hope that these ramblings will contribute to the understanding of his fascinating personality.

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