

THE DECLINE OF PEASANT SOCIETY

THE VIEW OF AN AUTODIDACT

Outside school, going with the cows, pulling the bellows, stealing fruit, making all kinds of gadgets that could be used as toys, eluding the priest, running away, out of respect or fear, from the Guardia Civil and begging your troubled mother for four pesetas to go to the cinema on Sunday; Via Crucis at Easter; Christmas holidays, nougat, killing the gocho, figs for Epiphany; summer holidays, bathing in the icy waters of the requeiro de Grandas, sowing potatoes, corn; mowing the grass. Weeding potatoes, sowing turnips, weeding turnips, meshing; beating iron, earth; earth from the field, from the atrium of the collegiate. Eating black bread, making slings, playing guá, spinning tops, billarda, hoops. Walking with your back to the wall to hide the tear in your trousers. Reading stories of Jack, Bill and Sam, The Warrior of the Mask, and so on. The university of the street, learning more outside than inside.

José María Naveiras Escanlar

José María Naveiras Escanlar "Pepe el Ferreiro" (31 March 1942, Grandas de Salime - 13 June 2020, Belmonte de Miranda) was born and grew up in a peasant family with a long tradition of ironmongers. He attended the National School as a child and although he did not continue studying, the influence of some of his teachers eventually underpinned his innate curiosity and hunger for knowledge, which would remain with him throughout his life.



Pepe, in a handmade toy car, surrounded by family and neighbours.

During his military service, which he did in Astorga, the classes and practical work in the mechanical workshop completed his already extensive artisan knowledge, adding a theoretical basis that would later be of great use to him in the processes of recovering items. Although he had no shortage of options for settling elsewhere, his nostalgia for his homeland brought him back to Grandas de Salime, where he set up a metal carpentry workshop.

In the forties of the 20th century, western Asturias, secularly isolated, was still an eminently peasant society in the process of disintegration. The world that Pepe knew in his childhood and youth was destined to become extinct. Traditional peasant society was accelerating its decomposition and with it, the economic, social, cultural and ideological model that structured the communities was coming to an end.

The construction of the Salto de Salime (1945-1955) was a turning point and a point of no return in the region. Its construction required the mobilisation of thousands of workers for whom villages had to be built. With them, came new fashions and demands that transformed the social landscape and economic activity, introducing new services and trades. The reservoir flooded the villages and the fertile plains of the river Navia with their orchards and vineyards, causing an exodus in search of better fortune in the opportunities offered by industry in other regions or, in the case of those who chose to stay, to move to new housing in the capital of the council.

In the 1960s, the accelerated mechanisation of the countryside, which until then had been very conservative in its uses, would end up definitively disintegrating the traditional peasant framework.

As a direct witness to these events, Pepe soon realised that the world he had known was rapidly and irreversibly decaying, rejecting and condemning to oblivion the wisdom and material culture of generations of peasant families.



At the Fonda Francisquín with a group of friends.