

A great *guru*

When Rafael first appeared in my life at the beginning of 1959, his third book of poems had recently appeared: *Numeros* (Numbers), ediciones del Hombre Nuevo, 1958. I was impressed by the *sentencias* (numbers 42, 43, 44, 46) with their blend of severity and humour. I still find them impressive, nearly 60 years later, especially the last, "Learning to live takes exactly a lifetime". (I later translated these and a selection of others from his 1977 collection, also called *Numeros*.)

This was the start of my rafaelian education: in spite of a degree from Oxford in English literature (in those days meaning from Anglo Saxons to Keats) I was ignorant in most other departments, apart from languages half-learnt in the course of diplomatic family life. My instructions were to read Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* (I read it on a beach in Barbados). Then came Kant, Schopenhauer, Rousseau, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Berdyaev (with the help of american anthologies). The history of literature in Spain, by Gerald Brenan led to Rafael's favorites Gracián, Luis de Leon, Lorca, Neruda. Unamuno's *Tragic Sense of Life*, a key work. The Baghavad-Gita. Plato. Zen (interpreted by Dante Suzuki) and the Tao Te Ching -- classics of the 60s. *Martin Fierro*, of course. Keyserling (*South American Meditations*). Marechal's *Adan Buenosayres*. Henry Miller (*The Books In My Life*). John Cowper Powys. (*The Meaning of Culture*). *The Ides of March* by Thornton Wilder. Herbert Read. Bellow, Mailer ... Like Borges, Rafael had a deep respect for Chesterton. The titles still stand out on the bookshelves. My contribution was Blake: we showed (in the embassy) an excellent film from the British Council on Blake's visual work , accompanied by a talk by me on the poems and philosophy which was later published in a bilingual edition by Hombre Nuevo.

Rafael's progress through the city, visiting galleries and studios (I made notes for the *Buenos Aires Herald*) was another education, seeing in action his energy and enthusiasm,

sympathy and encouragement for younger artists, respect and celebration of older ones. Always (almost always) taking a positive view, singling out the heroes and "saints", scorning irony and fashion. It impressed me, in Argentina, that people of (more or less) European Catholic descent manage to combine personal faith with rational intelligence and poetic imagination; the Irish can do this too, but the English tend to select one of the three. On one unforgettable day I was invited with Rafael and poet Fernando Demaría to tea with their master Leopoldo Marechal. The three poets discussed the relative truth and beauty of a finite or infinite universe for the new *Martin Fierro* translation, nobly suggested from his OAS office to the university of NY (Albany), it happily occupied four years of my life with the help of dictionaries, commentaries, and Rafael, whose generosity with his busy time was sorely tested by queries about "minute particulars" and complaints at interference by the Albany academics. In December 1967 it finally appeared, I came to Washington for a lunch with speeches and proudly received a bronze plaque in commemoration. Years later, thanks to Rafael it was the translation chosen for the splendid illustrated edition by the Zurbarán gallery.

I have an archive of early 1960s catalogues and *carpetas* (sets of prints), many with introductions by Rafael, and with his generous help I acquired wonderful paintings which have proved faithful friends: Presas, Barragán, Macentyre, Martino, Kemble, Perez Celis, Salatino ... [The enormous painting by Berni, *La Navidad de Juanito Laguna*, now a star of the museum in Palermo, spent several months in waiting in my flat in calle Arroyo, with its view across the then undeveloped Retiro to the pink-brown-purple river.] From his time in Washington and after his return I also have many photocopies sent by Rafael of his newspaper articles and essays. They seem to me ideal, explaining simply for readers in unknown territory, with excellent illustrations, but always aware of other angles and more complex meanings

A half-century of letters, in English (Rafael was bilingual, as is well known). His phrases (*sentencias* again) have entered our vocabulary: *Beware the confusion of categories* (Dante) --

One should not do someone else's job -- Embarrassment, nostalgia, guilt: inadmissible indulgences. From his time in Edinburgh (1945-7), his friend the poet George Kay always spoke of him with total recall, as did the Kings, with whom these two exceptionally handsome students lodged. Rafael liked to quote the very Scottish reverend King: *How do we know the world is improving? For all we know it is getting wairse and wairse till it is an abomination to Almighty God!* Or imitating the sinners poised for Hell: "*Laird, Laird, we didna ken!*" "*Ye ken the noo!*" And the historian Magda King remembered Rafael's talent, like that of Falstaff, not only to be witty but the cause of wit in others. An honour and a blessing to have known him.

KK

To Rafael, in your style

Even archangels don't stay long
so try to get questions accurate
as with expensive transatlantic calls
or hospital visiting,
even though we know we know
that the best answers seldom come from questions
but in parables, or a shared feast,
on postcards, or over cups of tea.

Since life makes the rules, not history,
we need more to check lines still open
than that the rules haven't changed;

rules being part of the game
as the first lesson. Then:

courage, to see what's possible,
decorum; filial piety;
at least, to cry and laugh during intervals.

The arts of solitude and shared time
(public life an advanced grade);
guessing the password, while
staying on the Qui Vive.

Your theories to prove it: that
our world, like God's, embraces
all of the Karamasovs,
and allows things to come to pass
according to natural forces, the
supernatural, the diabolical,
inertia and karma, all
holy energy, including law-making;
and that all can be over-ruled
by one thought, in an hour,
or in a grain of sand.

That best contains most.

That God has a sense of humour,

and likes it in others. Bottom no fool,
nor Siegfried ludicrous, if sung from the heart.

That saints may be doves or serpents.

That pigs are dangerous.

Irony, like activity, a peril

and a quiet life a work of genius.

Mental bricks: Faith, respect, pride; Hope,
balance, imagination; Love, a creed and a talent.

To diagnose without killing,

build without losing ground.

With questions as answers, write

legibly, on one side only,

in the right order

and with an eye on the clock.