

An Entire Universe

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Some men are universes in and of themselves: individuals whose genius lies in the sensibility with which they interpret reality and make it their own; artists who tend to be modest yet with horizons as vast as the world. Death's absurdity always makes it a difficult topic since it

deprives us of what we love best but, above all, despite its seeming inexplicability, it is the most natural part of our existence. Now it's the turn of Rubén Bonifaz Nuño, a magnificent poet, a free, independent man devoted solely to his art and our culture.

Nowadays, when many shun the classics, seduced by the latest trends, when men of letters come and go, swept away by the wave of the latest batch of best-sellers, when zombies turn into Jane Austen and teens are crazy about decaffeinated vampires, the example of a man who translated the *Iliad* and the poems of Catullus is unimpeachable and has an almost disturbing beauty.

Bonifaz Nuño was born in the town of Córdoba, Veracruz. Ninety years were his days, in the words of the Bible verse;

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he was able to communicate the universal wonder we feel upon contemplating nature, the power of disappointment in love, or the perfection of architecture; he also studied Latin and Greek, precise meter, and immense meanings; all because he did not see himself as a follower of this or that creed, or as a member of one clique or another, but simply as a man, a Mexican, merely engaged in his task of building a better and unprecedented world with his words.

His work was to say in Spanish what others said thousands of years before, weighing and not measuring words, as Alfonso Reyes once said, but also writing exact and perfect texts without this detracting from his expressiveness or his importance. Neftalí Coria aptly described him as a poet of brilliance, and that is true: distanced from our daily struggles and our inherent and oppressive meanness; his pen seemed more like a chisel, creating poems of magnificent purity with a delicate touch; it showed hours of work; Bonifaz Nuño was quite simply a master poet with a craftsman's skill and a Benedictine monk's patience, as Gracián would say; but he was equally a master of the word.

Don Rubén was a member of the Mexican Academy of Language, where he staunchly defended idiomatic roots. At times he could seem like one of those monks who, ensconced in their libraries, safeguarded a legacy, the importance of which would only be revealed thousands of years later. But Bonifaz was always out and about; he returned to his home town; he spoke about what he loved and hated with equal passion and vigor; he was a man of the world, a man whom we approached for his wisdom and knowledge. Trained as a lawyer at the for-



mer National School of Jurisprudence, he always maintained the intellectual rigor inherent in the study of the law and, far from isolating himself on the Parnassus of his beloved classical texts, he taught and researched and sat on the board of governors of the UNAM, the Alfonsina International Society and The National College. We called him a poet because that is how he described himself, though he was much more than that: he was culture compacted into the brief lapse of a human life. We called him a teacher, though he was much more than that: he was an education in himself through the example of his work and his days. Today he has left us and we can only say, "Thank you, Rubén." ■■■