



Personal Terms

Frederic Raphael

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In 1951, when he was 20, the novelist, screen-writer and "homme-de-lettres"-to-be Frederic Raphael bought a spiral bound notebook from Joseph Gibert in the Boulevard St Michel and started keeping a curious kind of writer's journal. His purpose was "to catch ideas and incidents on the wing" and "to train myself to notice things as they were". He continues this practice today, though the word "things" has come to embrace more or less everything that matters in the writer's world. These notebooks are at once a detailed "Biographia Literaria" and a creative resource, not only for him but for other writers and readers. Raphael includes reflections, sketches for stories and other projects, vignettes of people and places. Some entries are pages long, some are pithy aphorisms, all in one way or another illuminating the vocation of writer and the equally urgent and vital vocation of reader. A writer's chief tools are watching, listening, guessing, keeping an open mind, reading the present and re-reading the past to keep contact and faith with the works which until recent times constituted the imagination and critical discourse of our cultural tribes. "Personal Terms" is a generous collection from Raphael's notebooks, beginning (as Alice advises) at the beginning, and continuing the intermittent story up to 1969, that year of political crisis and disillusion. By then the 18-year-old boy in the Bou' Mich had become the author of eight novels and much else for the page and screen. He still visited (as he does today) Gibert's shop to acquire his enabling notebooks.

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