

**Review / Reseña**

Rosenmann-Taub, David. *GLOSA*. New York: Mandora Press, 2020. 412 pp.

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Awarded municipal and national prizes for his first three books and hailed in 1949 as a rising star in the Latin American poetic firmament by the foremost literary critic of that moment,<sup>1</sup> the Chilean poet David Rosenmann-Taub has written and published prolifically over the last seven decades. His poetry has been translated and anthologized on four continents, set to music and dance, discussed in seminars and conferences, introduced in multimedia presentations, and critically examined in numerous journal articles, dissertations and full-length books. In Latin American letters today, he is recognized as much for the profundity of his thought as for the rigor of his poetic expression. For Spanish poet, critic and academic Eduardo Moga, Rosenmann-

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<sup>1</sup> In the poet's biography, from his website: "In 1949 the publishing house Cruz del Sur in Santiago published Volume One of *Cortejo y Epinicio*. The book received wide acclaim in the press, including a reputation-making review in the country's largest-circulation newspaper, *El Mercurio*, from Hernán Díaz Arrieta (Alone), the leading literary critic of Chile... In 1951 Cruz del Sur published *Los Surcos Inundados* (*The Flooded Furrows*) for which he received the Premio Municipal de Poesía. For his (unpublished) book *El Regazo Luminoso* (*The Shining Lap*), he received the Premio Nacional de Poesía de la Universidad de Concepción (The National Poetry Prize of the University of Concepción)."

Taub is “the total poet: that is, the poet who deals with all aspects of reality and mobilizes all the resources of the language to do so” (2). And for Chilean National Literature prize-winning poet Armando Uribe, “*The most important and profound living poet in the entire Spanish language is David Rosenmann-Taub*” (1998).

Due to their concision, frequent lack of titles, figurative language with hidden referents and polysemic lexicon, Rosenmann-Taub’s poems often require extended concentration, reflection and study for their comprehension. Yet the assessment of his poetry as hermetic is ill-founded. If the poems are difficult to understand, it is because the poet wishes to express reality as accurately as possible, and since reality is complex, the expression of that reality must be perforce complex as well. The poet confirms this in his interviews; in a 2005 interview with Laura Castellanos, he declares:

To tell the truth with precision, with certainty, not to lie, as in a scientific investigation that has arrived to its ultimate consequences: that is a challenge. To accept the challenge is the real challenge. I don’t see the difference between science and poetry. The function of art is to express knowledge in the most exact way possible; otherwise, it has neither function nor destiny (2).

And in a 2004 interview, when asked by Francisco Fasola about the “secretism” in his poetry, he responds:

At the risk of appearing pretentious: Would you say to Einstein, “Is there something of ‘secretism’ in your theory of relativity?” For those who don’t understand it, of course there is. To understand even what makes up a salad, requires attention, and attention demands education. The inattentive reader will find any text hermetic, or, worse, he will believe that he has understood it (2).

Nevertheless, conscious of the gap between the content that he wishes to communicate and the hermeneutic strategies available to help his readers understand that content, the poet himself has made efforts to illuminate his poems. In 2008 Rosenmann-Taub published *Quince*, a collection of fifteen poems from various of his books, that he himself explicated and interpreted. *Quince* was the first opportunity for readers to learn, understand and appreciate the techniques that Rosenmann-Taub employs and the depth and breadth of the meaning he actually conveys.

Now, almost thirteen years later, the poet has just published a book which takes his auto-hermeneutic project to the next level. *GLOSA*, published in December 2020 by the Corda Foundation, is a book of 410 glossy large format pages that explicate seven of the poet’s poems from five of his books. The book is destined to be a collector’s item for Rosenmann-Taub aficionados. Its purpose? On the back cover, the poet writes: “Testigo, siempre, de mis poemas: autohermenéutica” (“Witness, always,

of my poems: autohermeneutics”). Quite simply, as the best possible interpreter of his poems, Rosenmann-Taub wants his readership to profit from the best possible interpretations of his poems.

In *Quince*, the poet analyzed his poems in a manner rarely seen; now, in *GLOSA*, with more pages devoted to fewer poems, he goes even farther. Words are dissected, to be reformulated in different ways; words within words produce meaning; phonemes, diphthongs and even letters become signifiers. Often, words from one poem appear in footnotes in another poem, so that the meaning of the word in the first poem may inform its meaning in the second. Meter, rhythm and rhyme emphasize the poems’ words and ideas, conveying meaning as well. The shape of the poem on the page, the number of lines it contains, the sounds of the words, and even the silences all inform the content. The poet not only employs every semantic and prosodic technique possible to express his meaning, but also employs every graphic element available to convey that meaning to the reader: colors, arrows, boxes, italics, different font types and sizes connect and emphasize textual elements. With the poet’s explanations, not only does the poem’s meaning reveal itself, but the reader learns and appreciates the construction of the poem and the techniques with which that meaning is conveyed.

A summary of the poet’s analysis of his poem “ONTOGENIA” gives an example of the poet’s approach.

*ONTOGENIA*

Santo, para la crema, el chocolate.  
Malvada, para ti, mi fantasía.  
Verde, para el profeta, lo granate.  
Y oscura, para mí, la luz del día.

*DEVELOPMENT*

Holy, for the cream, chocolate.  
Evil, for you, my fantasy.  
Green, for the prophet, maroon.  
And obscure, for me, the light of day.

Since the poem’s title is “Development,” we imagine a priori that the poem will tell us something about the human being’s ability to learn and grow. Sure enough, the poem treats both flawed and valid perceptions. Chocolate is holy for the cream, but this is a subjective judgment, based only on the chocolate’s own subjective experience. What is evil for you is wonderful for me: like the cream, we also have our own subjective perceptions and conceptions. The prophet goes deeper; he observes objectively, not subjectively, and understands that the surface may not necessarily reflect the reality beneath. And I also, at the beginning of my own development, realize that “the light of day”—truth—is obscure. Understanding that subjectivity is erroneous, that reality is

below the surface and that truth is obscure leads to curiosity, questioning and investigation: the first steps in development.

This seems a reasonable interpretation, especially since Rosenmann-Taub addresses these concerns in other poems as well. However, the poet's intention is far different, as I show in the summary below of his own interpretation.

#### *ONTOGENIA*

- The poem is first displayed by itself, and then set to a score that indicates its rhythm when recited.
- With its “para ti, para él, and para mí”, the poem is “for” you, “for” me, and “for all”. “Os cura”, two words inside “oscura”, infers that the light of day will cure me from the useless ingenuousness of my absurd hope.
- The poet analyzes the formal and conceptual structure of each line, to show that they reflect statism, not development. Without verbs, the poem is only an illusion of movement.
- The syllables of the title and the poem are four and forty respectively; the poem's shape is rectangular, a shape which resists change, along with the absence of explicit verbs.
- The title's ending—“nia” is negative: “ni a”; and this negativity is reflected in the ending of “fantasia” and “día” in the second and fourth lines.
- Despite the poem's title, the prefix “ant...” is found repeatedly in the poem: so the poem is not “Ontogenia” but “Antigenia.” There is apparent development, but it goes nowhere.
- The first three letters of the first three lines do not participate in the title; and the rhythm at the end of each of the first three lines—similar to the rhythmic figuration of the title—resists the rest of each verse.
- The first two letters of the title, reversed, spell “NO.” The last three letters are negative as well: NIA = No, de NInguna manera. There is NO development, says nature.
- The phoneme /j/, pronounced phonetically like an English “h”—“central, implacable, omnipotent” according to the poet—appears only in the title, in the center, encased and protected by the walls of “NO” at the beginning and end of the word.

- The poet examines the relationship between the first and last syllables of the poem, and of the vowels.
- In the poem's score, each line begins with optimism and ends in pessimism and disappointment, losing its energy and slowing as it progresses to the end.
- The rhythm of the first and third verses are identical.
- "Malvada" contains "Mal va"—"goes badly."
- "Verde" is "ver de." The prophet, intelligent and with good will, "sees" the maroon—the blood—of Jesus, the perversity of the multiverse.
- "Verde, para" contains "ver de para", which contains "ver depara". The poet brings the opportunity to the multiverse to see the blood of Jesus.
- "Lo granate" contains "logra"—Jesus fulfills his bloody mission.
- The second and fourth lines also have much in common: the references to "you" and "I" demonstrate our similarity.
- The "sí a" and the "dí a" at the end of the fourth line signify speaking and giving; however, while I am speaking and giving to myself, to you, to him and to Him, nature is speaking and giving only to itself, with duplicity.
- The "H"—the nothingness—of the universe, from before the beginning until after the end, is without being: only the animalistic guttural sound of nature—/j/—encased between two walls of NO.

Now, the poem takes on a different hue. With the exception of the prophet, all of us are stuck in our own subjectivity, no different than the cream with its chocolate. I don't see the light; nor does the poem indicate that I will ever see it. My own subjective optimism led me to assume that the poem's title indicated development was possible and I interpret the poem accordingly: the poet examines reality objectively, sees that nature precludes that possibility and expresses that in his poem.

The seven poems interpreted in *GLOSA* include an ode to his maternal grandmother, whom he wishes to keep alive in his memory regardless of the destructive forces of nature; a poem about a logarithm which becomes a meditation on being and nothingness; a poem about Scarlett O'Hara that ultimately contrasts the permanence of art with the transitoriness of being; and a poem dedicated to a friend and his pets, which speaks of making order out of disorder through devotion and obedience. Almost a third of the book is devoted to the poem "Twilight", in which the poet reveals the poem's multiplicity of meanings throughout a hermeneutical journey of 120 pages.

*GLOSA* is without a doubt the poet's most ambitious exposition of his poetics and the most thorough interpretation of his poems over the seven decades of his literary production. To this reader's knowledge, no other poet has gone so far as Rosenmann-Taub in employing all the grammatical, syntactic, prosodic and semantic elements of the poem to convey meaning.

The interpretations of the seven poems are treasures in and of themselves. However, above and beyond that, the understanding and application of the poet's hermeneutic tools and procedures to other Rosenmann-Taub poems will not only help the reader to understand these other poems, but also inform his or her understanding of the expressive capacities of the genre. *GLOSA* is a welcome addition to the Rosenmann-Taub bibliography as well as to the field of poetry interpretation.

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