

A Tribute to David Rosenmann-Taub (1927-2023)

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Recognized as a consummate pianist and composer, a superb artist and draftsman, a polyglot, aesthete and lecturer over the course of his life, David Rosenmann-Taub achieved his greatest fame as a poet. Celebrated with awards and critical acclaim, his poetry has been translated and anthologized worldwide. His poems have engendered conferences and seminars, articles and dissertations, and representations in dance and theater as well. Academics and critics have analyzed and written on the form and substance of his work over a span of more than seven decades. The acceptance of the poet's oeuvre into the Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes, the major repository of Spanish and Hispanic literature worldwide, as well as its inclusion in the Biblioteca Nacional de Chile, demonstrates the universal recognition of its importance and guarantees its preservation for generations to come.

Rosenmann-Taub displayed his talents almost from birth. His mother Dora Taub, herself a pianist, introduced him to the piano at the age of three, and he developed technical and musical proficiency at the instrument so quickly that he began giving lessons to others by the age of nine. His father, a polyglot and cultured individual, introduced him to great literature from the time he could read, and he became a voluminous and critical reader starting from an early age. However, poetry was his first and greatest love: he began dictating poems to his parents at the age of two, and the occupation became a lifelong commitment.

Recognizing his true vocation as a child, the poet spent his formative years not only writing poetry daily but also immersing himself in language, the primary tool of his profession, ultimately graduating from the university with a diploma in Spanish literature along with a working knowledge of French, Italian, Greek, Latin and German. His university studies in the natural sciences broadened his knowledge of the natural world, which he would use constantly as a resource for his poetry; and his studies in composition and piano performance throughout his formative years led him to the composition and performance of his own music as well as further informing the rhythmic, metric and phonic aspects of his poetry.

After leaving the university, Rosenmann-Taub dedicated himself to his activities as poet, musician and graphic artist. He achieved prominence as a poet at an early age and academics, poets and critics have continued their acclaim over the decades. After the poet garnered the first prize from the Sindicato de Escritores (Syndicate of Writers) for his first book, the Premio Municipal de Poesía (Municipal Poetry Prize) for his second, and the Premio Nacional de Poesía de la Universidad de Concepción (National Prize of Poetry of the University of Concepción) for his third, Hernan Díaz (Alone), the most celebrated critic of Chilean letters at that moment, hailed the young Rosenmann-Taub as "...a new star in the Latin American literary firmament (1950)." The following year, Nobel Prize Laureate Vicente Aleixandre remarked, "I am pleased to hail the appearance of a new figure in the poetry of our language, with the characteristics that delineate a distinctive lyrical poet (1951)."

After the 1973 military coup in Chile, and the theft of five thousand pages of his poetry in manuscript form, Rosenmann-Taub left Chile. While living in Buenos Aires between 1976 and 1978, the poet published three books of poetry with Esteoeste. During that period, he also gave lectures in New York City on his poetry and on San Juan de la Cruz, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Monet, Vermeer, Beethoven, Ravel and Albéniz, among others, under the auspices of the Oriental Studies Foundation.

In 1985 the poet settled permanently in the United States, where he would live and work for the rest of his life, dedicating himself to his artistic activities while also giving private lessons in literature, music, and art. This period was the most prolific phase of Rosenmann-Taub's creative life. During these last four decades he continued to write, revise, re-edit and publish, and by the time of his death his total oeuvre comprised more than forty volumes of poetry. In addition, he completed the composition and recording of over 100 musical CDs and assembled a lifetime collection of his drawings.

During this later period of his life, critical acclaim and recognition of his work continued at the highest level. In 1998, poet and Chilean National Literature Prize winner Armando Uribe declared that “The most important and profound living poet in the entire Spanish language is David Rosenmann-Taub.” Then, in 2005, noted Chilean poet and critic José Ignacio Silva observed that Rosenmann-Taub was “Perhaps one of the most legendary of Chilean authors of the moment.” Silva went on to say:

If poetry has somewhere been defined as the art of pushing language to its limits, then Rosenmann-Taub is the poet par excellence. Possessed of a style and a mastery that is both efficient and powerful, Rosenmann-Taub does justice to the fable concocted by others, with a language that vivifies the word, and a unique poetry charged with meaning, music, and rhythm. In short, Rosenmann-Taub lets nothing escape him, and neither should the reader let the possibility escape of reading and re-reading this poetry, unparalleled in our literature.

More recently, in 2011, Spanish academic, poet and translator Eduardo Moga described Rosenmann-Taub as “the total poet: that is, the poet who attends to all aspects of reality and mobilizes all the resources of the language to do so.”

In a country of poets, what makes Rosenmann-Taub’s poetry stand out? Why has he been so often called a “poet’s poet?” As observed above, the poet’s attention to form, rhythm, rhyme, and meter is unequalled, and he himself has repeatedly declared that these aspects of poetry are as fundamental to the poem’s meaning as to its sound. In addition, his use of all the rhetorical devices that the genre offers enables him to convey the poem’s meaning in its most precise form. The integration of all these poetic elements culminates in the precise expression of the poet’s thought: profound and illuminating.

In a 2008 interview with Laura Castellanos, when asked, “What is a poem?,” the poet responded: “In a literary sense: to express, with exactitude, in its own particular rhythm, a knowledge of which I can be sure. I use the visible to get to the invisible. I bare my thinking. In a transcendental sense, a poem is an object, or an act, well done, useful, and, of course, positive.”

Clarifying his poetic project still further in that same interview, Rosenmann-Taub stated,

Not to lie, but to tell the truth with precision, with certainty, as in a scientific investigation that has reached its ultimate consequences: that is a challenge. To accept this challenge is the real challenge. I don’t see a 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. I came to the world to learn. If I don’t learn, I am less than nothing: I murder my time. It’s

already a lot to know a truth, almost a utopia and, sometimes, a complete utopia. To express it constitutes the domain of true poetry.

My own journey with Rosenmann-Taub commenced in a Santiago bookstore in 2008, where I ran across his first book: *Cortejo y epinicio (Courtship and Epinicion)*. The poems intrigued me with their unusual language and striking metaphors. As I began to descend deeper into the meanings of the poems, I became entranced. When I finally understood a poem, it would speak to me in a way that I had never heard before. The poems articulated concepts that although often counterintuitive, I knew instinctively to be true even though I had never been able to formulate them into words.

The poet's overriding preoccupation with living life consciously and his unequivocal condemnation of the routine and unthinking life that is so common is inspirational. When I originally made contact with Rosenmann-Taub's work, I was auditing Spanish courses at the university while pursuing a career in the world of business. Since then, inspired by his poems and thought, I completed my doctorate in Spanish literature, published translations of his poems, wrote and published essays and articles on his poetry, and wrote and published two volumes of translations and commentaries on his work that illuminate the content of over one hundred of his poems for both lay and professional readers. I had read voluminously and played the piano all my life. Now, as a result of my work on his poetry, I became more interested and appreciative of great artistic, literary and musical works as I began to study them through the lens of the poet's worldview. I also began to understand others and myself in a more objective manner, using his descriptions of the human condition as my guide.

In the final analysis, I consider Rosenmann-Taub to be a teacher, and his poems the instruments through which he teaches. His curriculum includes the investigation of nature and the nature of human beings, the entire gamut of human relationships—those of family, friends, others, and one's relationship with oneself—, and most importantly, the challenges and rewards of consciously searching for, finding, and living one's real life.

David Rosenmann-Taub is himself a shining example of his own poetic truths. In 2000, with his profound commitment to never deviate from the life that he was meant to live, he chose to donate all his artistic creations to the nonprofit CODA Foundation, so that they could take on the task of preserving and promoting his work and leave him free to continue the creative activity that he was born to do. The poet has recently passed into another world. However, through both his work and the example of his life, he lives on in this world: in others and in me.

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