

Exploring Jewish Forms of Speaking to God:

The Use of Apostrophe in David Rosenmann-Taub's *Cortejo y epinicio*

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Abstract: In his first published collection of poetry, *Cortejo y epinicio* (1949), Chilean author David Rosenmann-Taub (1927) references Jewish culture, prayers and beliefs. This project seeks to foreground the Jewishness in his work as well as the cross-cultural spaces he creates. I argue that Rosenmann-Taub explores Jewish forms of relating to God through the use of apostrophe. In the first section of this essay, I offer a theoretical framework for discussing apostrophe in poetry and prayer. The following sections focus on three poems – “Elegía y Kadisch,” “Gólgota,” and “Schabat” – that depict speakers talking to or about God. Considering the poems alongside the Jewish prayers and conventions to which they refer, I read the poems as rewritten prayers. This comparison highlights the notable presence of Jewish forms in Rosenmann-Taub's poetry, while also drawing attention to how he reshapes them. Through these modifications, Rosenmann-Taub dramatizes the thresholds between belief and disbelief, divine and earthly, to point to a construction of faith as mode of being that collapses these boundaries. These metaphysical inquiries resonate with Rosenmann-Taub's contemporaries, while also building on them by representing Jewishness, heterogeneity, and heterodoxy as part of Chilean culture.

In his first published collection of poetry, *Cortejo y epinicio* (1949), Chilean author David Rosenmann-Taub (1927) depicts various forms of relating to the divine.ⁱ Some emerge as distinctly pagan or earthly, while others take on Jewish or Christian attributes. Existing scholarship discusses Rosenmann-Taub's “contenido religioso, metafísico, espiritual o, incluso, místico” and how it shapes his metaphysical inquiries (Cussen 2).ⁱⁱ However, it often overlooks the specific traces of Jewish traditions in his poetry.ⁱⁱⁱ Rosenmann-Taub was born in Santiago, Chile to Jewish parents that had fled the persecution of Jews in Poland. This background appears in his explicit naming of Judaic prayers and rituals. My project seeks to foreground the distinct presence of Jewishness in Rosenmann-Taub's poetic language and universe in his seminal book *Cortejo y epinicio*. Recognizing that he does not just replicate traditional expressions of faith in God, my questions are: how does he embrace and reshape these rituals? How does Jewishness

form his poetic inquiries? What is the significance of this Jewishness in the Chilean poetic tradition?

In *Cortejo y epinicio*, Rosenmann-Taub's speakers express crises of faith. They question what God is, what it means to believe in God, and the significance of observing religious tradition. They seek out Jewish traditions alongside Catholic icons, orations to pagan gods, and Christian dogmas to search for the divine. Highlighting the interactions and clashes between these traditions, which, by nature, seem to exclude each other, Rosenmann-Taub's poetry enacts the dynamism of living across and within multiple cultural, linguistic, and religious spaces. What emerges from his work is not a celebration of one religion or another, one culture or another, but rather a challenge to such fixed systems. He voices alternative expressions of belief that stand in contrast to institutionalized religions, while also drawing from them in order to dramatize the thresholds between institution and heterodoxy, belief and disbelief, divinity and earthliness. His speakers work towards a construction of faith as mode of being that collapses these boundaries.

Cortejo y epinicio's poetic explorations of faith dialogue with its contemporaries and its cultural and historical moment. *Cortejo y epinicio* was published in 1949, at a moment when a new vanguard literary movement was emerging in Chile and creating "rupturas y reencuentros" with existing literary traditions (Nómez, "Presentación" 1). In the 1930s and 1940s, Pablo Neruda, Gabriela Mistral, Vicente Huidobro, and Pablo de Rokha defined Chilean poetry.^{iv} Each of these celebrated poets sought to shape revolutionary poetic forms while also creating literature that engaged with Latin American and Chilean political and cultural realities. From the shadow of Mistral's Nobel Prize in Literature (1945) and Neruda's *Canto general* (1950), a new vanguard of poets, including Rosenmann-Taub, wrote in ways that that engaged with these

poetic traditions, as they sought to break away from them. Concha (2008) describes Rosenmann-Taub as a “singularidad” within the second vanguard because, in addition to writing poetry, he composed music for the piano. He studied music professionally at Santiago’s Conservatory of Music and continues to produce poetic and musical compositions.^v Despite his unique perspective, Rosenmann-Taub has often been overlooked or criticized for writing poems that seemingly do not engage with Chile’s political and social realities, unlike most of his forbears.^{vi} Against this assumption, this essay contends that Rosenmann-Taub’s poetry raises critical questions regarding the presence and absence of God, the role of spirituality in earthly realms, and the significance of Jewishness in a predominantly Catholic country. In these ways, Rosenmann-Taub’s poetry touches upon issues relevant to the private and public, subjective and collective realms of culture in Chile.

These philosophical and metaphysical inquiries also connect Rosenmann-Taub’s work to a series of literary productions emerging at that moment in Chile and seeking to consider the status of spirituality in the twentieth century. Rosenmann-Taub represents just one voice within a group of individuals writing religious and spiritual poetry including Ángel Cruchaga Santa María’s *Afán de corazón* (1933), Gabriela Mistral’s *Tala* (1938), and Eduardo Anguita’s *Tránsito al fin* (1935), as well as metaphysical poetry such as *Vigilia por dentro* (1931) and *Requiem* (1945) by Humberto Díaz-Casanueva. Each of these works similarly expresses crises of faith, reflections on loss, and what it means to confront loss without a confident faith in God. Within these works, Rosenmann-Taub emerges as one more Chilean poet exploring spirituality. His work, though, represents a distinctly cross-cultural voice that brings his framing of Jewish rituals, icons, and prayers into dialogue with the predominantly Catholic culture of Chile.

This Jewishness builds on the traces of Jewish theological works in Mistral's celebrated poetry collections, *Desolación* (1922) and *Tala*. In her poetry, Mistral similarly produces a heterodoxy of multicultural religious discourses, which often include the names and stories of the Hebrew Bible. In *Desolación*, Mistral's rewrites the Book of Ruth in her poem "Ruth." In addition to this prolonged engagement with the Hebrew Bible, Mistral's *Tala* includes brief allusions to Jacob and Leah in "La sombra" and Sarah, Abraham's wife, in "Pan." These references stand alongside others that evoke Christian, Chilean, Latin American, Incan, and Mayan stories. Through Rosenmann-Taub's poetry, he continues this exploration of Jewish, Christian, and other religious and mystical thought in this cross-cultural space. However, in contrast to Mistral's references to "Sol de los Incas, sol de los Mayas" in "América," for example, Rosenmann-Taub makes few, if any, overt references to Chile or Latin America (149). His landscapes are wiped of physical and temporal specificity, though they are shaped by relevant social, cultural, political, and linguistic issues in Chile. In this way, Rosenmann-Taub affirms that Jewishness, heterogeneity, and heterodoxy are part of Chilean culture.

Recognizing the varied symbolic registers of Rosenmann-Taub's work, this essay draws out their valences by engaging in a cross-cultural reading that highlights the specific dimensions of Jewishness in *Cortejo y epinicio*. Central to Rosenmann-Taub's representations of the human relationship with the divine is his use of apostrophe. The literary convention of addressing an absent person, object, or thing, I argue, represents one of the ways that Rosenmann-Taub explores Jewish forms of relating to God. In the first section of this essay, I offer a theoretical framework for discussing apostrophe in poetry and prayer. The following sections focus on three poems – "Elegía y Kadisch," "Gólgota," and "Schabat" – that depict speakers talking to or about

God. Their reactions range from continued pleading with God, in the hope of hearing some response, to an attempt to speak for God to a refusal to address God at all. With each section, I consider the poem alongside the Jewish prayers and conventions that serve as a reference point for poem's rewritten prayers to God. This comparison not only highlights the notable presence of Jewish forms in Rosenmann-Taub's poetry, but also points to how he challenges and reframes them to imbue them with an earthly, secular existence.

Apostrophe in Poetry and Prayer

Rosenmann-Taub's representations of his speakers' relationships with God take shape through the use of apostrophe, the convention or "figure of speech which consists of addressing an absent or dead person, a thing, or an abstract idea as if it were alive or present" (Brogan 19). The literal definition of apostrophe in Greek means to turn away because the "I" turns away from the stanza to speak to someone or something. As Culler (1981) suggests, literary critics have often treated apostrophes as "insignificant because conventional: an inherited element now devoid of significance" (Culler 136). Nevertheless, Culler regenerates the apostrophic function beyond its customary use in poetry as critical to the construction of the poem in its ability to reveal the figure of the speaking voice. Apostrophes enable the "I" of the poem to construct "an image of the self" (Culler 142). Culler writes:

the vocative of apostrophe is a device with the poetic voice uses to establish with an object a relationship which helps to constitute him [...] [the] voice calls in order to be calling, to dramatize its calling, to summon images of its power so as to establish its identity as poetical and prophetic voice. (142)

The vocative act of calling out to an object draws attention to the voice itself – how it envisions itself, its abilities, and its status.

While shaping an image of the speaking “voice,” apostrophes give insight into how the “I” of the poem sees himself or herself as a being embedded in social relationships, as Vendler (2005) notes. This voice may address other human beings or invisible beings or things that exist outside of the realm of the human. By speaking to such invisible beings or things in distinctly human forms, apostrophes create a relationship, an “intimacy” with something that “can never be humanly seen or known, yet can be humanly addressed” (Vendler 4). Through the voice of the poet, the unseen listener and its perceived or created relationship with the unknown emerge as an object of study that reflects on the speaker. In *Invisible Listeners: Lyric Intimacy in Herbert, Whitman, and Ashbery* (2005), Vendler emphasizes that:

What all lyrics of apostrophe, horizontal or vertical, offer us are tones of voice through which they represent, by analogy, various relations resembling those that we know in life. Lyrics can replicate the tenderness of a parent, the jealousy of a lover, the solicitude of a friend, the humility of a sinner. Such lyrics reveal the social relations in which the speaker is enmeshed. (3)

Apostrophic communication draws attention to the “I”’s reflections on lived social relations. Depending on how the speaker addresses the other, he or she may depict a relationship that is “horizontal” – a relationship between equals – or “vertical” – a relationship based on profound hierarchies. The speaker may also alternate between these relationships to trouble them. Because the “I” voices itself in solitude, what emerges is not the relationship itself, but rather “the poet-speaker’s own ethical choices” regarding what he or she believes these social relationships are or should be like (Vendler 6). Through apostrophic communication, the speaker dramatizes his or her expectations of the relationship.

Rosenmann-Taub uses apostrophe to reflect on the possibilities of contact and exchange between praying subjects and God. Typically, apostrophe does not refer to the addressee

characteristic of prayer. Modes of speaking to God in prayer may share some conventions of poetry (e.g. “partly suspended” communication), but prayerful supplications take on different meanings (Ramazani 128). As Kant suggests, prayer “as an address” takes place when “a human being assumes that this supreme object is present in person, or at least he poses (even inwardly) as though he were convinced of his presence, reckoning that, suppose this is not so, his posing can at least do no harm but might rather gain him favor” (210n). Such a sincere plea and belief in the existence of the listening subject is not necessary in poetry. While prayer “typically immerses itself in the divine object of its contemplation, worship, or petition,” poetry focuses on its “verbal action,” which is “often inscribed with a ‘meta-’ layer, speaking both within and outside itself” (Ramazani 133). Poetry calls attention to the form itself, a possible distraction in prayer, which is one reason why these two genres stand apart. In Rosenmann-Taub’s poetry, he incorporates the conventions of prayerful address with the “‘meta-’ layer” of poetry’s apostrophe to examine prayer itself. Through apostrophe, he reflects on how prayer is constructed, what drives his speakers to pray, and what ambivalences their prayers reveal.

He also uses apostrophe to dialogue with Jewish traditions. This condition of directly speaking to God represents one of the ways in which Rosenmann-Taub depicts a central tenet of Judaism. Such addresses are not specific to the Jewish tradition, but it is one of the main distinctions between Christianity and Judaism. In *Exploring Jewish Ethics: Papers on Covenant Responsibility* (1990), Eugene B. Borowitz reflects that having the ability to address God from anywhere at any time is part of an intimacy with God that is “typically Jewish” (457). This emphasis stems from the Torah’s prohibition of idolatry. Maimonides (1138-1204), a central Jewish theorist and Torah scholar, asserted that worshipping any kind of “intermediaries” can

lead to idolatry (*Book 67b*). He writes that “the essential principle in the precepts concerning idolatry is that we are not to worship anything created – neither angel, sphere, star, none of the four elements, nor whatever has been formed from them” (*Book 67a*). Using any kind of “intermediaries between yourselves and the Creator” has the potential to lead to faith in those “intermediaries,” instead of God (Maimonides, *Book 67b*). In contrast to Catholicism, which prays to three different forms of God (the Son, the Father, and the Holy Ghost), the saints, and icons and images of them, Judaism believes that praying to God directly and intimately affirms one’s faith in Him as the one and only deity.

Rosenmann-Taub’s poems stage the breakdown of this intimate relationship with God through the presence and absence of apostrophe. The following sections focus on three poems – “Elegía y Kadisch,” “Gólgota,” and “Schabat.” Each of these poems dramatizes striking changes in the speakers’ forms of addressing God. From a speaker attempting to establish a connection with an inaccessible God to one that addresses a dying human form of God, the collection shifts towards speakers that do not address God at all. As they become disillusioned with the possibility of re-establishing contact with Him, they turn towards the world around them. In particular, through the poem “Schabat,” Rosenmann-Taub depicts a secular form of this Jewish holy day, as if to suggest that the divine exists within the earthly, human world. Rosenmann-Taub reframes these Jewish forms as earthly occurrences without any necessary attachment to God or religion. In this way, his work articulates a secular, dynamic, and cross-cultural form of faith with Jewish elements.

“Elegía y Kadisch”

“Elegía y Kadisch” highlights the inter-generic and cross-cultural nature of the poem through its title. “Elegía” takes its origin in the Greek term “elegeia,” which refers to the particular kind of couplets once used in love poems, epitaphs, and poems of lament, which later came to define the genre of “elegy” (Braden and Fowler 399). Situating his work in relation to the elegiac tradition, the title also connects the poem to Judaism. A Jewish prayer, “Kadisch” is mostly written in Aramaic with some Hebrew at the end. Including the Spanish transliteration of this Aramaic word, Rosenmann-Taub articulates a Jewish presence within the Spanish language. He also invokes the tradition of intersections between Jewish and Spanish culture that pre-dates the expulsion of Jews from Spain in 1492 and that took on new dimensions with waves of Jewish immigrants to Latin America during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Through the title “Kadisch,” Rosenmann-Taub alludes to the ways in which this Spanish-Jewish history has shaped Chilean culture. Calling attention to Chile’s linguistic, social, and religious heterogeneity, Rosenmann-Taub creates a poetic voice that speaks from this cross-cultural space.

In “Elegía y Kadisch,” the poem depicts a speaker pleading first to a deceased person and then to God. Apostrophic calls pour out in a series of personal supplications that face silence in response. The poem begins:

Ay si te pudiera volver a ver, y te saludara y
aun no me diera cuenta. ¡Oh! cogería tus manos, te
miraría largo, y a lo mejor – es muy posible – es-
taría mirando hacia otro lado mientras hablabas,
pero sabría que estabas ahí de donde venía tu voz.

Quizá fuera más dichoso si te viera cruzar la
calle y estuviera seguro de que eras tú. (1-7)

The “I” of the poem expresses his wish to see (“a ver”) and hear “tu voz,” the voice of the deceased again. He imagines the way he would greet him (“te saludara”), clasp his hands

("cogería tus manos"), and look at ("te miraría") the person, as if he or she were still alive. He emphasizes the physicality of the relationship that the "I" seeks with the "you" in being able to see, hear, and touch the other person's body again. He wonders if, perhaps, it would be "más dichoso" to watch the person crossing the street, as if this vision could confirm the reality of the "you" better than any other sensory perception of him or her. While each of these appeals focuses on the "you," it also dramatizes the reality of the "I" that longs to return to a world where the "you" still exists. Through this vocative action, he imagines himself as someone that can speak to the deceased and, perhaps, bring him or her back to life.

Although the speaker attempts to linger in his hope of being corporeally reunited with his loved one, the poem traces his realization that no such reunion will take place. The use of "si pudiera" and "si te viera" phrases his appeals as highly unlikely or impossible. And yet, he continues by affirming "es muy posible," as if being optimistic might be enough to bring his loved one back to him. He makes another effort to re-establish contact with the deceased by expressing his hope to hear "tu voz" and then waiting to hear it. Punctuating this pause with a period and a line break, the poem emphasizes the speaker's anticipation. He waits and hears silence, which transforms into a new form of contact with the deceased; silence brings the addressee into existence by marking his unspeaking presence. Considering muteness, phenomenologist Don Ihde (2007) writes: "silence is the horizon of sound, yet the mute object is silently *present*" (50). Through muteness, the speaker marks the absence of the "you," which keeps that person present. Continuing his apostrophe on the next line, the speaker seems to realize that he can only maintain contact with the deceased by talking to him or her and then listening to the silences that his loved one has become.

This apostrophe to the deceased stands out in contrast to Mourner's Kaddish in the Jewish tradition that the poem's title references.^{vii} In Judaism, Mourner's Kaddish is the prayer that grieving individuals recite for their dead. The content of the prayer praises God. Notably, it does not mention the deceased, death, or mourning. In *Saying Kaddish: How to Comfort the Dying, Bury the Dead, and Mourn as a Jew* (1998), Diamant observes the irony that "the prayer that is synonymous with Jewish mourning does not mention death or consolation. It does not speak of loss, sadness, or bereavement. Nor is there anything about life after death in those brief lines" (13). Instead, Kaddish calls on mourners to pray that God's name be blessed and that God's Kingdom will emerge on earth. This discrepancy exists, in part, because the prayer was not originally intended to be for the dead, though it became one through public practice (de Sola Pool 104). As mentioned previously, the original language of the prayer is mostly Aramaic; as a result, numerous translations of the text of the prayer exist in other languages.^{viii} The *Encyclopedia Judaica* offers this English version:

Glorified and sanctified be God's great name throughout the world which He has created according to His will. May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime and during your days, and within the life of the entire house of Israel, speedily and soon; and say, Amen.

The congregational response [...is:]

May His great Name be blessed forever and to all eternity.

Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honored, adored and lauded be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations that are ever spoken in the world; and say Amen.

May there be abundant peace from Heaven and life, for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.

He who creates peace in His high places, may He create peace for us and for all Israel; and say Amen. (Skolnik and Berenbaum 695)

Kaddish affirms the mourners' continued faith in God, even after personally experiencing His power to take away life. They and the congregation recite the prayer in a call-and-response style, where the community joins their voices in a chorus that repeats "Amen" to affirm their faith.

Including "Kadisch" in his poem's title, Rosenmann-Taub evokes the content of this prayer and the traditions surrounding it. Several customs and rules determine how, when, and who reads Kaddish.^{ix} The prayer is traditionally read by a male descendant of the deceased or, if not possible, a male family member – a parent, spouse, or sibling. If none of these individuals can say the prayer, an individual unrelated to the deceased may also choose to take on the responsibility for them. Saying Kaddish represents a commitment to recite the prayer at the funeral of the deceased, each day for the following eleven months, and on the anniversary of the individual's death. These months of prayer ensure that the soul of the deceased will be purified or judged worthy to continue to the after-life. Jewish communities believe that it takes a full twelve months of prayer to purify the wickedest person's soul, but since most people do not fall into the category of the wickedest, the prayer is often said for eleven months. By Jewish law, the prayer must be spoken in a group of ten people, a minyan that includes the one(s) grieving. The mourner speaks to the congregation to signify that he or she carries the burden of his or her loss, and the community responds to affirm that the individual does not carry his or her loss alone.

The relationship between humans and God that emerges from this prayer is one of a continued communal faith in God. Harold Fisch (1988) argues that the interplay between solitude and solidarity is central to understanding temple prayer. When an "I" speaks in temple prayers, it functions not as an "autonomous ego," but rather as a self within community (113). The individual speaking to God dramatizes his or her personal choice to praise God. As the

community joins with the individual, their communal affirmation of faith also confirms the desired relationship between the “I” and the community as one of solidarity between individuals voicing the same choice to believe in God. This image of communal faith in God defines Jewish Kaddish in contrast to the variant form in Rosenmann-Taub’s “Elegía y Kadisch.”

Rosenmann-Taub’s poetic rendering of this prayer emphasizes the isolation of the speaker as well as his waning faith in God. Instead of drawing him to affirm his belief in God, death leads the speaker to question his faith. Instead of leading him towards a community, the speaker finds himself alone. Representing this loneliness, Rosenmann-Taub suggests that beyond the personal pain of losing a loved one, the “I” of the poem also struggles with the loss of community. As his faith in God wavers, he also finds himself separated from the community that comes with practicing religious traditions. Through this voice, the poem could be read as staging of this the loneliness of being Jewish within a predominantly Catholic country, without the “solidarity” of multiple communities that may pray with him or surround him in his spiritual crisis. The “I” of the poem calls out and leaves space for a community or God to respond, but neither one does. The poem punctuates this absence with three dots that separate the apostrophe to the deceased and the apostrophe to God. Each of these three points highlights the silences that take the place of a communal response, the voice of the deceased, or an affirmation from God. In this space of mourning, saying Kaddish might re-establish this relationship with God and the community, while also helping the soul of the dead find peace in the afterlife. However, in the poem, Kaddish becomes a signifier of a loss of contact with God, a community, and the deceased, which leaves the speaker to face the mourning process alone.

Once he recognizes the futility of pleading to his loved one, he turns to God and demands a response from Him. He cries out:

No me dejes, oh tú Dios mío, decir Kadisch.
 Gítales que el polvo que araña
 hasta las últimas vetas de mi vida, está pidiendo
 rasgar el Misterio. (17-20)

The poem's "I" begs not to say Kaddish; he pleads that God "No me dejes" to mourn at all by asking that He change the circumstances requiring him to say the prayer for the dead. Addressing God in the "tú" form, the personal form of "you," he depicts the intimate relationship he imagines having with God. He constitutes himself as someone that can speak to God directly and ask Him to respond to his earthly, human pleas. He demands that God "gítales" – that He shout to some unknown "they" to tell them of his pain. While God may have power over life or death, He is subordinate to this unknown "they" that decide to shroud God's abilities in "el Misterio." Longing to "rasgar," to penetrate and tear down this mystery, the speaker begs them to permit him this possibility. The voice suggests that if he must say Kaddish, it means that God has lost interest in his pleas or that he has lost contact with God, and that the "they" that yield power over God's abilities are equally indifferent.^x

The poem concludes by confirming the mourner's inability to change his circumstances. Beginning with the aforementioned stanza, the speaker repeats, like a refrain, two more times: "No me dejes, oh tú Dios mío, decir Kadisch." Each repetition concludes with a period and a line break that punctuate the poetic voice's solitude. Without a response from God, he is alone and powerless over his situation. As the "I" realizes that he cannot keep making the same request and expect a different response, he concludes: "Oh no, Dios mío, nunca, / por esa sangre que ahí existe reseca y me encierra en / esto que no es sino una atormentada oración" (29-32). He

imagines himself becoming enclosed, “encerrado,” as if trapped by the dried-up blood of his deceased loved one within this “atormentada oración.” Describing feeling enclosed “en esto que no es sino una atormentada oración,” he silences any lingering hope that his final recourse to reach the deceased is nothing but a tormented prayer. Instead of a prayer that re-establishes contact with God or aids the soul of the deceased to find peace, his version of Kaddish only represents more suffering and isolation.

“*Gólgota*”

From a God that exists beyond the speaker’s faith and out of his reach, *Cortejo y epinicio* continues to explore the status of the divine and its relationship to humanity in “Gólgota.” This poem addresses the Christian messiah as an attempt to reach a human form of the divine. The poem begins with a “Prólogo,” in which the speaker begins by calling to Jesus: “A toda hora, Jesús, te están crucificando. / Sí, Mesías, ahora, te están crucificando / Ellos son como yo: y tú me has conocido” (1-3). The “yo” of the poem marks Jesus’s humanity by calling to him while he is being crucified (“te están crucificando”), before his death or resurrection. The “yo” addresses the “tú” with the personal form and highlights this familiarity by asserting “tú me has conocido” – you have known me. While the speaker and Jesus appear to be two distinct beings, the prologue continues by blurring this distinction. The “I” of the poem asserts “Entra, Cristo, a mi alma humanamente” (15). He directs Christ to enter his soul “humanamente,” drawing attention to the distinction between the immateriality of his soul and the physicality of Christ’s body. He invites Christ to find renewed corporeal and spiritual existence by entering the speaker’s soul and sharing one body. Instead of encouraging Jesus to proceed to his resurrection and subsequent ascension to heaven, he encourages Christ to remain human.

In a discussion of Jewish icons, prayers, and beliefs, a poem about the Christian messiah may seem like an unusual inclusion. Not only is Jesus the central figure that divides Judaism and Christianity, but Judaism also upholds clear prohibitions against worshiping any creation of God as equal to or in His place. Recognizing these objections, I argue that “Gólgota” represents a continuation of Rosenmann-Taub’s discussions of the divine and Judaism. Rosenmann-Taub draws on Christian and Catholic icons, in addition to Jewish prayers to distinguish his poetic explorations from both forms of institutionalized religious expressions. Instead of celebrating either religion, he dramatizes his efforts to deviate from them to establish his interest in forms of divinity outside of them. The use of Christ in this poem situates Rosenmann-Taub’s work in a distinctly cross-cultural space.^{xi} Referring to the Christian messiah alongside discussions of Jewish prayers situates Rosenmann-Taub’s poetic voices at the intersection of these cultures. It also enables him to shape his images of the divine as something outside of and different from both of these traditions.

It is also notable that Rosenmann-Taub depicts the crucifixion of Christ. Even though he does not make any references to anti-Semitism in his poem, he refers to an event that is often cited to fuel hatred toward Jews. Alluding to this form of anti-Semitism, Rosenmann-Taub implies that conflict and animosity may also shape this cross-cultural space. In 2005, the European Union Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia put forth a “Working Definition of Antisemitism,” which cited “claims of Jews killing Jesus” as a form of “classic antisemitism” (Michael xv).^{xii} In *The Origins of Anti-Semitism: Attitudes Toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity* (1983), John G. Gager illustrates how this claim has been used to fuel hatred by depicting the stereotype of a Christian person that asserts “You [read: the Jews] killed the

ancient prophets sent to you by God and now you have killed Jesus, whom God has made Lord and Christ for all nations. [...] Now God has abandoned you, and your city lies in ruins,” as if the death of Jesus justifies the persecution of the Jews (3).^{xiii} Gager’s work, among others, disproves these arguments with historical and theological evidence. Even still, one example of the persistence of these beliefs appears in Marjorie Agosín’s *Always from Somewhere Else: A Memoir of My Chilean Jewish Father* (1998), a biography that she wrote about her father. As a young boy growing up in the 1920s and 1930s in Valparaíso, Chile, he would hear: “The priests at catechism chanting ‘Who killed Jesus?’ and the choir responding, ‘the Jews killed Jesus. The Jews killed Jesus’” (96). I cite this example not to encourage the equally false and problematic accusation that all Catholics share these ideas, but rather to give one individual’s experience of how these beliefs continue to fuel hatred against Jews.

Referring to Christ’s crucifixion, Rosenmann-Taub’s poem “Gólgota” may be read as a poetic form of recognizing this anti-Semitism and responding to it. Instead of portraying Jews as the perpetrators, the poem eliminates all markers of difference, hatred, and otherness. The speaker identifies the people crucifying Jesus as “como yo,” the same “I” that also becomes the voice of Jesus. Recognizing Rosenmann-Taub’s Jewishness, readers may connect him to the poem’s “I” as an attempt to underline that Jesus, like him, was Jewish. However, the poem focuses not on comparing the speaker and the addressee as Jews, but rather on relating them as humans. They are like each other because of their corporeal nature. They are equally subject to death, just as they are both capable of becoming the human home of the divine. Instead of treating Jesus with reverence or outside of a limited Jewish purview, Rosenmann-Taub redefines

the Christian God within his own cross-cultural exploration of the divine. In contrast to the speaker of “Elegía y Kadisch,” the “I” of this poem manages to establish contact with God.

However, what he perceives as Jesus’s voice is not external or heavenly, but rather something that comes from within and responds to him. He imagines himself creating a dialogue with God, except that only a single voice participates in this “dialogue.” The speaker expresses “para que hables, te doy voz. / Para que vivas, te doy sangre,” as if he can give Jesus the ability to speak, and Jesus comes to life through his “voz” (35, 36). The act of voicing transfers the life-force of the “I”’s blood to the unresponsive, crucified body that Jesus has become, and Jesus lives again. The speaker asserts:

yo soy tu lengua, mudo que habla,
yo soy tu lengua y te estoy hablando:
óyeme, Cristo, yo soy tu oído;
mira la cruz: soy el crucificado. (60-63)

The “yo” emphasizes the corporality that he and the “tú” share in one body. The speaker suggests that he is Jesus’s “lengua” and “oído,” his organs for speaking and listening. Through his tongue, Christ’s muteness becomes audible as silence. Through his ears, Christ can respond to the listener’s command to hear him speak (“óyeme”). The only sense that functions without the speaker’s assistance is his ability to look – “te tengo dentro de mis ojos, / me tienes dentro de los ojos” (56-57). Lending his voice to Christ, the “I” of the poem enacts the ability to awaken the rest of his addressee’s senses. At the same time, paradoxically, their limitations become apparent. Without his own corporeal life, Christ can no longer hear or speak, unless the subject gives him life by talking for him. The solipsism of this speech affirms the absence of a separate, divine voice of God. The speaker feels his isolation, and responds by dialoguing with himself for

Christ. In speaking, he marks the presence of others around him, even though, in doing so, he is forced to recognize them as silent, lifeless beings.

The poem concludes by seeming to celebrate this corporeality and the mortality it implies. The speaker ends with:

no te quedes atrás, avancemos
 juntos los dos al mismo paso:
 ¡sólo un camino hay en la tierra
 y ese camino nos está esperando! (80-83)

He calls to Jesus not to stay behind, but rather he and Jesus “avancemos” as a “we.” Instead of telling him to stop or move, he asks him to proceed forward, as if the death that awaits them represents a kind of progress. He imagines himself “juntos” with Jesus, accompanying him in his journey to be crucified, which has also become his own future because “solo un camino hay en la tierra.” Existing “en la tierra,” in the realm of the corporeal and human, implies the mortality that restricts them. Describing himself and Jesus as “nosotros” or “los dos,” he recognizes that they share this human limitation. And yet, the poem does not represent death as a negative. By contrast, the speaker’s call to “avancemos,” his use of exclamation points, and his declaration that “ese camino nos está esperando” seems to wipe it of any of the fear or evasion that may characterize a doomed person. Embracing this earthly limitation, the speaker suggests that what matters most about this divine figure is not his holiness or his resurrection, but rather his human body.

The poem situates the divine in the realm of the earthly. In the poem, the death of a human divinity also marks the death of an external or heavenly God, which leaves the praying individual muttering to himself. Jesus, the ascended Christian messiah, is just as absent as the Jewish God that leaves his wavering followers to mourn alone. Through “Gólgota” and “Elegía y

Kadisch,” Rosenmann-Taub suggests that Christianity and Judaism share their solipsism. The individual that prays to the Christ figure or the Jewish God is talking to him or herself. A detached relationship with God and the open-eyed body of Christ on the cross are remnants of listeners that can no longer hear. While the loss of a heavenly addressee leaves the speaker aware of his isolation, he also begins to recognize the power and creativity of being able to imbue the deceased with life through his own voice and corporeality.

“Schabat”

As *Cortejo y epinicio* proceeds, the speakers of the poems make fewer and fewer apostrophes to God, as if coming to terms with being isolated from Him. They focus more on speaking to earthly objects, describing events that take place within the realm of the human, and considering their own condition as mortal, physical human beings. In one of the final sections of the poetry collection, the poem “Schabat” portrays a speaker that does not address God, either as a listener or as an “I” that speaks. Rosenmann-Taub highlights the absence of prayer by titling the poem “Schabat,” the Jewish holy day that honors God’s creation of the world, and depicting a speaker that makes no effort to invoke God or speak to Him. The poem has lost the prayer-like addresses of previous poems. Instead, this poem portrays observances of Jewish rituals without the faith, joy, and life that ideally drive them. Instead of a celebration of life and God’s creation of the world, the poem depicts Shabbat as a kind of death.

The poem begins by describing one of the rituals that ushers in the celebration of Shabbat, the lighting of the candles. The speaker begins “Con los ojos cubiertos, vespéral, / ante los candelabros relucientes / de sábado, mi madre” (1-3). Right away, he establishes the temporality of this moment; the scene opens in the midst of the evening rituals that initiate the

Sabbath (“sábado”). Depicting the “I”’s mother “con los ojos cubiertos, vespéral,” the poem situates the scene at the exact moment, in which the mother has lit the candles and placed her hands over her eyes. In the Jewish tradition, the eldest woman of the household typically lights the candles. Locating the scene in this instant, the poem highlights the importance of time in creating this holy day, which is marked by its temporal, rather than its spatial existence. As Abraham J. Heschel (1951) asserts, “Judaism teaches us to be attached to *holiness in time*, to be attached to sacred events, to learn how to consecrate sanctuaries that emerge from the magnificent stream of the year. The Sabbaths are our great cathedrals” (8). The holiness of this day stems from the unity of divine and earthly time. The Sabbath commemorates this unity by marking the weekly anniversary of the day that God rested after creating the earth and all of human life within it.

If this were an actual Shabbat, instead of Rosenmann-Taub’s depiction of it, the mother would proceed by reciting the prayers over the candles. Spoken in Hebrew, the prayer over the candles reads:

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe,
 who hast sanctified us by Thy laws and commanded us to
 kindle the Sabbath light.
 Amen. (Millgram 66)^{xiv}

The prayer expresses gratitude to God and praises Him for creating the universe, while also recognizing that he selected the chosen people by giving them His commandments, which include observing the Sabbath. Concluding with “Amen,” the prayer affirms one’s continued faith in God. After saying the prayer, the mother would open her eyes and take in the light of the Sabbath, which begins the observance of this holy day.

Traditionally, Jewish people honor the Sabbath with rest and prayer, in an effort to commemorate God's creation of the world, His formation of the Jewish people, and His establishment of the day of rest (Ex. 20:8; Gen. 2:1-3). According to the Torah, observing the Sabbath means not just ceasing work, but also taking time to open one's mind to focus on and pray to God. As Heschel (1951) suggests, the Sabbath represents "a day of the soul as well as of the body," where prayer matters just as much as the "comfort and pleasure [that] are an integral part of Sabbath observance. Man in his entirety, all his faculties must share its blessing" (19). Honoring this holy day with bodily and soulful nourishment is one of the ways that Jews traditionally express their continued faith (Ex. 20:8-11). Seen as a blessing from God, the day is often represented as a bride that He has given to the Jewish people. Welcoming the Sabbath also means receiving the "Bride of the Sabbath," one of the many concepts that shape this holy day. The metaphor of marriage contributes to the celebratory atmosphere of Shabbat.

Setting up the expectation for a festive scene to unfold, Rosenmann-Taub quickly extinguishes this hope. The poem, "Schabat" depicts a scene that remains caught in a moment without prayer, delight, or holiness. Instead of reciting the prayer over the candles, the speaker's mother does not speak. Her muteness calls attention to the silence that takes the place of the prayer over the candles. Highlighting his mother's muteness, the "I" allows her to be present, but only as one that calls attention to the lack of sound. Her silence exposes the threshold between silent prayer, oral prayer, and the absence of prayer. Drawing on this interplay between belief and disbelief, the "I" of the poem constitutes himself as, unlike his mother, someone that keeps the Sabbath not by saying and listening to prayers, but rather by observing a different kind of ritual.

As the poem continues, its absence of religious faith becomes more apparent. Instead of time progressing towards the celebration, it remains arrested. The poem continues with:

Desfallece

la hora entre las velas encendidas.
Los muertos se sacuden. (4-6)

“La hora” falters (“desfallece”), as it loses its strength among the lit candles, and the dead begin to shake. Instead of progressing with the celebration of Shabbat and the poem itself, the stanza breaks off, leaving a space in-between “desfallece” and “la hora” that highlights this breakdown of time. Accompanied by the agitations of the dead, the speaker focuses on the lifeless, instead of commemorating life or marriage. The speaker proceeds with: “Como huévenes / de fiesta los bruñidos candelabros viajan en los espejos.” The candles travelling in the mirrors become like the hosts of the party. Instead of the divine being, earthly objects become the focus of the speaker’s attention. Describing the candles rather than the light they produce, which may refer to God or something God-like, the speaker underlines an absence of faith in Him replaced by the appreciation of earthly objects.

Through the imagery of time, candlesticks, and mirrors, Rosenmann-Taub plays with the distinction between faith and idolatry. As mentioned previously, a tenet of Judaism is not to mistake faith in Jewish rituals for God Himself (Maimonides, *Guide* 51-52). Focusing on the candles, time, and his mother, instead of worship itself, the speaker dramatizes his disbelief in God. Though some contemporary forms of Jewishness emphasize the importance of observance rather than faith, Rosenmann-Taub’s representation of Shabbat as a commemoration of death still separates itself from the rest and joy of most secular Jewish ideas about this day.^{xv} In the final stanza, the speaker observes:

Desde el viernes
 resuena la agonía de la tarde
 [...]

 La casa es un sollozo. El horizonte
 Entra en la casa envuelto de crepúsculo:
 Tiene forma de adiós. Creo soñar. (8-9, 12-14).

Instead of prayers and joy, the “agonía” of the afternoon is what resonates, along with the sob (“sollozo”) that the house becomes. “Agonía,” in Spanish refers not only to “agony,” but also specifically to the throes of death. While the Jewish tradition believes that the week builds up to this holy day and that letting go of the week should be the ultimate joy, Rosenmann-Taub indicates that the speaker would rather dwell in the anguish of the day, as if he were at a funeral. As the horizon enters the house covered in twilight, the house becomes like a sob (“sollozo”), lamenting and succumbing to the Sabbath rather than embracing it (Heschel 14). Writing this scene as a kind of “adiós,” a goodbye or a death, the speaker depicts a form of Shabbat that rejects taking time to rest and celebrate life. Paradoxically, though, it dramatizes the openness of more contemporary variants of Judaism that encourage observing Shabbat in some way, without involving faith in God.

In this poem, the speaker only identifies himself in the final line, with the assertion: “creo soñar,” as if speaking to himself, instead of to God, a community, or even another individual (14). This expression suggests multiple meanings. It may translate as: “I think I’m dreaming,” which implies that he is not sure, but that he might be imagining what is happening around him. His doubt highlights the interplay between what might be perceived as real and what comes to be in the act dreaming. The enunciation could also signify: “I believe to dream,” which expresses that the “I” believes in order to have access the worlds and ideas that become available to him through dreams. It could also propose the sentiment: “I believe dreaming” or “I only believe

through dreaming.” With each of these valences, the expression undermines any static form of what it means to believe. Rosenmann-Taub further challenges this fixedness by using the active verb “creer” instead of the noun “fe,” and “soñar” instead of “sueño.” Instead of rigid concepts, the poem depicts believing and dreaming as actions. They become present, possible, and contextualized in the human performance of them, and in each occurrence in which they are enacted. Expressing this form of belief, the speaker offers a secular, divergent observance of this holy day.

Secular Jewishness in Chilean Poetry

Through the presence and absence of apostrophe, Rosenmann-Taub’s poems express an unstable and unfixed form of spirituality. The earlier poems in *Cortejo y epinicio* depict subjects who speak to God(s) in Jewish, Christian, pagan, and non-specific religious forms. With each one, though, Rosenmann-Taub diverges from entrenched forms of “belief” and “disbelief.” He situates these established traditions as in crisis, while he explores what might exist beyond them. “Elegía y Kadisch” invokes Jewish forms of speaking to the divine. Using these forms to underline the absence of God, the poem suggests the loss of belief in God and a community to encourage that faith. The isolated subject becomes trapped in saying the “tormented prayer” of Kaddish. In “Gólgota,” the speaker imagines himself as a human form of God. He invokes God as an actual interlocutor but finds himself speaking to himself. “Schabat” expresses an indifference to addressing God as either present or absent. Rather, the voice of the poem becomes the one that creates, the one that takes on the role of God. He stands at the threshold between human and divine, between the one that believes and the one that enacts belief. Delving into questions about God’s existence and the meaning and role of prayer, the speakers come to

negotiate their own being through the act of “believing” (“creer”) and “dreaming” (“sonar”). They cease searching for a form of the divine outside of the realm of the human, and instead, they turn their attention towards seeking the divine in human and earthly experiences, actions, and modes of being.

Even though Jewishness represents only one dimension of Rosenmann-Taub’s explorations into the divine, it is significant that Rosenmann-Taub depicts secular forms of Jewish traditions, prayers, and rituals. For example, the speaker of “Elegía y Kadisch” recognizes the need to say Kaddish for the dead. The poem represents his own form of Kaddish, where he offers a variation of the prayer, even without a confident, communally-affirmed faith in God. In this sense, Rosenmann-Taub’s speaker transforms Kaddish into a secular prayer. He vivifies this tradition as a mode of being that enables him to “voice” his pain of loss. Similarly, in “Schabat,” Rosenmann-Taub’s speaker expresses respect for the traditions that he observes around him as a means to enact his own abilities to believe and imagine. Each of these Jewish elements appears modified and in co-existence with a range of other reshaped religious expressions.

Beyond his poetry, Rosenmann-Taub introduces a secular, cross-cultural Jewish voice in the Chilean literary tradition in the late 1940s. On July 2, 2002, Rosenmann-Taub met with *El Mercurio* journalist and book review coordinator Beatriz Berger for an interview. When she asked him about the presence of God in his poetry, he responded by saying, “Para mí el término Dios es terrenal. Lo que llamo divino es la expresión terrenal absoluta. No tiene nada que ver con el concepto de las religiones, en donde no hallo ninguna divina divinidad” (“Interview by Beatriz,” 4). In this interview, Rosenmann-Taub openly expressed his disbelief in the God(s) of

organized religion and of institutional religions themselves, which implicitly includes Judaism. What he considers “divine” is something that is absolutely earthly, that exists outside rigid religious practices. He acknowledges that he does not perceive any divine God in these traditions, which has led him to seek the divine in the realm of the “terrenal.”

Through *Cortejo y epinicio*, Rosenmann-Taub depicts the presence of the divine in the earthly realms, such that these categories lose their boundaries. His speakers come to these spaces via expressions of crises of faith in reflecting on what God is, what it means to believe, and the significance of observing God. Jewishness becomes a central component of these articulations. Rosenmann-Taub’s poetry neither honors Jewish religious beliefs nor celebrates Catholicism or paganism. He merges his interrogation of Christianity, Judaism, paganism, and non-specific mystical beliefs to seek answers to his speakers’ spiritual and religious queries. Through this cross-cultural mixing, his work expands on and diverges from Jewish, Chilean, and Latin American traditions. As they delve deeper into these questions, they come to negotiate their own being and spirituality through the act of “believing” and “dreaming.” They seek the divine in earthly actions, variations of religious rituals, and modes of being.

ⁱ Three editions of *Cortejo y epinicio* exist. Following its first publication in 1949, Rosenmann-Taub made substantial changes to each subsequent edition (1978, 2002). This essay focuses only on the first publication because the goal of this study is to situate Rosenmann-Taub’s work in the late 1940s.

ⁱⁱ For a discussion of the diverse images of the divine in Rosenmann-Taub’s poems, see Concha and Cussen.

ⁱⁱⁱ Rosenmann-Taub’s work has been recognized within Chile and abroad in anthologies of works featuring religious and Jewish themes. In 1980, Howard Schwartz and Anthony Rudolf edited and published an international collection of modern poetry by Jewish authors entitled *Voices within the Ark: The Modern Jewish Poets*, in which David Rosenmann-Taub’s poems appear alongside those of Alejandra Pizarnik, Jorge Plescoff and Mario Satz, among others. In Chile in 1989, Miguel Arteche and Rodrigo Cánovas edited a collection of poetry entitled *Antología de la poesía religiosa chilena* that features diverse Chilean religious poetry, including some of Rosenmann-Taub’s poems.

^{iv} Mistral won the Nobel Prize in 1945 and Neruda won the Nobel Prize in 1971. To this date, they are the only two Chilean writers to have received the Nobel Prize, and they are two of six Latin American writers to have won this prize.

^v Rosenmann-Taub has recorded several albums of original compositions as well as multimedia publications, including *En un lugar de la sangre* (2006), which includes his poetry, nine original compositions for the piano, and a CD and DVD of Rosenmann-Taub playing some of these compositions.

^{vi} In “Poesía chilena de mediados del siglo. Tres poéticas de la crisis de la vanguardia (Arteche, Lihn, Teillier)” (1999), Óscar Galindo Villarroel situates David Rosenmann-Taub among a generation of poets publishing their first collections of poetry in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Galindo Villarroel asserts that what united Rosenmann-Taub, Alberto Rubio, and Armando Uribe Arce, as a generation, was how critics responded to their works. Critics found their attention to the poetic form, tradition, and conventions to be a means of ignoring or evading real social problems and of “no aprovechar las libertades heredadas de las poetas de la vanguardia” (Galindo 596). Breaking with politically engaged poetry (as it was articulated in this moment in time) and vanguard conventions by paying particular attention to form, these authors represent one emerging group of poets in the 1950s.

^{vii} While “Kadisch” is a common Spanish transliteration of the Aramaic word, Kaddish is a common English transliteration of this word.

^{viii} For a discussion of the language and origins of Kaddish, see Pool.

^{ix} For a discussion of the customs associated with Kaddish, see Pool and Skolnik and Berenbaum.

^x It is important to note that this irreverent mode of speaking to God not only characterizes Rosenmann-Taub’s representation of this Jewish God, but also his representation of the human form of the Christian God, as I discuss in the following section on the poem “Gólgota.”

^{xi} Rosenmann-Taub represents one of many authors and intellectuals of Jewish descent that have engaged with Christian and Catholic sources in their cultural production. A famous example is Marc Chagall, whose works often depicts Jewish and Christian themes in the same space.

^{xii} This website has since removed this definition, in response to the argument that the definition conflates the Jewish people with the State of Israel, and as a result, it might produce uncritical treatment of Israeli policies. For a discussion of this decision, see Michael.

^{xiii} Gager’s Christian speaker is fictional and constructed to represent this perspective. Gager uses this story as a reference point for his critique.

^{xiv} The prayer over the Shabbat candles is recited in Hebrew. Many English translations exist; Millgram offers this translation.

^{xxxv} The Jewish tradition, in its more contemporary variations, emphasizes the importance of observing Jewish traditions and rituals, with or without belief in God. Two extreme examples of this form of observance include the Reboot movement (founded in New York in 2002), which seeks to create a space for discussion about identity and community, and one of the outgrowths this movement, the “Sabbath Manifesto,” a creative project initiated by a group of Jewish artists as a way to take a break from the speed of everyday life and strike a different balance with technology.

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