

Reframing Jewish Forms of Speaking to God: The Use of Apostrophe in David
Rosenmann-Taub's *Cortejo y epinicio*

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In his first published collection of poetry, *Cortejo y epinicio* ('Cortege and Epinicion,' 1949), Chilean author David Rosenmann-Taub (1927) depicts various forms of relating to the divine.¹ Some emerge as distinctly pagan or earthly, while others take on Jewish or Christian attributes. Existing scholarship discusses Rosenmann-Taub's religious, spiritual, and mystical content, as well as how it shapes his metaphysical inquiries (Cussen 2). However, it often overlooks the specific traces of Jewish traditions in his poetry.² Rosenmann-Taub was born in Santiago, Chile to Jewish parents who fled the persecution of Jews in Poland. His poetry invokes Judaism by alluding to its prayers and rituals. My analysis foregrounds this distinct presence in Rosenmann-Taub's poetic language and universe in his seminal book *Cortejo y epinicio*.³ Recognizing that Rosenmann-Taub embraces and reshapes rituals rather than merely replicating traditional expressions of faith in God, this essay examines a poetics informed by Jewishness and identifies its significance within 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 rituals. To search for the divine, they seek out Jewish customs alongside Catholic icons, orations to pagan gods, and Christian dogmas. 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 multiple cultural, linguistic, and religious spaces. What emerges from his work is not a celebration of one religion or culture, but rather a challenge to such fixed systems. He draws from multiple traditions to dramatize the thresholds between institution and heterodoxy, belief and disbelief, divinity and earthliness, as his speakers work toward a construction of faith as a mode of being that collapses these boundaries.

Rosenmann-Taub's poetic explorations of faith dialogue with his contemporaries. *Cortejo y epinicio* was published in 1949, when a new vanguard movement was emerging in Chile and creating "rupturas y reencuentros" 'ruptures and reunions' with existing literary traditions (Nómez, "Presentación" 1). In the 1930s and 1940s, Pablo Neruda, Gabriela Mistral, Vicente Huidobro, and Pablo de Rokha set new expectations for Chilean poetry by prioritizing revolutionary poetic forms that explicitly 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* ('General Song,' 1950), a new vanguard of poets,

including Rosenmann-Taub, wrote in ways that dialogued with these poetic traditions, as they sought to break away from them. Concha (2008) describes Rosenmann-Taub as a “singularidad” ‘singularity’ within the second vanguard because, in addition to writing poetry, he composed music for the piano.⁴ 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.⁵ Against this assumption, this essay contends that the poet raises critical questions regarding the presence and absence of God, the role of spirituality in secular life, and the significance of Jewishness in a predominantly Catholic country. In these ways, his poetry touches upon issues relevant to private and public, subjective and collective realms of culture in Chile.

These philosophical and metaphysical crises also connect Rosenmann-Taub’s work to a series of literary productions emerging at that moment in Chile that sought to consider the status of spirituality in the twentieth century. The 1930s and 1940s witnessed the publication of several collections of religious and spiritual poetry—such as Ángel Cruchaga Santa María’s *Afán del corazón* (‘Thirst for the Heart,’ 1933), Gabriela Mistral’s *Tala* (*Felling of Trees*, 1938), and Eduardo Anguita’s *Tránsito al fin* (*Passage to the end*, 1935)—as well as metaphysical poetry including *Vigilia por dentro* (‘Vigil from Within,’ 1931) and *Requiem* (1945) by Humberto Díaz-Casanueva. Each of these works expresses crises of faith, reflections on loss, and what it means to confront death without a confident faith in God. Rosenmann-Taub develops these reflections on spirituality by shaping a cross-cultural voice. He brings his framing of Jewish rituals, icons, and prayers into dialogue with Catholic culture. He also builds on the traces of Jewish theological works in Mistral’s collections *Desolación* (*Desolation*, 1922) and *Tala*.⁶ However, in contrast to her work, Rosenmann-Taub makes few, if any, overt references to Chile or Latin America. This abstraction shapes a broader focus on human relations with God in the twentieth century, while also affirming that such heterogeneity and heterodoxy are part of Chilean culture.⁷

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 he explores Jewish forms of relating to God. In the first section of this essay, I offer a theoretical framework for discussing apostrophe, as the poet merges poetic and prayerful conventions. The following sections focus on three poems—“Elegía y Kadisch” (‘Elegy and Kaddish’), “Gólgota” (‘Golgotha’), and “Schabat” (‘Shabbat’)—that depict speakers talking to or about God. In each section, I consider the poem alongside the Jewish prayers and conventions that serve as a reference point for the 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 as earthly, secular practices.

Apostrophe in Poetry and Prayer

Rosenmann-Taub's representations of his speaker's 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" (Perrine 19). The literal definition of apostrophe in Greek means to turn away: the "I" turns away from the stanza to speak to someone or something. As Jonathan Culler suggests, literary critics have often treated apostrophe as "insignificant because conventional: an inherited element now devoid of significance" (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. He writes: "the vocative of apostrophe is a device which 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). Apostrophe draws attention to how the voice envisions itself, its abilities, and its status.

Moreover, apostrophes give insight into how the "I" of the poem sees him or herself as a being embedded in social relationships, as Helen Vendler suggests in her discussion of lyric intimacy (3). The voice may address other human beings, invisible entities, or things that exist outside the realm of the human. Speaking to them 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 emerge as an object of study that reflects on the speaker. 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" based on how the "I" perceives them (3). 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 dynamics are or should be like (Vendler 6). Thus, apostrophic communication can represent or trouble an existing relationship, as well as dramatize the speaker's hopes.

Rosenmann-Taub uses apostrophe to reflect on the possibilities of contact and exchange between praying subjects and God. Typically, apostrophe does not refer to prayerful addresses. Modes of speaking to God in prayer may share some conventions of poetry (e.g. "partly suspended" communication), but prayerful

supplications seek an audience with God (Ramazani 128). As Immanuel Kant suggests in his book *Religion Within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1793), 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, which can become a distraction in prayer. Rosenmann-Taub’s poetry incorporates the conventions of prayerful address with apostrophe in order 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 about their faith.

Rosenmann-Taub also uses apostrophe to dialogue with Jewish traditions. This condition of speaking to God represents one of the ways in which he depicts a central tenet of Judaism. Such addresses are not specific to the Jewish tradition, but they are one of the main distinctions between Catholicism and Judaism.⁸ Having the ability to address God from anywhere at any time is part of an intimacy with God that is “typically Jewish” (Borowitz 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, to faith in those “intermediaries” instead of God (Maimonides, *Book 67b*).⁹ In contrast to Catholicism, which prays to three different forms of God (the Son, the Father, and the Holy Ghost), the saints, 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. Invoking Jewish forms of relating to God, Rosenmann-Taub contrasts them with Catholic ones to show how cultural and religious differences shape Chile.

Rosenmann-Taub’s poems stage the breakdown of this intimate relationship with God through the presence and absence of apostrophe. Focusing on “Elegía y Kadisch,” “Gólgota,” and “Schabat,” I argue that 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 Him at all. As they become disillusioned with the possibility of re-establishing contact, they turn toward the world around them. In particular, through the poem “Schabat,” Rosenmann-Taub depicts a secular form of this Jewish holy day, in which the divine only exists in the terrestrial world. Rosenmann-Taub reframes these Jewish forms as earthly occurrences without any necessary

attachment to God or religion. In this way, he 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 from the Greek term “elegeia,” which refers to the kind of couplets once used in love poems, epitaphs, and poems of lament, which later defined the “elegy” genre (Braden and Fowler 399). Situating his work in the elegiac tradition, the title also ties the poem to Judaism. “Kadisch” is the name of a Jewish prayer written in Aramaic with some Hebrew. 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 during the Spanish inquisition and that took on new dimensions with waves of Jewish immigrants to Latin America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Invoking this Spanish-Jewish history in Chile, Rosenmann-Taub highlights Chile’s linguistic, social, and religious heterogeneity, while also shaping poetic voices that speak from these cross-cultural spaces.

The poem “Elegía y Kadisch” 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)

Ay if I could see you again, and greet you and
still not realize. Oh! I would clasp your hands, would
look at you long, and maybe—it’s very possible—would
be looking away while you were speaking,
but I would know that you were there from where your voice was
coming.

Perhaps it would be more fortunate if I saw you crossing the
street and was sure that it was you.

The “I” of the poem expresses his wish to see and hear “tu voz,” ‘the voice’ of the deceased again. He imagines the way he would greet him, clasp his hands, and look at the person, as if he or she were still alive. The “I” emphasizes the physicality of the relationship he seeks, in being able to see, hear, and touch the body of the “you.” He wonders if, perhaps, it would be “más dichoso,” meaning more fortunate, joyful, or blessed, to watch the person crossing the street, as if observing this action would confirm the reality of the “you” and bring more joy than any other sense. He also describes this potential vision as blessed, a confirmation of God’s intervention and concern. Each of the speaker’s appeals focuses on the addressee, while also dramatizing the reality of the “I” that longs to return to a world where the “you” exists. Through this vocative action, he imagines himself as someone who can speak to the deceased and will 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 depicts his realization that no such reunion will take place. The use of “si pudiera” ‘if I could’ and “si te viera” ‘if I could see you’ phrases his appeals as highly unlikely or impossible. And yet, he continues by affirming “es muy posible” ‘it’s very possible,’ as if being optimistic might bring his loved one back. 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 awaits a response and hears silence, which transforms into a new form of contact with the deceased; silence brings the addressee into existence by marking his muteness. Phenomenologist Don Ihde writes: “silence is the horizon of sound, yet the mute object is silently *present*” (50, emphasis in original). Through muteness, the speaker marks the absence of the “you,” which keeps that person present, albeit in silence. 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.¹⁰ The content of Mourner’s Kaddish, which grieving individuals recite for their dead, praises God. Anita Diamant observes the notable 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” (13). Instead, Kaddish calls on mourners to pray that God’s name be blessed and that God’s Kingdom will emerge on earth.¹¹ This discrepancy exists, in part, because the prayer was not originally intended to be for the dead, though it became one through public practice (Pool 104). Kaddish affirms the mourners’ continued faith in God, even after experiencing His power to take away life. By Jewish law, the prayer must be spoken in a group of ten people, a minyan that includes the one(s) grieving.¹² The mourner speaks to the congregation to signify

that he or she bears the burden of his or her loss, and the community responds to affirm that the individual does not carry this loss alone. In a call-and-response style, the community joins their voices, repeating “Amen.” Communally, they affirm their faith in God.¹³ By contrast, Rosenmann-Taub’s variant Kaddish eliminates this dimension of community.

Rosenmann-Taub’s poetic rendering of the prayer emphasizes the speaker’s isolation as well as his waning faith. Instead of drawing him to affirm his commitment to God, death leads the speaker to question his beliefs. The “I” of the poem struggles with the personal pain of losing a loved one, his wavering faith in God, as well as the absence of community. In this way, Rosenmann-Taub stages the isolation of being Jewish in a predominantly Catholic country and without any support to explore these crises of faith. 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 these relationships, while also helping the soul of the dead find peace. However, Rosenmann-Taub’s Kaddish becomes a signifier of the speaker’s loss of contact with God, a community, and the deceased that leaves him mourning alone.

Once the speaker 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)

Don’t allow me, oh you my God, to say Kaddish.
Shout to them that the dust that scratches
until the last streaks of my life, is asking to
tear the Mystery.

The poem’s “I” begs not to recite Kaddish; he pleads to God to change the circumstances requiring him to say this prayer. Addressing God in the “tú” form, the personal “you,” he depicts the intimate relationship he imagines having with God. He constitutes himself as someone who can speak to God directly and ask Him to respond to his earthly pleas. The speaker then orders God to become a messenger and *gítales* ‘shout to them’ a more powerful and unknown collective “they.” While God may have power over life or death, the speaker represents Him as subordinate to these unidentified others that shroud God’s abilities in *el Misterio*

‘the Mystery.’ Longing to *rasgar*, to penetrate and tear down this mystery, the speaker begs them to permit this possibility. If he must say Kaddish, it means that he has lost contact with God or God has lost interest in his pleas, and “they,” despite their power over God, are equally indifferent.¹⁴

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” ‘Don’t allow me, oh you my God, to say Kaddish.’ Each repetition concludes with a period and a line break that punctuates 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” ‘Oh no, my God, never, / for this blood that exists there dry and encloses me in / this, which is but a tormented prayer’ (29-32). He imagines himself becoming surrounded, as if trapped, in the dried-up blood of his deceased loved one whose death obligates him to recite Kaddish. Paradoxically, his decision to pray corresponds with silencing any remaining hope of communicating with God or reaching the deceased. The prayer becomes a secular ritual that confirms the speaker’s isolation and suffering as well as God’s disinterest in hearing his pleas.

“Gólgota”

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 opens with a Prologue, 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” ‘At every hour, Jesus, they are crucifying you. / Yes, Messiah, now, they are crucifying you / They are like me: and you have known me’ (1-3). The “yo” of the poem marks Jesus’s humanity by calling to him during his crucifixion, before his death or resurrection. The “yo” addresses the “tú” with the personal form and highlights this familiarity by asserting “you have known me.” While the speaker and Jesus appear as two distinct beings, the prologue proceeds by blurring this distinction. The “I” of the poem asserts, “Entra, Cristo, a mi alma humanamente” ‘Enter, Christ, my soul, humanly’ (15). Commanding Christ to enter him, he draws attention to the immateriality of his soul in contrast to the physicality of his body. He invites Christ to find renewed corporeal existence, instead of proceeding to his ascension to heaven, by entering the speaker’s soul *humanamente* and sharing one body.

In a discussion of Jewish icons, prayers, and beliefs, a poem about the Christian messiah may seem unusual. Not only is Jesus the central figure that divides Judaism and Christianity, but Judaism also upholds clear prohibitions against worshiping any creation of God in His place. Recognizing these potential objections, I argue that “Gólgota” represents a continuation of Rosenmann-Taub’s discussions of the divine and Judaism. He draws on Christian and Catholic icons in addition to Jewish prayers to distinguish his poetic explorations from institutionalized religious expressions. Instead of celebrating either religion, he dramatizes his efforts to deviate from them. Referring to the Christian messiah alongside discussions of Jewish prayers, Rosenmann-Taub’s poetic voice speaks from a cross-cultural intersection of these cultures.¹⁵ He shapes an image of the divine that draws from and diverges from both traditions.

Depicting the crucifixion of Christ, Rosenmann-Taub also refers to an event that is often cited to fuel hatred toward Jews.¹⁶ Even though he makes no explicit reference to antisemitism in the poem, Rosenmann-Taub alludes to it. “Gólgota,” which refers to the location where Jesus was crucified, may be read as a poetic form of recognizing and responding to this antisemitism. Instead of portraying Jews as perpetrators, the poem eliminates all markers of difference. The speaker identifies the people crucifying Jesus as “como yo” ‘like me,’ 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 on comparing the speaker and the addressee not as Jews, but rather as humans, much like his persecutors. They are alike because of their corporeal nature. They are equally subject to death, just as they are both capable of becoming the human home to the divine. The poem’s “I” establishes contact with God through their shared humanity.

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 dialoguing with God, even though only one voice participates in this exchange. The speaker expresses, “para que hables, te doy voz. / Para que vivas, te doy sangre” ‘For you to speak, I give you voice. / For you to live, I give you blood,’ as if he possesses the ability to enable Jesus to converse, and Jesus comes to life through his *voz* ‘voice’ (35, 36). The act of voicing transfers the life-force of the speaker’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)

I am your tongue, mute that speaks,
I am your tongue and I am speaking to you:
hear me, Christ, I am your ear;
see the cross: I am the crucified.

The “yo” ‘I’ emphasizes the corporeality that he and the “tú” ‘you’ share in one body. The speaker suggests that he is Jesus’s *lengua* ‘tongue’ and *oído* ‘ear,’ his organs for speaking and listening. Through his tongue, Christ’s muteness becomes audible as silence. Through his ears, Christ responds to the listener’s command to hear him speak. The only sense that Christ can use without the speaker’s assistance is his ability to look—“te tengo dentro de mis ojos, / me tienes dentro de los ojos” ‘I have you in my eyes, / you have me in your eyes’ (56-57). Lending his voice to Christ, the “I” of the poem enacts the ability to awaken the rest of Christ’s senses. At the same time, paradoxically, his limitations become apparent. Without his own corporeal life, Christ can no longer hear or speak, unless the subject speaks for him. The solipsism of this conversation reveals the speaker’s isolation. Speaking marks the presence of Christ near him, even though, in doing so, he is forced to recognize the absence of a separate, divine voice.

The poem concludes by celebrating this corporeality and the mortality it implies:

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)

don’t stay back, we move forward
together two at the same pace:
there is only one path on earth
and this path is waiting for us!

The speaker calls to Jesus not to remain behind, but rather he and Jesus become a *nosotros* ‘we’ that moves forward. Instead of telling him to stop or move, he asks him to proceed, as if the death that awaits them represents a kind of progress. He imagines himself and Jesus *juntos* ‘together’ on Jesus’s journey to be crucified, which has also become the speaker’s own future because “sólo un camino hay en la tierra” ‘there is only one path on earth.’ Existing “en la tierra,” in the realm of the corporeal and human, implies the mortality that restricts them. Describing himself and Jesus as *nosotros* ‘we,’ 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 move forward and his use of the exclamation point seem to

wipe it of misfortune. 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 humanity.

The poem situates the divine in the realm of the earthly. The speaker represents the death of a human divinity as the loss of an external, heavenly God, which leaves the praying individual muttering to himself. Jesus, the ascended Christian messiah, is just as absent as the Jewish God of “Elegía y Kadisch” that leaves his wavering followers to mourn alone. Juxtaposing these poems, 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. The open-eyed body of Christ on the cross, like Kaddish, is a remnant 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 human realm, and considering their own condition as mortal, physical human beings. In one of the final sections of the 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. Moreover, the 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: “Con los ojos cubiertos, vesperal, / ante los candelabros relucientes / de sábado, mi madre” ‘With eyes covered, vesperal, / before the glowing candelabras / of Saturday, my mother’ (1-3). Ending this line with a period after ‘mother,’ Rosenmann-Taub marks the notable absence of a verb punctuating the stillness of this moment. The scene opens in the midst of the evening rituals that initiate the Sabbath. Depicting the speaker’s mother “con los ojos cubiertos, vesperal,” ‘with eyes covered, vesperal,’ the poem suggests that she has just lit the candles and placed her hands over her eyes. In the Jewish tradition, the eldest woman of the household lights the candles, which represents the beginning of Shabbat. This moment indicates the centrality of time

in this holy day, which is shaped by a temporal rather than spatial existence. As Abraham J. Heschel 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, emphasis in original). The holiness of this day stems from the unity of divine and earthly time, which the Sabbath commemorates by marking the weekly anniversary of God’s day of rest after creating earth and 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 and then open her eyes to take in the light of the Sabbath and celebrate this holy day.¹⁷ Traditionally, Jewish people honor the Sabbath with rest and prayer to commemorate God’s creation of the world.¹⁸ Setting up expectations for a festive scene to unfold, Rosenmann-Taub extinguishes this hope. The poem 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 highlights the silence that has taken the place of the prayer. Through this silence, Rosenmann-Taub calls attention to the threshold between silent prayer, oral entreaties, and the absence of prayerful address. Drawing on this interplay between belief and disbelief, the “I” of the poem constitutes himself as someone who, unlike his mother, keeps the Sabbath by observing a secular ritual rather than saying and listening to prayers to God.

As the poem continues, the absence of religious faith becomes more apparent. Instead of progressing toward a celebration, life remains arrested:

Desfallece

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

Fades away

The hour between the lit candles.
The dead shake.

La hora ‘the hour’ falters, becoming weak as it loses its strength among lit candles, and the dead begin to tremble. Instead of continuing with Shabbat rituals and the poem itself, the stanza breaks off, leaving a space between *desfallece* and *la hora* that highlights the slow passage of time. Accompanied by the agitations of the dead, the speaker focuses not on commemorating life or marriage, but on the lifeless. The speaker proceeds: “Como huestes / de fiesta los bruñidos candelabros / viajan en los espejos” ‘Like legions / of a party, the burnished candlesticks / travel in mirrors’

(6-8). Instead of a divine being, earthly objects become the focus of the speaker's attention. Describing the candlesticks rather than the candles' light, which may refer to God, the speaker suggests that his faith in God has been replaced by an appreciation for earthly objects. As *huestes* 'legions,' troops, or followers, the candlesticks become an imposing throng calling for celebrating this day, with or without God.

Through the poem's imagery, 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 stages 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 diverges from the rest and joy that characterize most secular Jewish conceptions of this day.¹⁹ 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).

Since Friday

the agony of the afternoon resonates

...

The house is a sob. The horizon
enters the house enveloped in twilight:
it has the form of goodbye. I must be dreaming.

Instead of prayers and joy, the *agonía* of the afternoon is what resonates. In Spanish, "agonía" refers to agony as well as, more specifically, to the throes of death. While the Jewish tradition celebrates the arrival of Shabbat as 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. 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 celebrate life. At the same time, it paradoxically dramatizes the openness of more

contemporary and non-traditional variants of Judaism that observe Shabbat as a secular celebration.

The speaker concludes the poem by asserting: “creo soñar” (14). Notably, he addresses no one in particular, not God or a community. The most evident translation of the line is ‘I must be dreaming’ or ‘I think I’m dreaming,’ a reaction to the unbelievable events taking place around him. The enunciation suggests that what is happening is so incredible that he must be imagining it. While he could be reflecting on God’s awe-inspiring actions, the speaker does not mention God; he displaces Him as the source of this holy day and his amazement. Asserting “creo soñar,” which could also be translated as ‘I believe I’m dreaming,’ the speaker positions himself as the believer and creator of the events taking place around him. Dreaming and believing in this act enables him to access otherwise unavailable ideas and worlds. Using active verbs instead of static nouns—*creer* ‘to believe’ instead of *fe* ‘faith’ or *creencia* ‘belief’ and *soñar* ‘to dream’ instead of *sueño* ‘dream’—Rosenmann-Taub undermines any fixed forms of what it means to believe. The poem depicts believing and dreaming as fluid actions, which become present, possible, and contextualized in the human performance of them, in each occurrence in which they are enacted. This form of belief re-imagines Shabbat rituals as secular and earthly modes of observing 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 such established traditions in crisis, as he explores what might exist beyond them. “Elegía y Kadisch” invokes Jewish forms of speaking to the divine to underline the absence of God. Without faith or a community, the isolated subject becomes trapped in saying the “tormented prayer.” In “Gólgota,” the speaker imagines himself as a human form of God. He invokes Him as an actual interlocutor but ends up speaking to himself. “Schabat” expresses an indifference to God as 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” (“soñar”). They cease searching for a form of the divine outside of the realm of the human; instead, they turn their attention to seeking the divine in earthly experiences, actions, and modes of being.

Beyond his poetry, Rosenmann-Taub introduces a secular, cross-cultural Jewish voice in the Chilean literary tradition in the late 1940s. In an interview with *El Mercurio* journalist and book review coordinator Beatriz Berger on July 2, 2002, Rosenmann-Taub responded to a question about the presence of God in his poetry. He offered, “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” ‘For me, the term God is earthly. What I call divine is the absolute earthly expression. It has nothing to do with the concept of religions, in which I don’t find any divine divinity’ (“Interview by Beatriz” 4). In this interview, Rosenmann-Taub openly expresses his disbelief in the God(s) of organized religion and of institutional religions themselves, implicitly including Judaism. What he considers “divine” is something that is absolutely earthly and exists outside of rigid religious practices.

Through *Cortejo y epinicio*, Rosenmann-Taub represents speakers articulating and expressing this earthly form of spirituality, which redefines God, believing, and observance as secular, worldly practices. At the same time, they draw from traditional forms of prayerful address, as they recreate them. For example, the speaker of “Elegía y Kadisch” expresses a need to say Kaddish for the dead. Rosenmann-Taub constructs the poem as the speaker’s own form of Kaddish, a secular variation that expresses the absence of a communally-affirmed faith in God. In contrast to Mourner’s Kaddish, his prayer-poem enables him to voice his pain of loss. Similarly, in “Schabat,” the speaker expresses respect for the traditions that he observes around him as a means to enact his own secular forms of believing. He partakes in these rituals, but in a distorted—secular and earthly—form. Each of these Jewish elements becomes secularized within a range of other once religious forms, while still maintaining and fulfilling a spiritual function. In this way, Rosenmann-Taub neither honors Jewish religious beliefs nor celebrates Catholicism or paganism. Instead, he merges his interrogations of Christianity, Judaism, paganism, and non-specific mystical beliefs to address his speakers’ spiritual and religious crises. As they delve deeper into their queries, they come to negotiate their own being through the act of believing, as a secular, spiritual practice.

Notes

1. This translation and all following ones are my own.
2. Rosenmann-Taub's work has been recognized within Chile and abroad in anthologies of works featuring religious and Jewish themes, such as Schwartz and Rudolf (1980) and Arteché and Cánovas (1989).
3. *Cortejo y epinicio* (1949, 1978, 2002) has been published in three editions with substantial changes made between each one. I focus on the first publication to situate Rosenmann-Taub's work in the late 1940s.
4. Rosenmann-Taub studied music professionally at Santiago's Conservatory of Music and continues to produce poetic and musical compositions. He has recorded several albums of original compositions as well as multimedia publications, including *En un lugar de la sangre* (2006), which contains poetry, original piano compositions, and a CD/DVD of the author performing selections.
5. Galindo Villarroel (1999) situates David Rosenmann-Taub among a generation of poets that published their first collections of poetry in the late 1940s and early 1950s. He 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, of "no aprovechar las libertades heredadas de los poetas de la vanguardia" (Galindo Villarroel 596) 'not taking advantage of the freedoms inherited from the vanguard poets.' They perceived these authors as breaking with vanguard conventions and politically engaged poetry, as it was articulated in this moment in time.
6. Mistral's poetry often includes the names and stories of the Hebrew Bible. In *Desolación*, Mistral's poem "Ruth" rewrites the Book of Ruth. *Tala* includes brief allusions to Jacob and Leah in "La sombra" 'the shadow' and Sarah, Abraham's wife, in "Pan" 'Bread.' These references stand alongside others that evoke Christian, Chilean, Latin American, Incan, and Mayan stories. Rosenmann-Taub continues this exploration of Jewish, Christian, and other religious and mystical thought from a cross-cultural space in his poetry. However, in contrast to Mistral's references to "Sol de los Incas, sol de los Mayas" 'Incan Sun, Mayan Sun' in "América" 'America,' for example, Rosenmann-Taub's landscapes are wiped of physical and temporal specificity (149).

7. Rosenmann-Taub's poetry resonates with that of other Jewish poets beyond Chile, including Edmond Jabès and Jerome Rothenberg, whose works similarly incorporate Jewish elements in critical, modified, and secular forms. This study focuses on situating Rosenmann-Taub's poetry within a Chilean poetic context. While it is beyond the scope of this essay, one could also analyze how his work dialogues with a broader Jewish poetics in which his interventions are also often overlooked.

8. Other religious groups encourage directly addressing God without human intermediaries. For example, protestants believe in the possibility of speaking to God anytime and anywhere, though they also pray to Jesus and the Holy Ghost as other forms of God, which would be considered idolatry in the Jewish tradition. Rosenmann-Taub frames his use of apostrophe as distinctly Jewish by naming Jewish prayers and rituals in the titles of his poems.

9. Maimonides emphasizes 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*). Such worship can lead to faith in the created thing instead of God.

10. The Aramaic word is commonly transliterated in Spanish as "Kadisch" and in English as "Kaddish."

11. The original language of the prayer is mostly Aramaic and numerous translations exist in other languages. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* offers this English version, which I quote in part:

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 . . . 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. (Skolnik and Berenbaum 695)

12. Several customs and rules determine how, when, and who reads Kaddish. The prayer is traditionally recited by a male descendant of the deceased or, if not possible, a male family member—a parent, spouse, or sibling. An individual

unrelated to the deceased may also choose to take on the responsibility, if no one else can. 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 afterlife. Jewish communities believe that it takes a full twelve months of prayer to purify the wickedest person's soul; since most people do not fall into the category of the wickedest, the prayer is often said for eleven months.

13. Fisch (1988) argues that the interplay between solitude and solidarity is central to understanding temple prayer. When an "I" speaks in temple prayers, the individual functions not as an "autonomous ego," but rather as a self within a community (Fisch 113). The individual speaking to God dramatizes his or her personal choice to praise God. As the community joins him or her, their communal affirmation of faith also confirms the desired relationship between the "I" and the group as one of solidarity between individuals who have made the same choice to believe in God.

14. This irreverent mode of speaking to God characterizes Rosenmann-Taub's representation of the Jewish God as well as the human form of the Christian God, Jesus, in the poem "Gólgota."

15. Rosenmann-Taub represents one example of many authors and intellectuals of Jewish ancestry, including Marc Chagall, who have engaged with Jewish and Christian sources in the same space.

16. 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). John G. Gager's (1983) work, among others, provides historical and theological evidence to challenge this claim against the Jews. And yet, examples of these beliefs persist and continue to fuel anti-Semitism. One example of the persistence of these beliefs appears in Marjorie Agosin's (1998) biography of 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 to give one individual's experience of how these beliefs have continued to fuel antisemitism.

17. 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. 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)

18. According to the Torah, observing the Sabbath means not just ceasing work, but also taking time to open one's mind, to rest one's body, and to 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 (*Jewish Study Bible*, Exod. 20:8-11). Moreover, Jews celebrate the day as the welcoming of a bride, which God 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 and contributes to its celebratory atmosphere.

19. Some contemporary variations of Judaism emphasize the importance of observing Jewish rituals, with or without faith in God. Two extreme examples include the Reboot Movement (founded in New York in 2002), which creates a space for discussion about identity and community, and one of its outgrowths, the "Sabbath Manifesto," a creative project initiated by a group of Jewish artists.

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