

THE INTERSECTION OF LIFE AND DEATH IN DAVID ROSENMANN-TAUB'S
TETRALOGY *CORTEJO Y EPINICIO*

Kenneth Gorfkle

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Approved by:

Rosa Perelmuter

Juan Carlos González-Espitia

Gregory Dawes

Frank Dominguez

Mónica Rector

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ABSTRACT

Kenneth Gorfkle: The Intersection of Life and Death in David Rosenmann-Taub's Tetralogy
Cortejo y Epinicio
(Under the direction of Rosa Perelmuter)

The dissertation examines the Chilean poet David Rosenmann-Taub's views of death through the analysis of poems from his tetralogy *Cortejo y Epinicio* (completed in 2013), and supplemented by his poems and commentaries in *Quince* (2008). The first chapter describes the poet's work and critical reception, reviews other scholarly studies that deal with the subject of death in the poet's work, and describes the dissertation's goals, methodology and structure. The second chapter analyzes poems that demonstrate the presence of death in life and the constant movement toward death throughout the multiverse and in man, as well as the countervailing desire for and movement towards conscious life. The third chapter illustrates Rosenmann-Taub's views of life after death, ranging from an existential perspective of death as nothingness and oblivion to other conceptions of an afterlife that imagine a fully developed consciousness. In the fourth chapter, the poems considered describe the juxtaposition of life and death at the instant of death, and by prolonging that liminal moment illustrate more fully the transformation from one state of being to the other. Also, the poet proposes that conscious life is in constant juxtaposition with the death that is the individual's unconscious behavior; the poems discussed here illustrate the importance of the individual's attitude in his struggle to lead a conscious life. The final chapter summarizes the findings of the previous three chapters, describes Rosenmann-Taub's essentialist worldview regarding nature and natural processes, life, death and consciousness, and contrasts the poet's worldview with prevailing ontological perspectives.

Throughout the study, the interpretive methodology makes use of semiotic and formal analysis to approximate the poems' meaning. These analyses are supplemented both by Rosenmann-Taub's expression of his worldview and by the poet's own phonological, syntactic and semantic patterns as they manifest themselves in his poetic universe.

To David Rosenmann-Taub and his poetry, the inspiration for this dissertation.

QUID

CIII

Conque manso el potrillo.... ¡Mansa coz
de chúcaro denuedo!
Por resultado, versos:
paráfrasis de Dios.

So the foal is tame.... Tame kick
of savage courage!
As a result, verses:
paraphrase of God.

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THE INTERSECTION OF LIFE AND DEATH IN DAVID ROSENMANN-TAUB'S TETRALOGY *CORTEJO Y EPINICIO*

During the last sixty years the Chilean David Rosenmann-Taub has distinguished himself as a unique poet in the world of Hispanic letters. The poet found his vocation in early childhood, and his precocious talents in piano and composition along with his later studies of languages and the natural and physical sciences have all served to enrich the musicality, lexicon and depth of thought of his poetry.¹ In 1941, at the age of fourteen, Rosenmann-Taub composed *El Adolescente*, an extensive poem that would be published four years later. He began writing the poems of the tetralogy *Cortejo y Epinicio*, his major work, during his teenage years and completed its first book in 1948, at the age of twenty-one. This book won the Sindicato de Escritores award for poetry in that year, and appeared in print the subsequent year. The succeeding four years saw additional awards and prizes for his next three works, *Los Surcos Inundados* (1951), *El Regazo Luminoso* (1952), and *La Enredadera del Júbilo* (1952), and his poems found a home in many of the poetic anthologies of Chilean verse during that period.

Between 1953 and 1975, Rosenmann-Taub published only one book, *Cuaderno de Poesía* (1962). However, starting in the mid-1970s, the poet published five books of poetry with Esteoeste in Buenos Aires: *Los Despojos del Sol: Ananda Primera* (1976), *El Cielo en la Fuente* (1977), *Los Despojos del Sol: Ananda Segunda* (1978), the second edition of *Cortejo y Epinicio* (1978), and, with Nahúm Kamenetsky, *Al Rey Su Trono* (1978). It was also during the 1970s that Rosenmann-Taub lectured in California and New York on the works of poets and composers

such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, San Juan de la Cruz, Beethoven, Ravel and Debussy sponsored by a grant from the Oriental Studies Foundation.

The poet has not sought publicity, and his seclusion has clearly borne fruit in his prolific literary output. Rosenmann-Taub has published eight additional books with the Chilean publishing house LOM Ediciones in the last decade, including his major work, the tetralogy entitled *Cortejo y Epinicio*. As I previously mentioned, *Cortejo y Epinicio* was first published in 1949 and then re-published for the third time in 2002. It was incorporated into the tetralogy with the completion of the other three books in 2013 and at that time recovered its original title of *El Zócalo*. The other three volumes of the tetralogy are titled *El Mensajero* (2003); *La Opción*, (2011); and *La Noche Antes* (2013). Other publications during this decade were *El Cielo en la Fuente/La Mañana Eterna* and *País Más Allá* (2004); *Poesiectomía* (2005); *Los Despojos del Sol: Anandas I and II* (2006); *Auge* (2007); and *Quince* (2008). In addition, the poet published *En un lugar de la Sangre* (including a DVD and CD) with Mandora Press (2006). In the last three years, Rosenmann-Taub's work has been translated and anthologized in different countries as well.²

Critics typically assign Rosenmann-Taub to the Chilean Generation of '50; however, they immediately qualify this assignment by contrasting rather than comparing him to the other poets of that group. They observe that Rosenmann-Taub's poetics adhere to traditional formal structures, include a vast and variegated lexicon, and exhibit a style that is simultaneously terse and rich in metaphor and imagery, characteristics foreign to the poetics of his contemporaries. Furthermore, whereas many poets of his poetic generation chose to examine social, political and historical themes during this period of socio-political unrest in Chile, Rosenmann-Taub writes primarily on universal themes. Although Naín Nómez identifies common ground between

Rosenmann-Taub and the laric poets Jorge Teillier, Alberto Rubio and Efraín Barquero of the Generation of '50 due to the centrality of the theme of childhood and the search for origins in their work, he also recognizes that Rosenmann-Taub “se separa de los poetas anteriores por la densa urdimbre de sus versos, tensos, ambiguos, rigurosos, contenidos en un discurso que nunca se consume a sí mismo” (“Sobre la poesía 8).³

In fact, it is difficult to place Rosenmann-Taub within any particular literary movement. Teodosio Fernández finds elements of romanticism, modernism, the avant-garde, surrealism, expressionism, neo-romanticism and postmodernism in his poetry; the inclusion of all these elements in the poet's oeuvre effectively prevents him from being classified as a member of any one literary movement. Naín Nómez, María Nieves Alonso, and Cristián Gómez note various thematic similarities between Rosenmann-Taub and poets such as Trakl, Vallejo, and Rilke; yet in the same way that his poetry is difficult to categorize, his treatment of poetic themes is not sufficiently similar to these other poets to warrant a meaningful comparison. Jaime Concha, for example, attempts to situate Rosenmann-Taub in both a Chilean and Latin American literary tradition in a 2008 article that finds poetic connections with Gabriela Mistral, Pedro Prado, Ángel Cruchaga Santa María and Rubén Darío, but ultimately concedes the poet's singularity (725). Rosenmann-Taub himself rejects the idea that his poetry might belong to or be influenced by any particular literary tradition. In response to the interview question “En ese acto de escribir, ¿hay algunos autores que considere indispensables?” he states,

La vida inmediata me es tan fuerte que me apaga otras resonancias. ¿Qué puede afectarme toda la cultura frente al hecho de caminar, cualquier día, a cualquier hora, por una calle cualquiera? El estudio, la investigación, el perfeccionamiento son totalmente diferentes del acto de la propia creación. El único autor que me es indispensable es mi persona (Berger 2).

The life that surrounds me is so strong that it eclipses other influences. What effect can all of culture have on me when compared to walking on any day at any hour, on any street? Study, research, improvement are totally different from the act of creation itself. The only author who is indispensable to me is myself.⁴

Thus, both past and current critical reception has failed to contextualize Rosenmann-Taub, and the poet himself spurns that effort.

Although Rosenmann-Taub attracted relatively little critical attention until the most recent decade, his poetry has been consistently praised from its inception. Between 1945, the date of the first publication of his work, and 2002, many book reviews and other newspaper articles assessing his work were penned by the most recognized critics and poets of the country and continent. In his review of *Cortejo y Epinicio* in 1950, Hernán Díaz Arrieta (Alone) called Rosenmann-Taub “...un astro enteramente nuevo” (3); for the French novelist, translator and critic Francis de Miomandre the poet’s first two books “poseen una calidad y un acento totalmente excepcionales. No veo a nadie, ni aun entre nosotros, que se atreva a abordar la expresión poética con tan desgarradora violencia” (1)⁵; and the Chilean critic Carlos René wrote of the “magia poética de Rosenmann-Taub” in his 1952 review of *Los Surcos Inundados*(2). All of them emphasized the innovative qualities of the formal techniques, imagery and lexicon found in his poetry.

The Spanish and Hispanic poets who were Rosenmann-Taub’s contemporaries were no less enthusiastic: Nobel Laureate poet Vicente Aleixandre referred to *Cortejo y Epinicio* as “El nacimiento de un poeta genuino”⁶ and the Generation of ’50 poet Miguel Arteche, describing *Los Surcos Inundados*, wrote “Pocas veces he visto una voz que trajera más riqueza entrañable de verdadera poesía—y muy contemporánea—como la de Rosenmann-Taub” (3). During the publication of his works in Buenos Aires 23 years later, the poet and critic Hernán del Solar and the Generation of ’50 poet Alberto Rubio continued to eulogize the poet. Later, in 1998,

Armando Uribe Arce, another fellow poet of the Generation of '50, and the soon-to-be winner of the Premio Nacional de Literatura in Chile, declared Rosenmann-Taub “El poeta vivo más importante y profundo de toda la lengua castellana...” (2).

After the publication of his works by LOM Ediciones in 2002 Rosenmann-Taub's works have continued to be described in superlatives. Academics and critics including Camilo Marks, Carmen Foxley, Naín Nómez, Jaime Concha, Teodosio Fernández and Pedro Gandolfo have all commented on the originality, complexity, and diversity of the various phonological, syntactic, and semantic elements of his poetry as well as their thematic universality. Yet, apart from general comments, few critics have discussed in detail the very poems they praise, other than to remark on their difficulty, his terse aesthetic style, his vast and unusual lexicon, and/or the unique ways in which he uses language.

When speaking of Rosenmann-Taub's complexity, critics often refer to him as hermetic, while insisting that his poetry “se abre una vez que la forzamos y nos habla entonces, con toda claridad” (Vejar 1). In fact, Rodríguez asserts that Rosenmann-Taub's is “un hermetismo de absoluta transparencia y locuacidad” (1); García Román remarks that his poetry “no es hermética...Lo que sí, son poemas de mayor información, de orden filosófico” (17); and Ignacio Silva observes that “Muy mal leída, la poesía de Rosenmann-Taub daría la impresión de ser hermética, ‘escrita en complicado’, con palabras obsoletas y anacrónicas, con poemas casi epigramáticos. Pero eso es desde una óptica pobre y deplorable. ...Si por ahí se definió a la poesía como el arte de forzar el lenguaje, entonces Rosenmann-Taub es el poeta por antonomasia...” (3).

In the last decade, appreciation of Rosenmann-Taub's work has deepened as its editors have attempted to place the poet in a literary, philosophical or historical tradition; discussed his

hermeticism (Nieves Alonso, Salvador, Miranda); reviewed his poetics (Monteleone, Salvador, Miranda); and examined important thematic elements (Nieves Alonso, Salvador, Monteleone, Costanzo). Starting in 2007, Teodosio Fernández reviews the poet's biographical data, publication, chronology and anthologization of his work, their awards and critical reception, the influence on them of various aesthetic movements, the "densificación" and musicality of his language (6), and compares these developments to those experienced by other poets of his generation in their efforts "...hasta conseguir que el lenguaje se vuelva opaco y el poema se transforme en un objeto que parece bastarse a sí mismo..." (7). Jaime Concha's 2008 study of *Cortejo y Epinicio* reviews the thematic elements and formal characteristics of the various sections of that book. Other critics have also compared the poet's books and discussed his hermeneutics of suffering (Ruiz, Nieves Alonso), examined the question of universality in his writing (Gómez) as well as the concept of the Other (Gallego Cuiñas).

Academic interest has accelerated even more of late; more than a dozen articles on various aspects of his poetry have been published during the last five years. Also, in 2010 and 2011, round table discussions on Rosenmann-Taub's poetry in Georgetown, Santiago and Paris resulted in three published collections of articles from participants. As an example, the eight studies that resulted from the Sorbonne conference range from discussions of Rosenmann-Taub's views of death by Naín Nómez, Sabrina Costanzo and Juanita Cifuentes-Loualt to the poet's views on language by Stefano Tedeschi and María Ángeles Pérez to the poet's demythification of the divine figure in an existential world by Ina Salazar (2011). The book introductions, aforementioned articles and conference papers comprise the corpus of critical work to date.

A topic that recurs in Rosenmann-Taub's works and one that has generated interest with his critics is his treatment of death, from a variety of angles that are all far removed from the

personal or emotive response that is common to the treatment of the theme by others. Rosenmann-Taub moves beyond twentieth-century existentialist conceptions of death, stimulating the reader to consider possibilities of the after-life that are outside of either the perspectives of traditional religions or nihilism. In addition, his ideas on nothingness, atemporality and non-spatiality that correlate with his views of death, along with the premise of the simultaneity of being and non-being that pervade his poetry, correlate with concepts from quantum mechanics. It is no wonder that Sabrina Costanzo believes that “From the strictly semantic point of view, ‘Preludio’ initiates what could be considered the *leitmotiv* of Rosenmann-Taub’s work: death” (1).

I intend to study Rosenmann-Taub’s ideas about death in his tetralogy *Cortejo y Epinicio* (2013), supplemented with the poems and commentary that appear in his anthology *Quince* (2007). This collection is particularly appropriate for the purposes of this study because it spans the poet’s entire career and is thus representative of all facets of the poet’s vision. In addition, *Quince* will be helpful for two reasons. First, all the poems in this unique book either treat the theme of death directly or allude to the theme, and second, the commentaries provide a reading and discussion by the poet that I will use to complement my own.

Quince is perhaps the most helpful textual resource available to interpret Rosenmann-Taub’s poetry. The poet wrote the commentaries using poems that are easier to understand than many of his others in order to illustrate what he considers approaches that are useful in decoding his poems. The book demonstrates his manner of explication: the poet uses concepts from both inside and outside the poem to decode its mimesis line by line. In addition, he illustrates formal and hermeneutic techniques that are specific to his poetry; among these techniques are his use of internal words, direct links that he makes between phonological and semantic elements, his use

of contrast, and also, the exposition of different elements of his worldview that can help in the comprehension of other poems of his as well.

Up to now several critics have addressed the theme of death. On two occasions Sabrina Costanzo examines poems throughout the poet's oeuvre that either treat death as their principal theme or allude to it (2010, 2011). She interprets their contents through paraphrasing them, and then describes their various phonological, lexical and/or semantic aspects that illustrate and justify her interpretation. While helpful in enabling the reader to penetrate the poems she examines, her analyses do not lead to an overall understanding of the poet's worldview, and Costanzo herself admits that her analyses are merely first steps in this domain.

Jaime Concha examines key poems from *Cortejo y Epinicio* to inductively arrive to Rosenmann-Taub's overall perspective on the theme of death and to tie his poetry to the poetry of other Chilean poets (2008). He comments on the dialectic of childhood and death, the dead speaker who wants to return to the world, and life and death as part of the cyclical rhythms of nature, as he connects Rosenmann-Taub's poetry to the Chilean poetic tradition and particularly the poetry of Gabriela Mistral. Concha, however, only examines six of twelve poems in detail.

Naín Nómez describes Rosenmann-Taub's treatment of the theme of death in two studies (2005, 2011). He notes the poet's tendency to prolong and amplify the moment of death. He also examines the (poetic) exorcism and/or transcendence of death through memory, childhood and childhood games, suffering, eroticism, irony and poetry, and the different ways in which the Rosenmannian speaker transcends death. He then demonstrates these concepts through reviewing poems from *Cortejo y Epinicio*, *El Mensajero* and *País más allá*, as well as citing the poet's own remarks taken from interviews and his own self-commentaries. Nómez's treatment of the theme in his two articles is more exhaustive than that of the aforementioned critics. In his

analysis he proposes his understanding of the poet's view of death, amplifies his ideas as he cites and discusses the poems, and then cites the poet himself, either in interviews or in his self-commentaries from *Quince* to further confirm his hypotheses. Although his approach is sound, I find his analysis limited. In the most thorough of these analyses, he still uses only eleven poems to describe Rosenmann-Taub's views on death and instead of analyzing the poems he cites only a few of the relevant lines from each poem to support his contentions. Although the number of poems that he discusses is greater than that of the other critics, it is still too small and the analysis too limited to adequately cover the entirety of the theme.

This study makes a systematic categorization, analysis and synthesis of a broad selection of Rosenmann-Taub's poems that treat the question of death, in a broader corpus of approximately 40 poems (Chapters 2-4). These chapters I hope will show that for Rosenmann-Taub, death or non-being is an integral part of life, and is present in both the body and psyche of man starting from the moment of birth. His poems portray his movement towards death, at both the conscious and unconscious levels, as a constant and integral part of life. The poet highlights the two states of being as simultaneous, and juxtaposes them in his poems.

The next chapters examine three distinct aspects of the poet's views of death and life. The second chapter looks at those poems that deal with death in life. Rosenmann-Taub's poems in this area first of all illustrate the constant way in which both death and the movement towards it are always present. Some of the poems describe how the individual himself actively and consciously chooses death over life, starting from birth, because of the terror that life presents, the insufferable burden of the passage of time, and the desire to escape the burden of consciousness. This section also examines poems that portray the individual's struggle against death.

The third chapter examines the poet's views of life after death. Rosenmann-Taub's vision in this domain rejects both the nihilistic view of death as well as conventional religious views of death that envision a paradise, purgatory and hell. Instead, starting with the viewpoint that the non-being of death may be as rich and varied as the state of being of life, he proposes a myriad of possibilities, spanning the gamut between an existential view of death as the cessation of virtually all material and spiritual existence on the one hand, and the imaginary continuation of a fully developed individual consciousness after death on the other hand. The poet's visions of life after death may be divided into four areas. The first category of poems illustrates the existential view of death: life after death is, or at the very least approaches the total absence of being. Man comes from nothing when he is born; and he returns to nothing when he dies. These poems depict the afterlife in terms of sleep, dream, shadow, echo, dust, memory, or negation. The second category illustrates the poet's many imaginative views of death, all distinct from conventional religious views, and with or without human presence. Now, the human essence may take the form of a cadaver, a gob of spit, a swamp, a voice, the glow of light or a star. A third category of poems describes the afterlife as an integral part of the eternal cycle of death and procreation in nature; phenomena from Nature depict these versions of the after-life. A final category of poems dealing with the after-life accords full powers of consciousness to the human being, even after death. The dead person may be the speaking subject of the poem, the poem's object, the interlocutor in a dialogue with the speaker, or an entity apostrophized by the speaker in a monologue.

In the fourth chapter I discuss the juxtapositions of life and death that populate Rosenmann-Taub's poetry on death. As described in the previous two chapters, Rosenmann-Taub's poetry describes aspects of death that exist in life as well as aspects of life that exist after

death. Given his continuous juxtaposition of these two states of being, it is not surprising that the instant of death would assume paramount importance in this poetic theme, since this is the point in time where the two states of being intersect in the most visible and tangible way. Rosenmann-Taub disregards the instantaneous nature of this intersection; instead, the poems prolong this instant in time in order to describe it fully. Furthermore, this transition from life and death is not simply a transition from being to non-being but may instead be a tradition from one form of being (or non-being) to another form of being (or non-being).

The poems that depict this transition fall into three categories. The first and most prominent category consists of poems that simply describe this encounter and transition. The speaker's voice may be in the first, second or third person, and the poems may refer to nature and natural processes and cycles of life and death or conceive of this transition in metaphysical terms. Second, as shown in the analysis of the previous chapters, the poet recognizes the presence of death in life and life in death. However, at times the depiction of the simultaneous nature of these two states of being is so marked that the reader must consider that in every moment of life the juxtaposition of these two states is just as pronounced as in the last instant of life. The final category of poems, while continuing to describe the encounter, now emphasizes the individual's state of mind, emotional response and/or actions as he/she confronts this eternal instant.

The dissertation concludes with a summary of Rosenmann-Taub's worldview as it relates to death. Pre-eminent in importance to this worldview is the concept of the simultaneity of being and non-being throughout both life and death, a concept that underpins all Rosenmann-Taub's poetry on death. The poet seems to equate life and death with consciousness and unconsciousness, distancing himself from the purely biological definition of life. His poems

delineate the constant desire for death and movement towards it, but hold open the possibility that the human being has within him the power to transcend it through consciousness. All the poems nevertheless demonstrate the omnipresence of the confrontation between life and death, consciousness and unconsciousness, during the individual's life as well as at the end of his life, and the challenges the individual faces in his desire to live consciously.

Rosenmann-Taub's terse style, lack of titles, figurative language, polysemic lexicon and constant employment of catachresis at times seem to render his poetry virtually indecipherable. Nevertheless, the poet insists that his poetry expresses the reality of the world and the human condition with precision, stating, "The function of art is to express knowledge in the most exact way possible; otherwise, it has neither function nor destiny" (Castellanos 2). To express the world in words is an enormous challenge; the poet accepts this challenge, and attempts to fulfill it with all the tools at his disposal. Accordingly, the reader can do no less than to attempt to decode his work in a manner that will be as faithful to its creator's intention as possible.

The fact that the poet chooses to express the truth as precisely as possible has led me to choose three text-based critical approaches for the analysis of his poetry, because they free us from momentary literary, cultural or historical influences or assumptions. The first is semiotic analysis, based on the approach of Michael Riffaterre. Its principles are that poems are a formal and semantic unity, that they have a unifying topic (its significance), and that this unifying topic applies to every one of its elements. According to the Riffaterrian model, a poem has two levels—mimetic and hermeneutic—and the anomalies (or "ungrammaticalities" as he calls them) at the mimetic level of reading have referents that come together to form a unified and consistent substrate at the hermeneutic level that surmounts the mimetic level.⁷

Riffaterre's insistence on linguistic and literary competence—to recognize the poem's figurative language and to know the pertinent themes, mythologies and texts that apply to this language—has guided me to other intra-, inter-, and extra-textual resources available to unravel its imagery. For example, with respect to the poet's lexicon, I examine the poet's his use of registers, his neologisms, his employment of “internal” words (words within words), polysemy and variety in titles, as I search for keys to unlock both a poem's significance and the hypograms that lie beneath its mimetic surface.

The analysis of a poem's figurative language is the most important aspect of this level of reading: it is both the challenge of the poem and the key to its meaning. The poet uses metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche, antithesis, oxymoron and paradox; of these tropes, metonymy is the most important.

For the vast majority of Rosenmann-Taub's images, the referent is unknown. Therefore, since metaphor maps one conceptual framework onto another, it is most useful when the referent is known. However, when the target domain is unknown, the metaphor's referent is difficult, if not impossible, to identify. On the other hand, metonymy connects to the target domain through contiguity; with this trope, only one domain is involved. Thus, in a poem that contains a series of unrelated images, if we conceive of each image as a metonym where the visible vehicle is connected to an underlying and invisible tenor by contiguity, and where the tenors of this series of metonyms are the same, we can identify the common tenor and thereby comprehend the poem.

Isotopies are other useful tools in Riffaterrian analysis. Redundancies at the semantic level of reading provide keys to a poem's theme and the poet's conception of it. As I noted in the previous paragraph, the hypograms that constitute the variants of the poem's significance at the

hermeneutic level of reading are all related isotopically, due to the poem's fundamental characteristic of unity. In addition, since they are more visible, the isotopies that we perceive at the mimetic level of reading also facilitate the comprehension of the text.

Finally, in Riffaterrian semiotic analysis a legitimate hermeneutic technique is the interpretation of an image or a catachresis (a word or an image that has vastly departed from traditional usage) in accord with the poem's significance, even without additional semantic or extra-semantic evidence to support it. This is invaluable in texts such as Rosenmann-Taub's that abound in figurative language, catachresis and ambiguities; it allows an expansion and enrichment of the interpretation that would be impossible if one were to rely solely on the purely semantic or formal structures of the text.

A second hermeneutic resource that I employ when and as appropriate is formal analysis. I analyze various elements at the prosodic, phonological, morphosyntactic, semantic and discursive levels of reading to understand and ultimately interpret the poem. This mode of analysis corresponds to the poet's own poetics; describing his own poetry, he stresses the importance of form in informing content as he declares that "Everything is for the content. If there's no content, there's nothing. How is form or sonority going to have more importance than the content?" (Berger 2). Rosenmann-Taub's commentaries in *Quince* are a rich source of examples of how the poet utilizes these elements to inform meaning. At the prosodic and phonological levels of reading, I examine versification, sonority (repetition, anaphora, alliteration, accentuation, silence, rhyme), and typographical elements, when they contribute to the analysis. Patterns and irregularities in these elements are used as a path to the poem's comprehension and interpretation. Deviations in versification, sonority, accentuation, punctuation and even typography all focus the reader's attention on key words and phrases.

At the morphosyntactical level of reading, I examine noun and verb forms and clauses, superlatives and diminutives and enjambment. Hyperbaton and other word order variations are used to emphasize the importance of words or concepts. Also, the poet employs grammatical conversions: verbs may become nouns, and nouns may be employed as adjectives in order to describe or modify other nouns. Just as in the prosodic and phonological areas, the poet deviates from the norm in these areas also in order to draw attention to key words and phrases in the poem.

A third hermeneutic resource operates at the level of discourse, where I employ a variety of intertextual and extratextual resources in order to assist in the interpretation of the poem, once it is understood semantically. The poem's "text" is extended to include many texts, and these texts—my corpus—then become its context. Just as the examination of phonological or semantic isotopies within a poem reveal the poem's meaning, the examination of meanings over a corpus of poems will reveal the "idiolectical character" of any individual text in the collective corpus and will facilitate its interpretation, as long as the corpus is homogenous, representative and exhaustive (Greimas, 163-64). In the specific case of Rosenmann-Taub, the consideration of his other poems and his own commentaries extends the poem's text in a homogenous and representative way and thus creates the redundancies necessary for its understanding.

I stress that even with this arsenal of hermeneutic techniques, there is no guarantee that my analyses are correct. I include alternative readings of the poem as they arise in my analysis, and I leave open the possibility that interpretations either contrary to or completely distinct from mine may be equally viable. As long as the interpretation can demonstrate that the poem is a formal and thematic unity and that its thematic elements are consistent with the poet's other writings and his worldview, it must be considered a reasonable interpretation.

Rosenmann-Taub employs a complex lexicon, multiple formal structures and figurative language to express what literal mimetic language cannot express. His vast storehouse of knowledge, his distinctive lexicon, imagery, philosophical conceptions and poetic approach all unite to produce a poetry that is atypical, complex and multidimensional. My analyses, though thorough and offered in earnest, stand beneath or below the poet's words and do not mean to reduce the significance and richness of the poetry. I approach his poems in a spirit of humility; this dissertation is no more than a first step towards the exploration and comprehension of one small aspect of his magnificent oeuvre.

Chapter 2

THE OMNIPRESENCE OF DEATH IN THE MULTIVERSE

David Rosenmann-Taub's views on death are varied and differ from those of other contemporary poets and philosophers. One of his unique visions involves the omnipresence of death throughout this universe and all of the other universes that constitute the multiversal reality in which we live. Death is present throughout the cosmos and throughout all of nature, in inanimate as well as animate objects, and always in intimate relationship with the human being as well, from the moment of birth to the last second of his life. The first poems of this chapter illustrate the omnipresence of death and describe the movement towards death that is present in both nature and the human being. The chapter then examines poems that describe the individual's own conscious collusion and collaboration with the unconscious behavior that for Rosenmann-Taub is tantamount to death in life. The last section analyzes poems that portray the possibility of the individual's ability to live a conscious life, despite the omnipresence of death and the movement towards death throughout the multiverse.⁸

1. The Inexorability of Death

In this section, we examine poems that describe the presence of death throughout the microcosmic, human and cosmic levels of the multiverse. Poems of this section explore the continuous movement towards death that occurs in these levels as well.

The first poem we examine is "Orco..." from *La Opción*, the third book of the poet's tetralogy *Cortejo y Epinicio*. The poem's first stanza expresses in a succinct way the foundation of the poet's attitude regarding the presence of death in life. I begin the study with this one short

stanza from this one short poem to show the all-encompassing nature of the poet's vision in this essential theme, as well as to demonstrate some of the principal semantic, lexical and other formal techniques he employs to express and amplify his position.

XVII

Orco multiverso, para penetrar todo, expresas nada, perecederamente indómito. (30)	Orcus multiverse, to penetrate all, you express nothing, terminally indomitable. ⁹
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A series of paradoxes, this untitled poem explores the antithetical and paradoxical nature of all reality. The antitheses initially shroud the poem's meaning in mystery. However, ultimately they enable the poet to express the complex and profound way that he views the existence and non-existence of everything real and imagined, on both cosmological and personal planes.

The poem's first two lines, each containing only one word, constitute its first paradox and set the stage for the antitheses to come. "Orco" (Orcus) is the Roman god of the underworld as well as the name of the underworld itself, that imaginary place where human souls go to reside after death. Representing the world of the afterlife, "Orco" stands for death. "Multiverso" in modern scientific parlance signifies the sum total of all possible universes, including space, time, matter, energy and all the rules that govern them. Thus, in these first two lines the poet juxtaposes all real and imagined physical reality with the opposing vision of a metaphysical reality.

In his juxtaposition of the two nouns ("Orco / multiverso"), the poet uses each to describe and modify the other, thus proposing that just as the multiverse that we inhabit is characterized by death, so is the underworld "multiversal" in nature.

The stage is now set for the development of the poem's theme. Apostrophizing the "Orco multiverso," the speaker declares that in order for it to penetrate all, it expresses (or signifies) nothing. Now, it is more reasonable to conceive that a metaphysical reality penetrates a physical reality than to conceive the opposite. Accordingly, this third line of the stanza thus reiterates and confirms what the two preceding lines have already suggested: death permeates every part of the multiverse.

The stanza's third line expresses yet another antithesis: true knowledge is inexpressible. Another meaning of "penetrar" is to understand or to know; therefore, in addition to being the sum of all real and imaginable universes, the multiverse contains all the knowledge of those universes as well. However that knowledge, even if it can be understood, cannot be expressed in language. Despite his curiosity, the human being's necessity to think and express in language prevents him from understanding.

The last line of the stanza gives the reader yet another antithesis to ponder: "percederamente indómito." This "Orcus" multiverse in which we live is indomitable. Nevertheless, because it is "terminally" indomitable, it cannot be considered truly indomitable or unconquerable. Death marks the end of life, and doesn't exist without the life that precedes or accompanies it. The multiverse is not invincible; it will die, and with it, death as well. The root word of "percederamente" is "percer"—to die—underscoring even further that death and the multiverse will ultimately cease to exist.

This phrase also tells us that death is not only connected to life but also to time, since death's indomitable nature is "percedera," terminal. As she discusses the concept of nothingness in relation to space and time, physicist K.C. Cole observes that "Time, in other words, can't exist in nothing, and nothing can't exist in time.... Everything depends on time.

And nothing exists without it” (251). Death is linked to time, and time, to the multiverse, so the disappearance of time results in the disappearance of death as well. The multiverse, including space, time and death itself, disappears.

The prosodic and phonological elements of “Orco” support and amplify the poem’s meaning as well, since in Rosenmann-Taub’s poetry, rhyme and alliteration often link words semantically. Before examining this technique as it manifests itself in “Orco,” we will look at an example from *Quince*. The poet demonstrates this phonological characteristic of his poetry in his poem “Desiertos,” from *Quince* and in his commentary to the poem that follows it.

Desiertos

<p>Ante <i>la mano</i>: seca cual <i>su</i> fotografía. Con diplomacia idéntica, luna, las iluminas. (97) (italics in text)</p>	<p>Facing the hand: dry like its photograph. With identical diplomacy, moon, you illuminate them.</p>
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In his commentary to the poem, the poet says, “*La luna, seca, decanta hermandad en la mano y en la fotografía de la mano: tres hijas de la sequedad* (101).” Then, at the end of his analysis, he writes: “Dúo: los fonemas de luna y de mano – fraternidad – “impregnan” la cuarteta:

<p>ANte LA mANo: secA cUAL sU fotogrAfíA. CoN dipLOmAcíA idéNtíCÁ, LUNA, LAsíLUmíNAs.</p>	<p>Ante lA MANO: secA cuAl su fOtOgrAfíA. CON diplOMAcíA idéNtíCÁ, luNA, lAs iluMíNAs.</p>
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Sonoridad y emoción: para “sentido (102).” [Sonority and emotion: for “meaning.”]
(italics and capital letters in text)

In the above excerpt, the poet shows the manner in which he relates the phonemes in “mano,” (“a-o), fotografía” (“o-o-a-a”) and “luna” (“u-a”) in order to highlight their semantic “brotherhood”: the “luna” “ilumina” the “mano” and its “fotografía.” Rosenmann-Taub

frequently uses phonological isotopies such as rhyme or alliteration to connect words semantically; we also use it in this study to amplify the poems' interpretations.

In the poem "Orco," phonological isotopies operate in a similar way to those of "Desiertos" described above. The assonant rhyme pattern "o-o" found in the words "Orco," "todo" and "indómito" links them together semantically as well: death is both omnipresent and indomitable. Similarly, the alliteration of the words linked by the plosive "p" links these words semantically through their connection with life. "Para," "penetrar" and "percederamente" suggest the purpose, the effort, the action and the terminal nature of life. In like manner, the "p" in "expresas" suggests the effort to communicate and, similarly, the "p" in "percederamente" the struggle against the inevitability of death that its word evokes.

Rosenmann-Taub also employs internal words to both expand and elucidate meaning. Poems from *Quince* demonstrate this formal device, and we see it here as well. The word "multiverso" refers not only to the multiverse, but also to the "multi-verso", the multitude of verses which express its substance. Nevertheless, the speaker's pronouncement, "...expresas nada" indicates that these verses remain silent; although meaning may be present in the multiverse, its expression is absent. The initial phrase "Orco / multiverso" refers also to an unspoken multitude of speech acts: "Orco" is "multi-versal." This portmanteau word reinforces the coetaneous and paradoxical existence of the multiverse and death: death exists simultaneously with life, and silence ("expresas nada") exists simultaneously with expression (multi-verso). In addition, the internal word "presa" found in "expresas" suggests that language itself may be a prison and the individual poet who attempts to express the nature of the multiverse in words finds himself a prisoner in that prison.¹⁰

The poem's typographic elements support its semantic meaning. In the first stanza, the second line with four syllables is longer than the first with two syllables, the third is longer than the second with eleven metric syllables, and the fourth shorter than the third, with nine metric syllables. This expansion and contraction of the poetic line corresponds with the size of the poet's conception. Starting with a vision of the afterlife, the poet expands his conception to the multiverse and then to the understanding of all that exists. However, due to the transitory nature of being expressed in the fourth line, this conception is ultimately reduced. The lengths of the poetic lines all correspond to these semantic shifts.

This nine-word first stanza thus expresses grand concepts: the omnipresence of death throughout multiversal reality, the impossibility of epistemological investigation and expression despite man's efforts to the contrary, the omnipotence of death and, simultaneously, its powerlessness facing the passage of time. The poet's use of antitheses allows him to express the complexity of reality in few words. Also, phonological isotopies, internal words and typographical elements expand the meaning of these antitheses and enrich the poem's significance as well.

In addition to the omnipresence of death, the continuous movement from life towards death is another thread that runs throughout Rosenmann-Taub's poetry. In his commentary to "Ontogenia" in *Quince*, Rosenmann-Taub presents this idea in prose:

Hacia atrás deriva el multiverso, *para* anularse. "Comprender" y saber: tácticas del "ser", *para* consumirse. La energía se desenergiza. Saber: desenergización que, cooperando con *mi* ímpetu a desaparecer, me informa del exhaustivo despojo. Recurso del multiverso para eliminarse... (192) (italics in text)

The multiverse slides backwards to annihilate itself. To understand and to know: tactics of being, in order to consume oneself. Energy de-energizes itself. To know: a de-energization that, cooperating with my own impetus to disappear, informs me of the exhaustive dispossession. Recourse of the multiverse

to eliminate itself (translation mine).”

In this commentary to “Ontogenia,” Rosenmann-Taub describes the multiverse annihilating itself, eliminating itself as its energy “de-energizes” itself. Being is not only simultaneous with non-being but also leads to non-being, and this movement towards non-being is fundamental to the poet’s worldview.

The first poem of *El Mensajero* (2003), “Arambeles” begins with the recognition of the presence of death in life, then uses a series of images to describe the movement towards death that is inherent in all animate and inanimate objects.

Arambeles:
fanales: secos ríos
de los yunques benignos
de la hacendosa suerte.

Tatters:
beacons: dry rivers
of the benign anvils
of hardworking destiny.

Vacante
rectitud.
Transitoria, mi carne
finará más aún. (11)

Vacant
rectitude.
Transitory, my flesh
will finish yet more.

“Arambeles” are tatters, rags that were once clothes. This first image immediately expresses the destructive nature of time, manifested in the deteriorated condition of a piece of cloth or an item of clothing that was once beautiful and useful. In like manner, the phrase “secos ríos,” the dry riverbeds that once were rivers, also evokes the passage of time; the river has disappeared with the passage of time, leaving only the dry banks that were once its bed. The phrase “Transitoria, mi carne / finará más aún ” is yet another example of the deterioration and decay that comes with the passage of time, as the poet alludes to a biological process that occurs throughout life and continues even after death. With this last image, the speaker personalizes this universal theme: he recognizes that like everything else in the natural world, his own body

is also decaying and dying, and the process will continue after his death as well. As in “Orco,” all is transitory, and natural entropic processes continue throughout life and after death.

These metonyms identify the theme as the movement to death of both animate and inanimate objects over time, exemplified by their deterioration, decay and ultimate disappearance. Now the other images may be understood and analyzed within this thematic context. The colon that precedes “fanales” equates it with “arambeles,” and in so doing indicates that these tatters are beacons illuminating for the individual the universality of decay and death. The “secos ríos / de los yunques benignos / de la hacendosa suerte” are also related to the preceding two images through the colon that precedes them: like the “arambeles,” they are also beacons warning of the inevitable movement towards death that comes with the passage of time.

The phrase “...yunques benignos / de la hacendosa suerte. /” suggests predetermination: the demise of the river is foreordained and inevitable, by that industrious and kind destiny that is death itself. The poet’s choice of adjectives in this clause further illuminates his own point of view: he labels the anvils as “benignos” and destiny as “hacendosa” because for him, free will and eternal life would be too great a burden for man to bear. Instead, destiny–death–works hard to bring the solace and comfort of non-being to all. Death is not only omnipresent and inescapable, but also both necessary and desirable.

The final phrase we consider is “vacante rectitud.” This phrase might normally be understood as an ironic criticism of virtue. However, in the context of the poem, the phrase instead seems to suggest the virtue of emptiness. Everything moves towards its desired end: death, disappearance, and nothingness, characterized as correct and virtuous, desirable as well as inevitable. “Rectitud” can also refer to the quality of straightness, perhaps referring to the

riverbed of the first stanza; this is yet another positive characterization of the movement towards death and emptiness.

Published in 2003, “Arambeles” anticipates and reinforces many of the themes of “Orco,” published in 2011, eight years later. The images of the “arambeles,” the “secos ríos,” and the “carne” which will terminate “más aún” all illustrate the theme of the presence of and movement towards death in life that is found in “Orco.” The poet develops his themes at both the universal and personal levels in both poems. The transitory nature of being is highlighted in both texts as well. Nevertheless, despite the two poems’ similarities it is their differences that enrich the reader’s understanding of the poet’s thought. Whereas in “Orco” Rosenmann-Taub posits death as omnipresent and co-extensive with life, in “Arambeles” his emphasis is more on decay and disintegration: the actual movement of life towards death. Here, death is present in life, not as a coetaneous state of being but rather as a process: the process of dying. Also, in “Orco” the theme is presented in an abstract manner, whereas in “Arambeles” the poet uses concrete objects such as rags, riverbeds, yokes and the human body to illustrate his theme. Most important, whereas the ideas of “Orco” are presented in an objective and non-judgmental tone, the speaker’s subjectivity finds its voice in “Arambeles.” “Benignos” and “hacendosa” link the individual’s predetermined destiny to positive attributes. The phrase “vacante rectitud” implies that death is an end that is virtuous. Finally, with the possessive “mi” of the “mi carne” in the last stanza, the speaker seems to gracefully accept his death and the deterioration of his own body that will continue after death, recognizing that he himself will undergo the same process as the other examples in the poem.

Rosenmann-Taub expresses the concept of life as a continual process of dying in other poems as well. In “La zampoña, serena,” from *El Mensajero*, a poem to which we will return,

the poet writes, "...Hiemal concebimiento / irrumpe hacia la hora / tenuísima..."(82). ["Wintry conception / erupts towards the faintest hour..."] If the "wintry conception" metaphorically represents the moment of conception and the "faintest hour" is the hour of death, then all life is a rush towards death. In its refrain, "Aerolito" from *El Zócalo* expresses the same concept: "Ibas corriendo hacia la muerte / sin tu relámpago en las bridas. /...Ibas corriendo hacia la muerte / por las ladinas graderías. /...Ibas corriendo hacia la muerte: / brasa de máscaras cautivas" (33-35). ["You were running towards death without your lightning in the flanges. /... You were running towards death through the crafty terraces. /... You were running towards death: / ember of captive masks..."] In all these instances, the individual went toward his death, recapitulating the journey of the meteor that went towards its death and burial in the earth and thus became the meteorite that is the poem's title. In the first refrain the speaker is impotent and defenseless ("sin tu relámpago"). In the second, he is seduced by the crafty terraces ("por las ladinas graderías"), the forces of nature that control him. In the third refrain, the "ember of captive masks" portrays the speaker as the charred remnant of a false representation of himself. These lines anticipate other themes that will be treated in this study; however, here they all highlight the theme of the human being's constant movement towards death that runs throughout Rosenmann-Taub's poetry.

"De vuelta a los rosales..." comes from *El Zócalo*, the 2013 revised edition of the first book of Rosenmann-Taub's tetralogy published in 1949 with the title *Cortejo y Epinicio*. Like "Orco...", it treats the theme of death in life; and like "Arambeles...", it deals with the concept of life as a process of dying. Moreover, the poem introduces the idea of life emanating from death, in a Heraclitean world that is constantly in a state of flux and transformation.

XVI

De vuelta a los rosales,
pavesas en los rayos de parques agostados,
hacia su paraíso las rosas se dispersan.
Ser sin ser, mis corimbos,
marchitos, se preparan.

¡Redentores
nidos! ¡Brisas! La luna
muere al nacer mañana.
Noche antigua, esta noche
tejió, aterida, huérfana, el sudario
que hoy es dueño del sueño.

Los pámpanos, estevas,
frotan la primavera: criaturas
de pan de sortilegio
ondean, en lo hondo de la almendra,
porvenires vividos:
inerrantes glicinas de celajes:
gaviotas: Dios viajero:
mármol:
mar. (45)

Back to the rosebushes,
soot in the rays of withered parks,
the roses disperse towards their paradise.
To be without being, my corymbs,
withered, prepare themselves.

Redeeming
nests! Breezes! The moon
dies when the morrow is born.
Ancient night, this night
wove, frozen, orphaned, the shroud
that today is the owner of sleep.

The vine branches, plow handles
rub the spring: creatures
of the bread of sorcery
ripple, in the depths of the almond,
lived futures.
immobile glycines of cloudscapes:
seagulls: God voyager:
marble:
sea.

Rosenmann-Taub's continuity of thought over the course of his life becomes apparent in the analysis of these poems. Written when he was an adolescent, "De vuelta a los rosales..." examines the topic of life and death with the same degree of complexity and arrives to the same conclusions as those of "Arambeles..." and "Orco..." published fifty and sixty years later.

This poet employs the semantic isotopies of death and dying along with those of life and birth to describe the flux of a Heraclitean world. In the first stanza, the burned rosebushes, the rays of withered parks and the roses themselves—typically the classic poetic image of fleeting life but here presented as dead, with their petals dispersing to a paradise—all demonstrate the ubiquitous movement towards death. The adjective "agostados" means "withered" or "parched," and is also etymologically linked to "August;" the excess heat of the August sun parches the parks, roses, rosebushes and corymbs, causing their death. The corymbs are a particularly apt

metaphor for the human being: just like individuals in the world, each has a similar exterior (the flower), but all of their interiors (the stalks) are uniquely different. Like the rosebushes, parks and roses that precede them, the speaker's corymbs also prepare for the state of non-being; the adjective "withered" suggests that they have already begun the process of dying. Furthermore, the poet's use of the possessive adjective in the phrase "mis corimbos" suggests that the corymbs are a metonym for the human being, and the process of dying applies equally to the human being and all of his possessions as well as to the natural world. As in "Arambeles..." and "Orco...", the imagery again demonstrates the two themes: the presence of death in life and the movement towards death in life. The rosebushes are already soot, the parks are parched, the roses are dispersing to their paradise, and the speaker's corymbs, already withered, prepare to "ser sin ser."

In the second stanza, along with images of death, now images of birth and life begin to appear. A metonymic image for birth, the "nests" redeem, since as the protective homes for birds' eggs they represent the beginning of the cycle of life. The poet calls attention to the word "Redentores" by situating it in a line by itself: the "redemption" of death, life is a deliverance from death's destruction portrayed in the first stanza.

The word "breezes," is connected to the previous image of the "nests" through its similar punctuation, and is also a metonymic image that represents life as well, since movement connotes life. The poet employs the image of wind in other poems to represent life; in a 2001 interview with Patricio Rojas, speaking of "Después, después, el viento entre dos cimas," the first line from "PRELUDIO," the first poem of *Cortejo y Epinicio*, Rosenmann-Taub comments that everything the human being does happens between two peaks: that of doing what one has to do, or not doing it (1). The poem we analyze now is situated only fifteen poems later in the same

book, and so it appears that the movement of the “¡Brisas!” connotes life, similar to the wind that represents human activity in “PRELUDIO.”

The succeeding images also illustrate the interconnectedness of death and life. In the next line, the moon dies with the “birth” of the following day. After that, the night is “frozen,” which also recalls death. The night is orphaned, since day, its parent, has died; it weaves the shroud of sleep for the death of the following day.

Whereas in the first stanza the images all show the movement towards death, and whereas in the second stanza the poet describes the cycle of life and death, stanza, the poet’s images of the third stanza form the isotopy of the intermingling of life and death, both on the planet and in the multiverse. The first example of this juxtaposition of life and death are the vine branches; once alive but now dead and converted into plow handles, they plow the soil in spring, preparing it for the generation of new life.

The next image, the “criaturas de pan de sortilegio,” is initially difficult to understand. However, this phrase and the related words and phrases “Lo hondo de la almendra,” “porvenires vividos” and “glicinas” form an isotopy, as they portray different aspects of the process of conception of life. Glycines are precursors to proteins, and as such, one of the key building blocks of life. The idea of a future that is already lived, when juxtaposed with the image of glycines, suggests that the future is always a product of the past, and that the past is transmitted to the future by the elemental building blocks of life during the act and process of conception. In this context, the “criaturas” in “lo hondo de la almendra” seem to refer to the almond’s DNA: the essential ingredient that will determine the future tree. This DNA comes from all the past generations of almond trees that were the almond’s predecessors, and determines the characteristics of the generations to come. The poet terms this sorcery, and the action of these

microscopic “creatures” is indeed magical: DNA may be understood as the ingredient that in a figurative way brings the dead back to life, in successive reincarnations, and these “futures” have indeed already been “lived.”

Succeeding images continue to amplify the poem’s theme. Even further back in the chain of life are glycines, the precursors to protein and thus the basis for all life in the universe. The poet describes them as immobile, in the midst of constantly changing cloudscares, again conflating and contrasting the immobility of death with the mobility of life.

Connected by colons to demonstrate their equivalence, the last four images also are part of this semantic isotopy of the conflation of life and death. The seagulls, “God voyager,” marble and the sea all contain elements of life and death, being and nonbeing, on either a physical or metaphysical level, similar to the previous images in the stanza and poem. Of this series, “Mármol” and “mar” bear closer examination since they each stand alone in their poetic line. Based on the stanza’s previous imagery, it appears that the poet asks the reader to consider the possibility of life and death existing simultaneously and evolving into each other in both of these forms of matter. Marble was once limestone; geological ages ago, it was formed through deposits of skeletal fragments from marine organisms. Like the other images, it again, in a disguised way, illustrates the movement from life to death. Finally, the sea and everything it contains may be conceived of as another representation of the processes of life and death, continuously in transformation and in juxtaposition with each other.

Thus, the poem is a succession of images that portray the presence of death in life, the constant movement from life to death in the universe, the inverse movement from death to life, and the constant intermingling of life and death, on microcosmic, human, and cosmic scales. The various images express the diversity and universality of this movement, in elements as static

as marble, as fluid as the sea, as concrete as a plow handle, and as metaphysical as the conception of God as a voyager. The poet's conception spans the infinitely small and the infinitely large, and, in the temporal domain, past, present and future. Throughout, death and life are intertwined and inseparable; each is essential for the other. The poem is thus greater in its scope than "Orco" and "Arambeles...." Not only does it contain the previous concepts of the simultaneity of being and non-being and the constant movement towards death, but in addition, the poet expands this concept to include the idea of death as the foundation for life and life as redemption of death. Furthermore, whereas "Arambeles" used only concrete images of decay to show the movement of life towards death, here the poet's use of concrete living and inanimate images as varied as plow handles, almonds, seagulls, marble and the sea induces the reader to ponder how life might exist in the most inanimate and abstract objects possible, as well as how death might be present in all of the different forms of life in the multiverse.

Whereas "Orco," "Arambeles" and "De vuelta a los rosales" are all more or less objective visions of the presence of and movement towards death throughout the natural world, the images of this next poem evoke a darker tone. "La zampoña, serena" comes from *El Mensajero* and illustrates not only the inescapability of death but nature's deceptive practices as well.

LIX

La zampoña, serena,
generosa, en la piel de apatía, venablo,
huele a establo.
La boyante faena

de membranes virtuosas – su resaca –,
humillada: la prisa se apresura.
Los cardos, abrasados, aguijan: su cordura
– enclenque lastre – ataca.

Hiemal concebimiento
irrumpe hacia la hora

The panpipes, serene,
generous, in the skin of apathy, javelin,
smells of the stable.
The prosperous work

of virtuous membranes– their undercurrent –
Humiliated: the hurry hurries.
The thistles, scorched, goad: their good sense
–sickly judgment – attacks.

Wintry conception
bursts towards the weakest

tenuísima. El ocaso finge color de aurora. hour. The sunset feigns the color of dawn.
Mi vejez, a la espera, joven, por un momento...(82) My old age, waiting, young for a moment...

Like its predecessor, this poem appears to be a succession of unrelated images. However, the unvarying underlying assumption that guides analysis is that the poem consists of a formal and semantic unity, despite its mimetic complexities and variations. In this poem, for example, the series of phrases and words punctuated by commas that follows “La zampoña serena” is an isotopical description of the panpipes. The reader’s task is to employ his linguistic and literary competence to intuitively decipher this isotopy in order to reveal its underlying meaning.

In Greek mythology, the reed pipes are the musical instrument played by the Greek god Pan; as such they metonymically represent nature with its elements of eroticism, hedonism and procreation. Thus, the first four words of the poem describe nature as musical, serene and generous. Immediately thereafter, however, the images take on a more malevolent hue. The panpipes are described as “en la piel de apatía,” suggesting that so-called “natural” tendencies, such as sex and procreation, are the apathetic abandonment of one’s true being to the program and cycles of nature. The next metonymic representation of the panpipes is even more striking: the javelin is both a phallic symbol, representing power, fertility and male domination, and also a deadly weapon. This image again illustrates the negative aspects of nature and so-called “natural” tendencies that belong to all species, but are most prominent in the human species: the urge to sex and power, procreation and domination. The first stanza’s final portrayal of nature, the “smells of the stable,” foregrounds the stench that is the reality of nature, the odor that poets and romantics prefer to ignore. The speaker thus begins with a superficial view of the paradisiacal elements of nature, but almost immediately immerses the reader in the reality of an apathetic, violent and stinking world where power and domination are all-important. Understood

through the various hypograms that form the description of the panpipes, the poem's significance may be designated as "the true nature of nature."

The succeeding images contrast this description of nature with that of man. In opposition to these malignant and deadly forces of nature, the work of "virtuous membranes" that strive for life and consciousness is "humiliated," since nothing they do can prevent death. The poet inverts the traditional view of nature and man with his use of the word "resaca." Man is typically portrayed as a rational being whose rationality enables him to dominate nature. Nevertheless, rationality is always subject to being swept away by the "undercurrent" of nature. Now, man's rationality is the undercurrent: subordinate to nature, and humiliated in its inability to fight nature's dominance. The words "la prisa se apresura" suggests that even time itself accelerates, hastening the moment of extinction. The thistles may be another metonymic representation of the human species: with the capacity to wound, they themselves are wounded, they hurry through life, and their sanity is only a weak and sickly judgment which attacks them in their urge to comply with nature's demands.

It is difficult to define the tenors of these metonymic vehicles with any degree of certainty; nevertheless, the poem's semantic isotopies again help to reveal their identity. The enjambment that ends the first stanza and begins the second links these descriptions of nature: work is humiliated, time passes all too quickly, intelligence is weak and is used unwisely, and conflict is omnipresent. These recurring elements establish the isotopy of man within and against nature that correlates with the significance of the preceding stanza. The words "prisa," "se apresura" and "aguijan" all create temporal tension; the "faena" is "humillada," the "cardos" are "abrasados" and the "cordura" "ataca." Intelligence counts for little, time passes and death is imminent. The words "abrasados," and "ataca" recall the "venablo" of the preceding stanza as

the poet continues to emphasize the idea of the substrate of violence below nature's visible aspects.

Semantic elements from the third stanza continue and confirm many of the poem's previous themes. The concept that all life rushes to the hour of death starting from the moment of conception dovetails with the second stanza's emphasis on haste. Nature's deceptive practices illustrated in the third line of this last stanza echo those same deceptive practices more fully described at the poem's outset. The last line continues this theme of deception. However, now, colluding with nature, it is the speaker himself who practices self-deception, hiding his own impending death from himself.

Although the poem begins with a rose-colored view of nature, the poet almost immediately contrasts this vision with the unadorned reality of nature and natural processes. Initially represented by the "serene panpipe," nature is in fact apathetic, rank and violent. Conflict, the humiliation of work and intelligence, the passage of time and the omnipresent and overpowering rush from conception to death characterize nature and man's existence in nature. No matter how complex and intelligent, biological or mental systems are incapable of deviating from Nature's program. Finally, the poem's beginning and end illustrate the deception that nature practices to hide its objectives from the human being.

The analysis of these four preceding poems enables us to comprehend certain aspects of Rosenmann-Taub's conception of death.. From "Orco" comes the fundamental idea of the simultaneity of being and non-being, along with the questioning of epistemological endeavor and the nature of being in time. In "Arambeles," the poet focuses specifically on the process of dying that is inherent in all animate and inanimate objects, due to the entropic nature of the multiverse. "De vuelta a las rosales" reiterates the poet's conception of the simultaneity of death

and life; however this poem emphasizes not only the constant movement from being to non-being but also the inverse movement, from non-being to being, throughout all levels of the multiverse, giving a multitude of concrete examples to show the inseparability of the two states of being. “La zampoña serena” reiterates this omnipresent movement towards death; however, here the poet stresses the ugliness of this reality, man’s impotence facing Nature’s powers and the passage of time, and the deception and self-deception that hides the truth of his situation from him.

Up to now, the poems selected have examined the omnipresence of death in a general way; however, many poems focus on the presence of death specifically as it relates to man. Poem XL from *El Mensajero* is another illustration of the presence of death in life. However, in contrast with the preceding poems, which all dealt with death in the world in general or in nature, this poem focuses solely on the presence of death in the human being.

XL

Endriago encabritado:
gladiador:
derrotado
monitor
de albedrío,
tal vez, mío.
Caoba nigromante.
Tumba errante. (57)

Rearing monster:
gladiator:
vanquished
monitor
of free will,
Perhaps, mine.
Mahogany necromancer.
Wandering grave.

Another typical example of Rosenmann-Taub’s terse style, the poem consists of five images, which the reader must understand and connect in order to ascertain the theme. As always, the operative assumptions are that the poem has a logical internal consistency and unity, that its language is to be understood figuratively, not literally, that the images are metonyms that characterize key concepts not necessarily mentioned in the poem, and that the hypograms that are the tenors of these metonymies themselves form the isotopy that is the poem’s significance.

The first image, “Endriago encabritado” is that of a rearing and uncontrolled monster.¹¹ The poet’s choice of the term “endriago,” including human features in this portrayal of the monster, suggests that the image may be a metonym whose tenor is man: instead of a monster with human features, the metonym characterizes man as a rearing and uncontrolled monster. This leads us to the hypothesis that the poem’s theme is the human condition.

The second image, “gladiador,” is another portrayal of the human being, depicting man’s ability and desire to fight and compete. However, the gladiator does not fight of his own free will, but instead for the entertainment and due to the will of others. Also like the gladiator of ancient times, the human being is always faced with an uneven fight in the world: life is a struggle from beginning to end, the human being can fall at any moment, and in the end, he always loses, since death comes to all. The gladiator is not subject but object; for all intents and purposes he is lifeless, since the life he leads, controlled by others, is not his own. In the same way, the individual human being is also a “gladiator,” raised to conform to familial, social and cultural values that may have little to do with his essential self and thus spending his entire life pursuing goals that may be valued by his cultural milieu but do not reward him personally.

The third image, “derrotado monitor de albedrío / tal vez, mío /” is another characterization of the human being in his unconscious mode. The “monitor of free will” seems to be an allusion to man’s consciousness and sense of ethics: the self-awareness and self-judgment of the individual’s actions that governs his behavior. Yet according to the DRAE, “albedrio” signifies “Voluntad no gobernada por la razón, sino por el apetito, antojo o capricho.” Contrary to “libre albedrío” that signifies free will, governed by reflection and decision, this other will is directed by natural and animal instincts. The speaker declares that it is the monitor of this animal will that is vanquished. Then, in the following line, he observes that it is quite

possibly the monitor of his *own* animal instincts that are defeated, thereby acknowledging that even though he is aware of the forces that control him, he is unsure of his capacity to defeat them.¹²

With this third metonymic representation of the human being, it is now even more evident that the theme is the characterization of the human condition. The human being does not rule his animal instincts, appetites and passing fancies but is instead ruled by them: fear, greed and lust are the forces that underlie most human behavior. Even when he is aware of them and recognizes their power over him, the individual still cannot to govern them: despite being fully aware of his own condition, the speaker admits to his reader that his own “monitor” is nevertheless vanquished, unable to restrain those urges. The phrase “derrotado / monitor / de albedrío, / tal vez mío. /” indicates that the struggle of which the poem speaks exists not only in the world but within the interior of the human being as well: the struggle of the individual’s will and intelligence against the power of his animal instincts.

The next image reveals more specifically the nature and power of these forces. Like “Orco multiverso,” “caoba nigromante” is another example where two nouns function as adjectives, modifying each other. Mahogany is a tropical West Indian hardwood, and a “nigromante” is a shaman, a practitioner of black magic who foretells the future through examining the viscera of dead animals. Taken together, the words conjure up images of the tropics, indigenous tribes with their shamans, and the inexplicable forces of nature, spirituality and irrationality. The phrase by itself has little meaning. However, now that the preceding three metonyms have established the significance of the poem, this phrase may be construed as another isotopical element describing the human condition: man is portrayed as an irrational animal in nature, controlled by unknowable and thus magical natural forces.

The final image, “tumba errante,” adds to, confirms and completes the theme outlined in the preceding images: the human being in his unconscious state is, for all intents and purposes, dead. The individual’s life is above all his mental life: his self-awareness and will that translate into conscious action without which he is no more than a walking corpse.

The word “errante” plays an important role in this last image. The word may be translated as “wandering” or as “homeless.” This isotopy of home and homelessness recurs repeatedly through Rosenmann-Taub’s poetry. For the poet, “home” does not refer to a physical structure but to inner essence. When an individual is “home” or “in his home” he inhabits his essential self; when “not at home,” not living his true life, he may be said to be lifeless. In this sense, “tumba errante” is another isotopy of living death. The individual finds himself in a state of non-being, due as much to the implication of “errante” as that of “tumba:” he is lifeless because he is not in contact with his true being.

The poem’s phonological elements support this interpretation as well. Rosenmann-Taub’s poetry often directly connects semantic isotopies phonologically, and that is the case in this poem. The dominant assonantal rhyme is “a-o,” appearing in “Endriago,” encabritado,” “derrotado,” and disguised, in “gladiador” and “caoba.” These five words form the semantic isotopy that describes man: a monster, out of control, defeated, a gladiator, and an entity in and of nature, subject to the forces of nature. Another phonological element is the consonant rhyme “i-o,” appearing in “albedrío” and “mío,” and again, disguised, in “monitor.” These isotopical elements all relate to the higher level of human existence of the human being: “albedrío” is his free will, “monitor,” the “monitor” of his free will, and “mío,” his self-awareness. Lastly, the consonant rhyme “nigromante” and “errante” at the poem’s end links the black magic that controls the individual externally with the individual’s inability to control himself. The rhymes

that constitute these phonological isotopies connect the poem's semantic isotopies to further confirm its significance.

Thus, when understood figuratively, these seemingly unrelated images are all isotopic elements that manifest different aspects of the same theme: the presence of death in the life of the human being that is the fundamental nature of the human condition. In his unconscious state, the human being is an uncontrolled monster. His life is a constant struggle, generally for the benefit of others, not himself, and doomed from the beginning. The struggle that takes place in his internal world has no better chance of success; even if he is aware of their presence in his life, the cultural, socio-economic, psychological, emotional and biological forces that shape the individual prove stronger than his rationality, consciousness and will. The poem's first seven lines thus describe the individual as an uncontrolled monster, due to his own nature, to the cultural milieu in which he is raised to the inability of his own intelligence and will to control himself, and to the forces of nature within him. Taking into consideration all of the above, the last line concludes that the individual in his unconscious state is essentially lifeless. Since his awareness and self-awareness distinguish him from other species, his lack of that awareness and self-awareness is the equivalent of death

While the preceding poem focused on the presence of unconsciousness and death in the human being, our next poem, from *El Mensajero*, deals with the movement towards death in the human being.

XVII

Físico

Polea de celajes:
hacia las medianoche del guarro amanecer,
los incas y sus pajes.

Appearance

Pulley of cloudscapes:
towards the midnights of the disgusting sunrise,
the incas and their pages.

Trompo encarnado – predilecta muerte -,
giras para aprender a no moverte
y desaparecer.

Incarnate top – preferred death – ,
you turn to learn not to move
And to disappear

¿Quizá de lo tortuoso unas señales?
¿Hubo entre estas instancias pensamiento?
Calvarios: por pañales.
¡Égida de escarmiento! (28)

Perhaps some signs of the deviousness?
Was there thought in these instances?
Calvaries: for diapers.
Shield of lesson!

Read at the mimetic level, the poem addresses the Incas' sacrifices, detailing the horrific cultural practices of a past civilization, and questions whether it is possible to learn from its mistakes. Nevertheless, this interpretation leaves many unanswered questions. Why does the poet use the "Polea de celajes" as a metaphor for the passage of time (if that is what it indeed represents)? Why does the poet use a toy from the modern era to metaphorically represent the sacrifices of pre-Conquest civilizations? Why is the shield a shield that kills and also a shield that gives a lesson, and what is that lesson? Why is a poet who prefers universal themes writing about a specific moment in time and dealing with a specific practice of a specific culture? And what is the relevance of the title: "Appearance?"

A hermeneutic reading that requires that all the elements of the poem be unified results in a different interpretation. We enter the poem in its second line: "Hacia las medianoches del guarro amanecer." Read literally, these are the nights of the disgusting dawn, and with the mention of the Incas in the succeeding line, imply the idea of human sacrifice. However, understood as a hyperbaton, the line's meaning changes dramatically. In this reading, the movement that the line describes is "from the disgusting sunrise towards the midnights;" and with the word "de(l)" now translated as "from" instead of as "of," the line becomes a metaphor for the human being's journey through life: from the disgusting sunrise of his birth to the midnights of his death. The cloudscapes of the poem's first line move as if drawn by a pulley; that is, they are in constant movement, since the pulley will not allow them to stop. This image

of constant movement in space now precisely describes the temporal movement from birth to death: it is constant, unstoppable, and most important, totally obvious.

In this movement towards death, all men are equal, for which reason Rosenmann-Taub mentions the Incas and their pages in the same phrase; in the fundamental condition of the human being, cultural status is meaningless. All mankind moves from birth to death, regardless of time, place, cultural or social status, and this movement is as constant, inevitable and as obvious as the movement of clouds across the sky.

The poet now describes this movement towards death in more concrete terms, continuing to use the isotopies of movement and stasis to signify life and death. The phrases “predilecta muerte,” “no moverte,” and “desaparecer” all directly state or indirectly imply the condition of death. The “trompo” is a toy whose fundamental characteristic is movement: movement in space, as it spins, and movement in time, as it begins to spin and ultimately falls. This spinning top is a metaphor for the human being, who with his incessant and unconscious daily activity rejects the conscious behavior that for Rosenmann-Taub characterizes life, and in so doing disappears from himself. When the poet says, “giras para no moverte” he refers to human life that moves in space, but nevertheless remains in the same place. This image of the individual in particular and mankind in general is quite powerful. For millions of years the human species has “spun in the same place” in terms of the development of conscious life; despite advances in knowledge, we still concern ourselves with basic issues of security, our basic motivation is fear, and the law of the jungle prevails.

The spinning top represents a “predilecta” death for another reason as well. The top spins due to the will and action of an external force, just as man’s actions are primarily determined by cultural values and not his own values. In the sense that unconscious activity favors cultural

values over individual ones, the death of unconscious life is a “favored” death throughout all cultures, since it promotes the advancement of the culture over the advancement of the individual. It is also “predilecta,” since it is the death chosen by the individual as well. The adjective “encarnado” emphasizes that this unconscious activity that dominates human behavior from birth to death is incarnate, built into the very structure of the human being.

Thus, the metaphor of the spinning top more precisely characterizes the movement from life to death depicted in the first stanza: driven by both external forces and incarnate structures, the individual moves incessantly, not only in space and in place as he lives the death of an unconscious life but also in time as he moves towards his own physiological death. However, as obvious as the individual’s mortality is, he doesn’t recognize it. Instead, he lives his life as if he were immortal, never aware of the real life he is missing nor the death that is approaching but instead continually favoring cultural priorities over his own being.

The third stanza’s first line asks if there were any signs of this “deviousness.” Why, asks the speaker, can the human being not see the finitude of his life, a fact as obvious as the movement of clouds across the sky? Objectively, one knows that death comes to all; but subjectively, one cannot imagine his own death. Although from an objective standpoint, one knows the top will eventually come to a halt, the top itself doesn’t know when or if it will “stop twirling.” From the internal and subjective point of view, death is always something that comes to the other person, not oneself, and in general there are no signs strong enough to impact the individual’s thought in this domain.

The speaker asks, “Was there any thought in all this?” The question is as ironic and rhetorical as it is sincere: with so little time to live and so much objective evidence of his impending death, how can the individual be so blind to his own personal movement towards

death? The speaker declares that man exchanges his diapers for his death agony to emphasize that the process of dying starts at birth; exchanging death for life in that moment, man shows himself oblivious to exploring what life has to offer him.

The poem's final line provides an explanation for this apparent absurdity. The unconsciousness that blinds the individual to his own personal movement towards death is a punishment. However, it is a shield as well. A shield from what? Since according to all that has come before in the poem, the human being's entire existence is the denial of a conscious life, this movement towards death must be the shield from having to live a conscious life. Yet the shield of unconscious life is no ordinary shield: it is a shield with the Medusa head, the shield that itself kills, since unconscious life is itself a form of death.

Thus the third stanza becomes linked with the two that precede it. The initial movement towards death uses metaphors of cloudscapes, "incas" and pages to show its omnipresence, clarity and inescapability; then, the spinning top characterizes even more concretely and specifically the form that unconsciousness takes in man, throughout his life activities and in his movement towards death. The poem's final metaphors characterize this movement towards death even more precisely. Death comes unannounced. If there are signals, man needs to be conscious in order to notice them and to think about them, and the questions' ironic nature casts doubt on that possibility. Instead, man's Calvary, his death agony, starts at birth; he gladly exchanges the death of unconscious life for conscious life, because as well as a punishment, it also functions as a shield against the enormous difficulty of living a conscious life and the awareness of one's ultimate death.

The poem's title now becomes intimately related to the poem itself in this hermeneutic reading. "Físico," is translated as "appearance," and this second reading demonstrates that the

entire poem revolves around appearance. From an objective perspective, the movement from birth to death is as obvious as the clouds moving across the sky; and viewed objectively, the sacrifices that individuals make to be faithful and loyal to social norms give them the appearance of a spinning top. Also viewed from a subjective perspective, no signs of death exist even though death is apparent everywhere, starting from the beginning of life. What *does* appear to the individual are all the negative aspects of conscious life—the rejection of social norms, with everything that rejection entails—and he needs the protection of this shield of unconsciousness that is death in life in order to protect himself. The title thus indicates that this concern for the superficiality of appearance and the lack of attention to one’s true being are the real reasons behind this movement towards death that is the poem’s central theme.

Poem XIV from the same collection, “¡Cierto, el mismo descaro...(25)” again demonstrates the constant movement from life to death. The speaker describes a newly born baby whose very appearance (his cheeks, eyebrows and eyes and ears) announces his death. They are, he tells us, “clarines de carroña.” The poet expresses that the early cries already herald the death to come; with his first breath, the baby has already begun to die.

“Rapsodia,” from *Quince* also expresses the movement from life to death. After bearing two children, the speaker’s wife dies in childbirth, in the process of giving birth to twins.

...ni Elbirita, quien, quizá me equivoco,
Murió de pulmonía.
No, de parto.
Sí, sí, de parto, sí.
Tuvimos una niña; luego, un niño,
y,
por cimera gloria,
aquel tenue embarazo de mellizos,
que, de un zarpazo, a ella le borró
su secreto,
y a mí, el campo de dicha. (38-39)

...nor Elbirita, who, perhaps I’m mistaken,
died of pneumonia.
No, in childbirth.
Yes, yes, in childbirth, yes.
We had a girl; later, a boy,
and,
for the highest glory,
that faint pregnancy of twins,
that, in a thud, erased
her secret,
and for me, the field of bliss.

In his commentary, Rosenmann-Taub suggests that it is this very excess of life, the birth of twins, which brings death.

...la felicidad emergió para ser demolida: por urdir más unión—y—, la pareja fue separada: por procurar cimera gloria, ahogó la que tenía en el campo de dicha: el seno de árboles hogareños, de hierbas “y” ríos “fértiles,” arrasado—borrado borrado—, será el campo de la derrota en la batalla por flagrar. (61)

Happiness emerged to be demolished: by contriving for more unión—and—, the couple was separated: to obtain the highest of glory, it drowned what it had in the field of bliss: the breast of domestic trees, of herbs “and” “fertile” rivers, devastated—completely erased—, will be the field of defeat in the battle for burning.

The poet declares that everything is born to die, created to be erased, united to be separated; the nature of life is to die. He concludes, “La naturaleza ha devastado “y” devorado.... ...la naturaleza borra para borrar: vivimos, “naturalmente”, para no vivir (61).” [“Nature has devastated “and” devoured... ...nature erases to erase: we live, “naturally,” to not live (61).”]

As we have seen from the above analyses, the themes of “Orco,” are anticipated in these poems from earlier volumes of the tetralogy. This more abstract vision of the penetration of death throughout the multiverse takes on concrete form in “Arambeles” with the images of tatters, dry riverbeds and human flesh that decays both before and after death. The simultaneous presence of death and life is illustrated at the microcosmic, human and cosmic levels in both the temporal and spatial domains in “De vuelta a los rosales.” The urge towards death that is omnipresent throughout nature finds its expression in “La zampoña serena.” “Endriago encabritador” and “Físico” focus specifically on the presence of death and the movement towards death in the human being. Finally, Poem XIV from *El Mensajero* and “Rapsodia” from *Quince* even more concretely demonstrate how the movement towards death in the human being starts at the moment of birth.

2. Man's Conscious Movement towards Death

Up to now, we have examined works of the poet that have illuminated the presence of death and the movement towards death in both nature and the human being. We now examine poems that show how man consciously cooperates with this movement toward death, how he actively and purposely seeks to relieve himself from life's challenges. This aspect of death is perhaps the most striking of the various views of death in Rosenmann-Taub's poetry, since it runs counter to the seemingly universal desire for life and fear of death that characterize the human being. "Cómo me gustaría..." from *El Mensajero* illustrates Rosenmann-Taub's vision of the individual's conscious desire for non-being.

LXIII

Cómo me gustaría ser esa oscura ciénaga,
libre de lo de ayer, qué alivio, oscura ciénaga,
dejar correr el tiempo. ¡La más oscura ciénaga!

How I would like to be that dark swamp,
free from yesterday, what relief, dark swamp,
to let the time pass. The darkest swamp!

Cómo me gustaría jamás haber nacido,
libre de lo de ayer, jamás haber nacido,
dejar correr el tiempo, jamás haber nacido.

How I would like to never have been born,
free from yesterday, to never have been born,
to let the time pass, to never have been born.

Cómo me gustaría lograr morirme ahora,
libre de lo de ayer, lograr morirme ahora,
dejar correr el tiempo, lograr morirme ahora.

How I would like to be able to die now,
free from yesterday, to be able to die now,
to let the time pass, to be able to die now.

Cómo me gustaría rodar por el vacío,
libre de lo de ayer, rodar por el vacío,
dejar correr el tiempo, rodar por el vacío.

How I would like to wander through the void,
free from yesterday, to wander through the void,
to let the time pass, to wander through the void.

Cómo me gustaría ser el cero del polvo,
libre de lo de ayer, ser el cero del polvo,
dejar correr el tiempo, ser el cero del polvo.

How I would like to be the zero of dust,
free from yesterday, to be the zero of dust,
to let the time pass, to be the zero of dust.

Para no cavilarme, para no volver nunca,
Dios mío, yo creyera en Ti para no ser.

To not reflect, to never return,
My God, I would believe in you in order not
to be.

Cavílame en tu nada, no me hagas volver nunca.

To reflect on your nothingness, don't make
me ever return.

¡Dios mío, yo creyera para nunca creer!

My God, I would believe to never believe!

Cómo me gustaría ser esa oscura ciénaga
sola bajo la lluvia,
¡cómo me gustaría ser esa oscura ciénaga
sola bajo la lluvia!

How I would like to be that dark swamp
alone under the rain,
How I would like to be that dark swamp
alone under the rain.

Dicen que fue la muerte la causa de la vida,
y la vida - ¿la vida? – la causa de la muerte.
Pero, ahora, mi muerte la causa de mi vida.

They say that death was the cause of life,
and life – life? – the cause of death.
But now, my death the cause of my life.

Yo qué: furgón deshijo – destello – de la muerte.
¿Me repudias, ovario, por ímprobo deshijo?

I, who: bastard boxcar – shine – from death.
Do you repudiate me, ovary for being an
ungrateful un-son?

Me has arrastrado al éxodo tan candorosamente

You have dragged me to the exodus so
innocently

que tu candor me duele – ultrajante alarido -,
que tus lianas me duelen – dignas uñas lumbreras -:

that your candor hurts me—outrageous howl—
that your vines hurt me—worthy dazzling
fingernails

cómo me gustaría jamás haber nacido,

How I would like to never have been born.

cómo me gustaría ser esa oscura ciénaga,
libre de lo de ayer, qué alivio, oscura ciénaga,
dejar correr el tiempo. ¡La más oscura ciénaga!

How I would like to be that dark swamp,
free from yesterday, what relief, dark swamp,
to let the time pass. The darkest swamp!

Cómo me gustaría rodar por el vacío:
la más oscura ciénaga sola bajo la lluvia.
Cómo me gustaría olvidarte, Dios mío.
Cavírame en tu nada. ¡No me hagas volver nunca!

How I would like to wander through the void:
the darkest swamp alone beneath the rain.
How I would like to forget you, my God.
Reflect on me in your nothingness.
Don't make me ever return!

The poem is divided into two sections, each six stanzas long. In the first five stanzas of the first section, the speaker expresses his wish for various forms of non-being. In the sixth stanza, although the speaker continues to express his plea for non-being, he now apostrophizes God and directs his plea to Him. The second section starts with a reiteration of the speaker's wish for non-being; the eighth, ninth and tenth stanzas are the speaker's explanation of his wish for non-being; and the final two stanzas of this last half of the poem recapitulate many of the ideas of the first section. In this sense, the poem resembles a musical piece in sonata form, with its exposition, development and recapitulation sections. Throughout the poem, Rosenmann-Taub employs the phrase "Cómo me gustaría" that would normally anticipate a favorable and desired

outcome to great effect: like a musical *leitmotiv*, the phrase strengthens the force of this plea for non-being to the reader as it challenges and subverts his perspective of life.

The speaker is neither unconscious nor does he exhibit the unconscious movement towards the state of death in life seen in previous poems. Instead, he is totally conscious and aware of his consciousness; yet this very awareness of his state is a burden so great that he longs for death and pleads for it throughout the poem. What is this burden? As evidenced by the repetition of the line “libre de lo de ayer,” the speaker implies that he is a prisoner of his past. As much as his own genetic makeup, his corporeal, mental and psychological memories and ingrained habits all imprison him in a totally determined present and future. In addition, the repeated line “dejar correr el tiempo” implies that the speaker is also a prisoner of time: no matter how much he would like to stop time, he cannot prevent the minutes of his life from ticking away. Only with death will he be free from this awareness of time, finally able to “dejar correr el tiempo.”

The speaker’s double awareness, of his imprisonment in a predetermined life and of his mortality, provokes him to seek the unconsciousness of death. Throughout the first half of the poem, he asks for the end of self-awareness (“no cavilarme nunca”), not to exist (“no ser”), not to believe (“no creer”), and to die (“lograr morirme ahora”).

The sixth, eighth, ninth and tenth stanzas bear close examination, since they express not only the depth of the speaker’s desire for non-being, but also the reasons behind this desire. I repeat the sixth stanza along with its companion, the twelfth stanza, for convenience below:

Para no cavilarme, para no volver nunca,	To not reflect, to never return,
Dios mío, yo creyera en Ti para no ser.	My God, I would believe in you in order not to be.
Cavílame en tu nada, no me hagas volver nunca.	To reflect on me in your nothingness, don't
	make me ever return.
¡Dios mío, yo creyera para nunca creer!	My God, I would believe to never believe!

Cómo me gustaría rodar por el vacío:
la más oscura ciénaga sola bajo la lluvia.
Cómo me gustaría olvidarte, Dios mío.
Cavírame en tu nada. ¡No me hagas volver nunca!

How I would like to wander through the void:
the darkest swamp alone beneath the rain.
How I would like to forget you, my God.
Reflect on me in your nothingness.
Don't make me ever return!

In the second and fourth lines of the sixth stanza as well as in the last line of the twelfth stanza the speaker expresses his lack of belief in God. The repetition of the word “nunca” lends emphasis and finality to the speaker’s desire: never to think, never to return to life, never to be and never to believe, since the world in which he lives is unendurable for a conscious human being. God must be a monstrous lie, for if he were real, he would never have created a world like this; and if he did exist and did create this world, he shouldn’t/wouldn’t deserve to exist. Nevertheless, the poet would rather believe in this monstrous lie in order to escape from the hell in which he lives and to never have to believe in anything anymore. To enable the reader to understand the depth of the poet’s conception of the horrific nature of the world, the speaker tells us that he would commit the ultimate crime: he would betray his own being by believing in a God in which he doesn’t believe, in order not to escape this burden of life.

The eighth, ninth and tenth stanzas provide an interlude to the previous and succeeding stanzas, with their more restrained emotional tone. The speaker uses the indicative mood instead of subjunctive and imperative moods in order to describe the cycle of life and death in a more objective tone, as he recounts his own personal experience that led him to the miserable position in which he now finds himself.

Dicen que fue la muerte la causa de la vida,
y la vida - ¿la vida? – la causa de la muerte.
Pero, ahora, mi muerte la causa de mi vida.

They say that death was the cause of life,
and life – life? – the cause of death.
But now, my death the cause of my life.

Yo qué: furgón deshijo – destello – de la muerte.
¿Me repudias, ovario, por ímprobo deshijo?

I, who: bastard boxcar – gleam – of death.
Do you repudiate me, ovary, for being an
ungrateful un-son?

Me has arrastrado al éxodo tan candorosamente

You have dragged me to the exodus so

innocently

que tu candor me duele – ultrajante alarido -, that your candor hurts me—outrageous
que tus lianas me duelen – dignas uñas lumbreras -: that your vines hurt me—worthy dazzling
cómo me gustaría jamás haber nacido, How I would like to never have been born.

In the first of these three stanzas, the speaker first describes the cycle of life and death in general, and then personalizes this cycle with the use of the possessive: “...*mi* muerte, la causa de *mi* vida.” In the next stanza, he presents in a concrete way how this concept applies to him, describing himself as a “furgón deshijo.” “Deshijo,” literally “un-son,” carries the connotation of an individual without knowledge of his origin, and thus without knowledge of himself. The word “furgón,” with its meaning of “boxcar,” metaphorically describes the speaker as an individual led by others, powerless, and without the ability to determine his position or direction in life. In addition, this “furgón deshijo” is a “destello—de la muerte:” a gleam of death. Whereas previously the speaker declared that his death is the cause of his life, now he gives specifics: he is an alienated and impotent individual, and also, at the moment of his birth, a gleam that anticipates his death.

The next lines demonstrate the speaker’s distaste for life in a unique way: he imagines himself as his own fetus at the moment of birth, and his interlocutor is the ovaries that represent his mother. He has already accused his mother of rejecting him for being an ungrateful “un-son.” Now, he accuses his mother of giving birth to him against his will as she pushes him through the birth canal. Her innocence, her candor, her scream at the moment of birth, her fingernails as she first embraces him: all are outrageous and hurtful. He neither wanted to be born nor asked to be born, he hates his life and he wants to die starting from the minute of birth.

The stanza's last line of the stanza returns the reader to the main theme of the poem, which is his desire not to exist. However, now the reader understands this desire differently. Man's desire not to exist starts from even before birth. He is dragged into existence against his will, without knowledge of who he is and without any knowledge or power to live a life he can call his own, born into a world that is unbearable with its imperfection and evil. Can it really be a surprise, then, that he wishes never to have been born?

In the poem's last line, the speaker again begs God to not force him to return to the consciousness of life. Thus, the poem is first and foremost a plea for death and release from the vicissitudes of life. However in addition, it is a complaint against the painful and degrading forces of nature that originally brought him into being and consciousness.

The poem achieves its impact in a number of ways. As mentioned above, the repetitions of key phrases add emotional intensity to its content, particularly when read aloud. The poet's repeated use of imperatives and infinitives, superlatives and exclamatory clauses, and conditional and subjunctive moods contributes to the poem's emotive effect as well. However, the wide variety of ways in which Rosenmann-Taub expresses the speaker's desire for the state of non-being in this poem is arguably the one element that captures the reader's attention most vividly. The phrases "lograr morirme ahora", "ser el cero del polvo," "¡yo creyera para nunca creer!", "jamás haber nacido," "dejar correr el tiempo," "rodar por el vacío," "ser la más oscura ciénaga," "olvidarte, Dios mío," "Cavílame en tu nada;" and "¡No me hagas volver nunca!" are all different ways in which Rosenmann-Taub expresses his desire for the state of non-being. The desire for the cessation of existence, for being without being, and for non-being *per se* are three distinct conceptions of death that run throughout Rosenmann-Taub's poetry; they come together in this poem where the poet expresses in the most intense way possible his desire for death.

“Dominio” from *El Mensajero* is another powerful statement about the urge to die and the movement towards death that is the essential aspect of the human condition. In addition, the poem presents the human being’s conscious collusion in this movement towards death.

XVI

Dominio

Calcinada,
la rúbrica;
gentil, el lodazal;
el monasterio,
decaída oscitancia
vagabunda.
“Pues te blasfemarás”.
“Señor, no tiemblo.” (27)

Dominion

Burned,
the rubric;
gentle, the swamp;
the monastery,
decayed wandering
negligence.
“Then you will curse yourself.”
“Lord, I don’t tremble.”

In this poem, four images are followed by a dialogue between the speaker and his “Lord.” The first image is that of a “burned rubric.” The word “rubric” has several meanings; for example, it may be a heading, the title of a book, a rule, a mode of procedure such as a protocol, a class or category, or a commentary or gloss. The common denominator to all these definitions is identity: the creation, determination, modification or amplification of the identity of either a concrete object or of an abstraction. Thus, the “burned rubric” refers to an identity that has been destroyed.

The second image is that of a “sweet swamp.” The poem “Cómo me gustaría...” employs the swamp as a powerful image of death, and it seems that here again the speaker employs the image to again describe death’s sweetness and gentleness of death. Both this and the preceding image are metonyms and their common tenor is death, so at least on a preliminary basis, it appears that the poem’s theme is death.

The third image is that of “the monastery.” The monastery has two distinguishing and related characteristics: on the one hand, isolation and withdrawal from secular life, and on the

other, devotion to God. The monastery is not necessarily an image of death *per se*. However, if we accept the fundamental principle of semiotic analysis that the poem is a unity, then in keeping with the previous two images, both of these characteristics of the monastery may be interpreted as a form of death as well. On the one hand, to isolate oneself from secular life is not to live one's real life but instead to live a life circumscribed and prescribed by the monastery and its rules; and for Rosenmann-Taub, a life that is not one's real life is the equivalent of death. On the other hand, Rosenmann-Taub also conceives of the individual's devotion to a traditional God as another form of the abandonment of oneself. In *El Zócalo*, he writes, "Era yo Dios y caminaba sin saberlo. Eras oh tú, mi huerto, Dios y yo te amaba (56)." ["I was God and I was walking without knowing it. You, oh you, God, were my orchard, and I loved you."] Discussing this excerpt in an interview, the poet says,

For me the term God is of this earth. What I call divine is the expression of absolute earthliness. It has nothing to do with the concept of religions, in which I find no divine divinity. The poem that you mention was written when I was twelve. I wrote it again in Buenos Aires, after losing my family. And I rewrote it with very few changes. That which satisfies me, gives me tranquility, gives me joy, without asking anything from me in return: that is what I call God. Which is why I say: 'I was God and I was walking about without knowing it.' That tranquility, that satisfaction, was God. I was the orchard (Berger 4).

The monastery thus represents death in two ways: first, the abandonment of secular life in general and second, the abandonment of the individual's own life in particular, as he turns over his life to the rules of the monastery and to the worship of an external and imaginary God, one who (for Rosenmann-Taub) has no connection to the individual.

In the context of the first three images and based on the premise that the poem has a fundamental unity, the final image, "decayed wandering negligence," may be considered yet another view of death. Mankind is "decayed," since as we have seen in the poem "Arambeles," there is an inevitable and continuous movement towards decay and death for the human being,

starting from the moment of birth. Mankind is also “wandering” because he has no “home.” As previously discussed in the analysis of “Endriago...,” one’s “home” is within, it is one’s essence, and has nothing to do with a physical location. Accordingly, this concept of “wandering” is another allusion to the lack of identity described in the first image of the poem. Finally, humanity is a “negligence” or “mistake” since without consciousness there is no reason for his existence in the grand scheme of the multiverse. Rosenmann-Taub diminishes the human being similarly in other poems. In “Duo” from *La Opción*, the individual’s conscience labels him “Pitiminí (34):” a trifle; and in “La Traición” from that same book, the speaker calls himself “desliz (26):” a mistake, or slip. Always the human being is diminished when he does not use his consciousness. Thus, in the world of “Dominio,” this decaying, homeless, trivial and purposeless accident called the human being, without identity, will, awareness or self-awareness and whose sole wish is for unconsciousness, is lifeless.

In the last two lines of the poem, the speaker dialogues with God and, in so doing, further develops the poem’s theme. God tells the speaker that he will curse himself for abandoning life as described previously, and the speaker responds that he is unafraid. In essence, God gives the speaker a gift by informing him that if he continues to think and act as he is doing, that he will regret it in the future. However, the speaker doesn’t understand the value of the gift he has been given; his response that he is unafraid implies that he intends to continue his mode of existence without change. This short dialogue informs us that although God exists, He neither controls nor judges mankind; instead, it is mankind who is responsible for its actions and for its judgment of those actions. It also emphasizes the human being’s commitment to proceed towards his death and his unwillingness to embrace life, no matter what the cost.

The comprehension of the poem's four metonymic images and the dialogue of its last two lines reveal the poem's semantic unity: the tendency towards unconsciousness and death that is inherent in the human condition. The relevance of the title, "Dominio," now becomes clear. It is not God but man who has dominion over man: the individual himself determines his own life. However, man uses this power to choose and live the living death described in the first four images of this poem and is unafraid of the consequences. He prefers the erasure of his identity, the sweetness of oblivion, the withdrawal from life, and the decay and homelessness of an accidental existence, to a conscious life. He has dominion over his life, and he exercises that power by choosing not to live it; even more, he neither regrets nor fears his choice. The poem thus succinctly expresses the suicidal nature that is inherent in the human condition: not the wish for physiological death, but the wish for unconscious life that is its spiritual equivalent.

As one of the fundamental tools of semiotic analysis, the examination of the deviation from the norm in various prosodic elements of the poem supports this interpretation. The poet calls attention to the words "Calcinada" and "vagabunda" as he gives each of these words its own line, surrounding them with silence. As discussed above, "calcinada" characterizes the individual's identity as charred, burned, reduced to ashes: in other words, totally destroyed. In Rosenmann-Taub's poetry the concept of home and homelessness generally refers not to a physical place but rather to an interior state. In poems like "La Cita," "El carruaje ligero de la noche" and "Otras voces reclaman otras voces" the poet considers the concept of "home" as the manifestation of the individual's contact with his essential self. Accordingly, the word "vagabunda" indicates that individual is homeless, totally removed from his essential being. Surrounded by silence and in this way highlighted by the poet, these two words sum up the two most powerful images of the poem that express death in life for the individual.

In another deviation from the norm, the fourth and eighth lines of the poem each contain five syllables, in contrast to the versification of the rest of the poem. In the fourth line, the speaker implies his entrance into a monastery and thus, his commitment and devotion to an external God. Conversely, in the eighth line, when God remonstrates with him, the speaker says, “I don’t tremble.” In these two lines, also related by their versification, the speaker first devotes himself to a God who leads him away from his real life, then rejects the Lord who directs him toward his real life.

Finally, the words “lodazal” and “blasfemarás” are linked due to both to their rhyme pattern and their accentuation. Both lines are heptasyllabic, in both lines the second and sixth syllables are stressed, and both lines end in “acento agudo.” These prosodic correspondences link these two lines semantically: the “lodazal” is an image of death, and the speaker’s blasphemy reveals his commitment to the rejection of life despite the consequences.

Many other poems from the tetralogy express the idea of man’s conscious preference for death and his movement towards death. Rosenmann-Taub’s poem XXI, “De hinojos, las visiones deslumbradas” from *El Zócalo*, is a sonnet in which the speaker apostrophizes death. In the last two tercets he writes,

En mi lecho final aquí me tienes.
No sé si acudirás y tengo miedo
De que no vengas a mis pobres sienes

Here you have me in my final bed.
I don’t know if you will come and I fear
that you won’t come to my poor temples.

A tomar este fuego de viñedo
Tuyo que por la tierra he sustentado:
Aprisa, quiero aprisa tu llamado. (52)

To take this vineyard fire
of yours that I have sustained on earth:
Quickly, I want your call quickly.

The speaker personifies and apostrophizes Death. He is afraid that Death will not come, and again begs for the relief that only He can bring and demands that he hasten with the final call.

Similarly, in “Diálogo sepulcral” from the same book, another poem that we examine later, the poet writes,

... Empújame a tu apremio:
Me reconquistarás
Como cuando de bruces gusté el trance
De los hielos. (41)

Push me towards your urgency:
You will reconquer me
like when face down I tasted the trance
of ice.

The speaker asks Death to push him according to His own demands, and tells Him that He will conquer the speaker, just as he did before. Once again, the speaker’s conscious movement towards death and his wish to end his life is a predominant theme.

Finally, the poem “Aerolito” from *El Zócalo* cited earlier expresses this same concept of the conscious movement of the individual towards death, as the poem’s refrain demonstrates: “Ibas corriendo hacia la muerte / sin tu relámpago en las bridas. /...Ibas corriendo hacia la muerte / por las ladinas graderías. /...Ibas corriendo hacia la muerte: / brasa de máscaras cautivas” (33-35). [“You were running towards death without your lightning in the bridles. /... You were running towards death through the crafty terraces. /... You were running towards death: / ember of captive masks...”]

Rosenmann-Taub’s poetic thought has been consistent through the course of the poems examined thus far, from *El Zócalo*, originally published in 1949, through *La Opción*, published in 2011. The next poem to be examined, “El carruaje ligero de la noche...” comes from his most recently published work, *La Noche Antes* (2013), the fourth book of his tetralogy. The analysis of this work, published sixty-four years after the publication of the first book of *Cortejo y Epinicio*, again reveals the consistency of thought that spans the poet’s life and poetic production.

CLXXVII

El carruaje ligero de la noche...
Me ayudan
a vestirme.
Listo,
por fin,
de pie,
no me atrevo a salir.

Debe de ondear la acera
en abusiva gelatina. Temo
asomarme a la puerta:
puede verme
el cochero y llamarme.
La criada, en su reino:
“Churumbel, no se atrase.”

¿Libertad?
Ascender
hasta el asiento blando,
dejándome llevar...
Las calles agasajan
garapiñosas víboras.
¿Moradas

o desperdicios? Unta
la niebla los umbrales.
Los caballos
avanzan
como si no pisaran.
Y me quedo dormido:
con abandonos de pestañas gruesas,

enlutados,
los astros me reciben:
El carruaje ligero de la noche...
Me ayudan
a vestirme.
Listo,
por fin,

de pie,
no me atrevo a salir.
Debe de ondear la acera
en abusiva gelatina. Temo

The swift carriage of the night...
I am being helped
to dress.
Ready,
finally,
standing,
I don't dare to go out.

The sidewalk might be rippling
in abusive jelly. I am afraid
to appear at the door:
The coachman can see me
and call me.
The maid, in her kingdom:
“Kid, don't be late.”

Liberty?
To rise
to the soft seat,
letting myself be carried along...
The streets fete
sugar-coated vipers.
Dwellings

or wastes?
The fog smears the thresholds.
The horses
advance
as if they weren't moving.
And I remain asleep:
with desolations of thick eyelashes,

mournful,
the stars receive me:
The swift carriage of the night...
I am being helped
to dress.
Ready,
finally

standing,
I don't dare to go out.
The pavement might be rippling
in abusive jelly. I am afraid

asomarme a la puerta:
puede verme
el cochero y llamarme.

La criada, en su reino:
“Churumbel, no se atrase.”
¿Libertad?
Ascender
hasta el asiento blando,
dejándome llevar...
Las calles agasajan

garapiñosas víboras.
¿Moradas
o desperdicios? Unta
la niebla los umbrales.
Los caballos
avanzan
como si no pisaran.

Y me quedo dormido:
con abandonos de pestañas gruesas,
enlutados,
los astros me reciben. (220)

to appear at the door:
The coachman can see me
and call me.

The maid, in her kingdom:
“Kid, don’t be late.”
Liberty?
To rise
to the soft seat,
letting myself be carried along...
The streets fete

Sugar-coated vipers.
Dwellings
or wastes?
The fog smears the thresholds.
The horses
advance
as if they weren’t moving.

And I remain asleep:
with desolations of thick eyelashes,
mournful,
the stars receive me.

Riffaterre asserts in his *Semiotics of Poetry* that “...one factor remains constant: poetry expresses concepts and things by indirection.... ...Indirection is produced by displacing, distorting, or creating meaning” (1-2). Displacement occurs through figurative language, such as metaphor and metonymy; distortion, through ambiguity and paradox; creation, through the organization of the text by means of structural elements, such as symmetry, rhyme, or semantic equivalences between positional homologues in a stanza (2). In the poem under consideration, we first examine the structural elements that lead to the poem’s matrix. We then examine the poem’s figurative language. In the poems by Rosenmann-Taub’s such as this one that are extended metaphors, the various vehicles of the metaphors at the mimetic level are words, phrases or descriptive systems that the poet transforms into hypograms that form the poetic text

at the hermeneutic level of reading. These hypograms are the tenors of the poem's metaphors; they collectively create the isotopy that is the poem's significance.

Another testament to the ubiquitous presence of death in life, the poem is a monologue that describes the speaker's life situation and actions. Ostensibly it appears to recount the story of a more or less helpless individual, awakened in the night, dressed, and taken for a carriage ride while still half-asleep. Since the poem is situated in the section of *La Noche Antes* entitled "Baladas de la Vejez," the individual might be an old and possibly moribund person; the helplessness and fear that appear in the speaker's description of himself, along with his appellation as "Churumbel" suggest that he could be a young child.

Beginning with the third line of the fifth stanza, the poem begins to repeat itself, and the poem's second half replicates its first half. This word-for-word repetition is the poem's key structural element: due to its repetition, the carriage ride is no longer a unique event but a general one. The trip may be repeated temporally with the same individual once, twice, three times, a hundred times or an infinite number of times; or, if repeated with another individual as protagonist, it may also be repeated with two, three, a hundred individuals or all individuals. With this repetition, the poet makes the carriage ride a description of the human condition, where the unconscious or semiconscious individual passes from one state of being to another, repeatedly and eternally. The poem's theme is thus "the journey of life."

The poem's figurative language supports this understanding as well. The representation of life as a journey is common throughout literature.¹³ In the extended metaphor that constitutes the poem, many semantic elements support this interpretation. Two key lines are those that begin and end each of the poem's two sections, in addition to beginning and ending the poem itself. The "carruaje ligero de la noche" is the first line of the poem, and appears again as the first

line of the repetition. In this line, the poet emphasizes the uniqueness of this carriage that transports the individual: It is not any carriage but *the* carriage, it is a *swift* carriage, and it is a carriage *of the night*.

The “noche” in this line seems to represent not night but death. This is not the only poem in which night symbolizes death in Rosenmann-Taub’s poetry. The third poem from *El Zócalo* reads as follows:

III

En las eras, ajeno,
He raído los mismos sabores
que aprendí en las escuelas del sueño.
¿Cuándo empieza la noche? (26)

In the threshing floors, strange,
I have grated the same flavors
that I learned in the schools of sleep.
When does the night begin?

The “sabores” to which the speaker refers seem to be flavors of death. These same “flavors” can be learned in the “schools of sleep,” since the unconsciousness of sleep is akin to the unconsciousness of death. Since they teach unconsciousness, the “flavors” must be either the unconsciousness of death or unconsciousness that is death in life. Also, the word “eras” in the poem’s first line has two relevant meanings. First, in past eras, perhaps in other incarnations, the speaker “grated” the flavor of death, and he also learned those same flavors in the “schools of sleep.” Second, “eras” may mean “threshing floors,” as shown in the above translation. With this definition the speaker’s experience of death is again more concrete: he “grated” the flavors of death on the threshing floors that he learned in the “schools of sleep.” Since the goal of threshing is to separate the grains of wheat from the chaff, the flavors of death that he “grates” are the desirable end product. Having grated the flavors of death either in the threshing floors of life or in past eras, and also having “learned” them in the “schools of sleep” the speaker now wants to know when the night that is death begins.

Likewise, in the poem “Preludio” from *El Zócalo*, a poem that will be analyzed later, “...un solo cuerpo /...” is found in “...la noche que no conocemos” (26). Since all other nights are known, this unknown night can only be the night of death.

Therefore, the phrase “carruaje ligero de la noche” in this poem may be interpreted as “the swift carriage of death.” The adjective “ligero” makes sense in this context: the journey of life is swift, the years past, and life is over before one realizes it. In addition, the repetition within the poem calls the reader’s attention to the line, “los astros me reciben.” the line that ends both the poem’s first section and the poem itself. Since the phrase makes no sense literally, it must be understood figuratively: this can only be the expression of the speaker’s death, with his departure from this world to be received in another world. The poem “STELLAE” from *El Mensajero* reads “Cuenca de castigados (13).” This poem seems to suggest that stars are the abode of the dead, and the phrase “los astros me reciben” corresponds to that understanding. Finally, the location of the poem in the last section of the *La Noche Antes*, entitled “Baladas de la vejez,” and the fact that this volume of the tetralogy deals with the last years of the individual’s life also suggest the interpretation that death is imminent.

The poem’s first images set the stage for this journey through life. The speaker seems to be an old and impotent man, and the swift carriage of death is the vehicle that carries him to his physiological death. As an equal and alternative interpretation, the “carruaje” may also be the carriage that brings life. Accordingly, the “noche” could be the unconsciousness that comes with the beginning of life, the process of dying that takes place all through one’s life, or the concept of night as “death in life” that we have seen portrayed in many other poems discussed in the chapter. The interpretations exist without contradicting each other in the poem. If the “carruaje” brings life, it also brings death, and the carriage ride is the journey towards one’s death that starts

when one is born; and if the “carruaje” brings death, then it is still that same journey towards death; the only difference is that the journey does not start at birth but instead in old age.

Our understanding of the poem as a statement of the human condition is therefore based on the repetition that is the poem’s key structural element, as well as the figurative language of the first and last lines of the poem that metaphorically confirm that concept with the representation of life as a journey and death as its final destination. Since according to Riffaterre the poem is a semantic unity, we now examine the other semantic elements of the poem, to see how they inform and amplify the poem’s significance. Each word or phrase of the poem is an ungrammaticality, behind which lies a hypogram; the hypograms taken together form the isotopy that renders the full meaning of the poem clear.

In the prologue to the journey that the first stanza describes, the speaker is being helped to dress by other people. The poet wishes us to see the human being’s dependence on other people as starting from the first moment of life. He is helped “to dress;” understood figuratively, he is helped to put on the guises and disguises of manners and appearance that are socially acceptable, even though they have nothing to do with his real being.

The next set of images describes a speaker who appears to be ready physically but not psychologically. He is standing, but doesn’t dare to leave, because the sidewalk might be rippling in abusive gelatin. Read figuratively, the passage presents the idea that even when prepared for life, the individual’s basic emotional stance is that of fear, of the unknown future that lies ahead. Nothing is steady or stable, not even the ground upon which one treads. Gelatin is a substance that is neither solid nor liquid; with the phrase “abusiva gelatina” the poet precisely describes an environment which is not only unstable but indefinable and hostile to the individual. The metaphor accurately describes man’s world: a jungle in which social, economic

and work-related rules change at a moment's notice, and business relationships, family and romantic relationships and friendships may suddenly prove untrustworthy.

The images that follow develop this theme of fear of the unknown future. The speaker is afraid to appear at the door, because the coachman might see and call him. He would like to stay in his garden of childhood forever; even as an adolescent he knows that adult life is the road to death and wants to avoid it. Nevertheless, this road is impossible to avoid; will he or no, he is pushed into life. The maid's "kingdom" is typically the house or the kitchen; here the poet emphasizes the mundane role that people often accept in life; they "rule" but in an extremely limited domain. Yet on a deeper level, the maid's "kingdom" is the kingdom of her unconscious life: she rules over only the mechanical aspects of her being, not even exploring her real life. The individual is pushed into life, albeit with good intentions, by a maid who cares for him, as evidenced by the word "Churumbel." Yet despite the good intentions and love, he is on his own; nobody can give him the real help that he needs, since everyone around him lives in darkness as well.

After the preparation and initiation comes the journey itself, and the poem's next seven images form the isotopy that describes it. The speaker's question "¿Libertad?" asks whether the journey is predetermined or if the speaker has the freedom to live his life as he wishes. In the next line, the verb "Ascender" continues to leave the issue in doubt; but the next two lines indicate that either true liberty is non-existent, or that if it does exist, the individual chooses to ignore that possibility and instead passively accept the events of life as they occur. The speaker takes the easy route of this journey, the "asiento blando" of life; he allows himself to be carried along, living a life determined by cultural norms. The "calles" of the external world celebrate the "sugar-coated vipers" of entertainment, financial success, sex, fame and power; the metaphor

powerfully expresses the sweetness of these goals as well as their venom for the individual who wants to live his real life. The “calles” also laud the less obvious but still “sugar-coated vipers” of family, friendship, social relationships, and love, all of which take the individual away from his real self as well. Desirable on the surface, these goals in reality have nothing to do with the individual but instead are promulgated by either nature or society to serve their own ends; once again, as the individual follows these externally motivated goals, he ignores his own being.

The speaker questions further: “Are these buildings that I see, these activities into which I can enter in my life, true dwelling places for me? Or are they metaphorically those “desperdicios,” scraps, leftovers from other people’s plates in this meal of life?” The speaker wants to know if he can live his real life or if he will live a life dictated by forces outside of himself, whether he will metaphorically inhabit his own home or whether he will live in a nook in someone else’s home, eating off someone else’s plate. Nothing is clear: the speaker can’t see inside those buildings, because not only does the fog of mass culture and convention cover everything, but also the individual’s own internal fog prevents him from seeing within himself. The real tragedy is that not only is the speaker ignorant of his true “dwelling places” but also, he has no way to find out. His only solution is to enter those buildings one by one; that takes time, and time is finite and never stops. To enter these buildings also takes the will of the individual, but the individual has already shown only the desire to rise to the “soft seat,” and allow himself to be carried along. Without time, will, or help, the individual has little chance of finding his true “home.”

The last images continue the extended metaphor of this journey of life. The speaker has been traveling in this carriage that represents the death of a life lived unconsciously and the journey of life towards death that he ascended in the previous stanza. He succumbed to the “soft

seat” of an unconscious life and allowed himself to be carried along, letting life pass him by.

The hours and days pass imperceptibly; the passage of time, symbolized by the movement of the horses, is barely noticeable. The speaker remains (psychologically) asleep, unconscious and oblivious to his real life until the moment of his physiological death, when the stars receive him.

The journey of life has come to an end. The multiversal consciousness mourns because the individual has lost the opportunity to lead his real life. Yet almost immediately another opportunity presents itself: the “carruaje ligero de la noche” brings the speaker once again back to life and to the same process of dying previously described. The poem’s word-for-word repetition makes it clear that unfortunately, nothing changes. The speaker’s ignorance and fear, based on his formation during childhood and adolescence, the “sugarcoated vipers” that surround the speaker in his adult life, the fog of culture and convention, the internal fog that hides the speaker’s real identity from himself, and the unceasing passage of time all culminate to forge, for a second time, the identical tragedy of yet another unlived life.

The poem is thus an encapsulated vision of man’s life, starting from birth and ending with death. The individual is portrayed throughout as either unconscious or semiconscious, afraid to live his real life, tempted by superficialities, passively accepting his circumstances, unaware of the passage of time, and ultimately exchanging the unconsciousness of an unlived life for the non-being of death.

The poet employs his distinctive technique of emphasizing key words by giving them their own line, thus separating them both visually and phonically from the words and lines that precede and follow them. With the word “Listo” he suggests that the individual is in fact ready and able to determine his own destiny. Nevertheless, with the next word, “Liberty?” he both questions and posits the individual’s will and responsibility to determine that destiny.

“Ascender” describes the individual’s actual movement upwards, and answers the one-word question of the preceding line: it implicitly announces that the individual is indeed capable of self-determination. Nevertheless, the speaker chooses the “asiento blando, dejándose llevar...” so even though he is capable of self-determination, his choice is to avoid that self-determination. The poet emphasizes “Moradas” since these buildings, homes, represent the activities essential to the individual’s being, in contrast with the “desperdicios” that are the waste of the individual’s life. The word “Avanzan” is given its own line to emphasize the speaker’s knowledge of the inexorable passage of time. Perhaps knowledge of the inexorability of the passage of time and the finitude of life may motivate the individual to leave his “asiento blando;” however, that does not occur in the poem.

The final one-word poetic line is “enlutados.” Above all, the poet wants to underscore the tragedy of this situation. The individual was finally “listo,” “de pie,” and ascended to the journey of life. However, instead of choosing life, he chose the “soft seat” of convention in the carriage of death. Seduced by the “sugar-coated vipers,” he never entered into his true dwelling places, time passed, and he ultimately died without ever having lived. After the hyperbaton of the last stanza is unraveled, it reads, “enlutados, los astros me reciben con abandonos de pestañas gruesas.” In mourning for the loss of the greatest opportunity that the individual could receive, the stars receive him: the multiverse is desolate over the gifts and opportunities that the individual was offered but never accepted. The repetition is a poignant statement of this tragic state of affairs, since it strongly implies that the unconscious state of being that is the journey of life will repeat itself ad infinitum.

The poems analyzed in this section demonstrate in a number of different ways the individual’s conscious movement towards death that occurs throughout his life. In “Cómo me

gustaría...” the speaker fervently pleads for the surcease from life that comes with non-being. In “Dominio,” the human condition is portrayed as a constant and omnipresent desire for and movement towards death, in full knowledge of the negative consequences of that attitude. In yet other poems, the speaker personifies and apostrophizes death, asking to end his life. Finally, in “El carruaje ligero de la noche,” the speaker recounts all the ways in which, throughout his life, he has consciously chosen the fear, passivity, and unconsciousness that characterize death in life. All these poems reveal the individual’s active desire for death, his conscious choice of death and his movement towards death throughout his life, along with the concrete effects of that choice.

3. The Countervailing Movement towards Life

Man’s conscious movement towards death is a recurring theme throughout *Cortejo y Epinicio*. However, this perspective is not the poet’s only conception of mankind; he also recognizes the possibility of the impulse to life as well. The poems of this section illustrate this impulse and how it manifests itself in the human being.

El Zócalo’s “Con su sogá oportuna me ahorca...” illustrates both the movement to death and a simultaneous movement towards life.

V

Con su sogá oportuna me ahorca
la baldía intemperie de duendes:
estropajo que arrimo de emblema:
ataúd enroscado, azazel.
Una gota de agua me anhela.

With its timely rope
the sterile inclemency of goblins hangs me:
rag that I bring near as an emblem:
coiled coffin, azazel.
A drop of water desires me.

Es danzar con la hostil deserción:
el presagio al revés y cumplido.

It is to dance with the hostile desertion:
the portent reversed and fulfilled.

Por cordura de harapos garduños
aflojar lo postrero. ¡Es huirme!
Va a caer y mi sino se tensa,
abrevando la fiebre en cenit:
alfiler que se incrusta en la greda.

Through the wisdom of cutpurse tatters,
to let go of the last one. It’s to escape!
It’s going to fall and my destiny tenses,
slaking the fever at its zenith:
a pin that embeds itself in the clay.

¡Sí! ¡Permíteme oír cómo cae
esa gota de agua, Dios mío! (31)

Yes! Let me hear how falls
that drop of water, my God!

The first two stanzas of this dramatic monologue contain a series of metonyms that describes a common unidentified theme, which the reader identifies through uncovering the common tenor of the poem's metaphors and metonyms. These tropes speak either literally or figuratively of death, starting from the beginning. In the hyperbaton of the first stanza's first two lines the speaker first declares that the hangman's rope is "timely;" with this adjective the speaker implies that he welcomes his execution and willingly permits it.

Then, the speaker declares that he loses his life to the "sterile inclemency of goblins ("duendes")." In Spanish mythology, "duendes" are demonic earth spirits, evoking irrationality, earthiness (including sexuality) and death. García Lorca popularized the concept of "duende", contrasting its force that emanates from the earth and is linked to death with the grace and charm of the angel and the classical artistic norms of the muse. He called it an "emotional darkness," residing in the blood, and asserted that it is the generating force of both life and great artistic endeavor (Maurer 48-62). With this understanding of "duende" in mind, the passage is another reference to death, and can be understood as follows: "I happily lose my life to the sterile harshness of irrationality and earthiness."

This leads to the question: how can irrationality and earthiness be sterile and harsh? Inverting the Lorquian concept of "duende," as he privileges the Apollonian virtues of wisdom and rationality, the poet implies that irrationality and earthiness are not the generating force of human life but instead its opposite: the abandonment of one's real being, which is rationality and consciousness. For Rosenmann-Taub, erotic desire and irrationality are the animal functions of the human being that nature employs in its constant drive towards reproduction and death; when

the individual surrenders himself to those functions, the human aspect of his being disappears. In this sense, the poet uses the phrase “sterile inclemency” to refer to these goblins of irrationality and earthiness that put the human being to death by preventing him from realizing the fertility and fruitfulness of his intelligence and consciousness and instead resign him to animal level of existence. In this way, the poet continues to develop the theme of man’s conscious movement towards death as portrayed in previous poems.

The metaphor “estropajo que arrimo de emblema” of the third line is situated before and after two images of death, connected to them by colons which equate it with them; as a result, this image must also refer to death. The speaker brings a rag near him to serve as his emblem, his representation of himself, much as a country represents itself with a flag. However, this flag is a tattered rag. Instead of representing himself with the highest part of himself, the individual represents himself with the worst part of himself, and as he presents that negative aspect of himself to the outside world, he devalues his life. Again, the conscious choice of death prevails. This metaphor recalls the “arambeles” of the first poem analyzed in this chapter. The “rags” of that poem symbolize the decay and deterioration throughout life that leads to death, beacons warning of the destructive nature of the passage of time. In this poem, the same metaphor symbolizes the individual’s identification with that part of him that is decaying and moving towards death.

The stanza’s fourth line contains the image of the azazel, which in the Jewish tradition is both a demon and also the scapegoat upon whom all personal and social problems are blamed. When one blames another for one’s problems, one avoids the reality of one’s own life. Linked to the preceding metonymic representation of death, that of the coiled coffin, by a comma, this image also reinforces the theme of the human’s conscious movement towards death.

In the last line of the stanza the poet introduces a new idea. In the midst of these metonymical and metaphorical movements towards death and the devaluation of life suddenly appears a contrary image: a drop of water desires the speaker. This seems to be a sign of life, since the drop of water demonstrates life with its emotion of desire. Now conscious of that desire, the speaker also seems alive.

The second stanza continues the theme of the preference for death and the individual's perception of the lack of value in his life. The phrase "hostil deserción" seems to signify the desertion of oneself, the quintessence of hostility and another expression of the individual's movement towards death, since the willingness to abandon oneself is the equivalent of unconscious life. The portent "al revés y cumplido" may also be considered a representation of death: whereas a normal portent is unfulfilled and predicts the individual's future life, this portent is already fulfilled, thus revealing the past instead of the future. Suggesting that man's future life is determined by his past, predetermined by genetic and social structures and, as a result, not his own, the poet again highlights the automatic and mechanical nature of predetermined life.

The images of these two stanzas thus speak of the presence of death in life, the desirability of death and the ways that the individual seeks it. When understood as metonyms, linked through punctuation, contiguity and the semantic unity that is the poem's fundamental characteristic, these images illustrate, amplify and deepen the poet's vision of mankind's desire for and movement towards death. There is one exception. In the midst of these images of death has already appeared its opposite: the drop of water that represents life and consciousness and that not only exists but "desires" the speaker.

The third stanza develops this idea that the drop of water has introduced. In the first two lines of the third stanza, the speaker expresses the wisdom of the rags of the thief. The image of the “rag” surfaces again, but this time, with a different meaning. Unlike the “arambeles” of the previous poem or the “estropajo” earlier in this one, the “harapos” here have “cordura.”

Whereas the previous images of rags bear the connotation of deterioration to the point of uselessness, the pickpocket’s rags are the opposite; he uses them as clothing, to cover himself and keep himself warm. Actively fighting against the forces of entropy, he uses these rags and prolongs their usefulness.

Furthermore, as he breaks societal laws, the pickpocket uses his own brand of wisdom to obey a higher law: that of survival. Unlike the vast bulk of humanity, the thief privileges his own being over social or cultural norms and laws; in this sense, he is closer to living his real life than the vast majority of people who routinely accede to these societal norms and laws. The speaker understands that he is a human being like the pickpocket; unlike the pickpocket, however, he is trapped with his belongings, his social position, and his own preconditioned physical and mental processes that enslave him. Now, following the wisdom of the pickpocket and his rags, he wants to let go of everything, to escape convention, and perhaps to live his real life.

The speaker identifies with the drop of water: just as the pickpocket relinquishes social acceptability, just as the water escapes and finds its freedom, so does the speaker escape from his own externally motivated roles. He finds his own freedom vicariously as he feels the tension of his own destiny linked with that of the water about to fall. The poet’s choice of the word “sino” to signify destiny is significant: the internal words “sí” and “no” that the word contains imply the possibility that man does indeed have the ability to choose and thus the ability to determine his

own destiny. “Abrevando la fiebre en cenit” evokes the story of the flight of Icarus: like the myth, the drop of water falls into space, lives a glorious life for an instant, and then ends its life evaporated, as extinct and worthless as a pin embedded in clay.

Describing the trajectory of the drop of water, the poet uses the word “abrevando.” With its similarity to the words “abreviar” and “breve,” the word suggests the brevity of life. Also, the phrase “en cenit” may refer to the drop of water instead of the fever. The line thus suggests that a person’s life has a trajectory with apogee and perigee, and as a result becomes a powerful exhortation to the individual to let go of conventional thinking, to risk consciousness, and to dare to ascend unthinkable heights as he lives his real life.

In the last stanza, the speaker addresses God as he pleads to experience his real life by being able to “hear”—experience—that brief moment between the instant when the drop of water is freed, performs its function of “slaking the fever at its zenith”, and the moment of its death. This is in direct opposition to the images of the poem’s first two stanzas, and to those images discussed in previous poems. In fact, the powerful images of the first two stanzas of this poem bring the speaker’s prayer for consciousness into high relief. The hangman’s rope, the “duendes,” the coffin, the “azazel”, the dance with “hostile desertion” and the fulfilled portent all metonymically represent death and the movement towards death in life. Yet, in contrast to all these negative images, this insignificant drop of water, this most humble manifestation of nature imaginable, takes on life and lives with apparent consciousness and purpose. Rosenmann-Taub evokes the myth of Icarus to present the portrait of a glorious and conscious life. The final stanza, with its exclamatory “Yes!” and plea to “hear”—to internalize the conscious life of that drop of water—is the most forceful affirmation of all: it seems as if the speaker is saying “Yes” to life in this line, and implicitly encouraging the reader to do the same.

<p>Ah ser la triste oveja que ante el perro temible</p> <p>insiste en bizarrias de profuso desmaña, y acercarme, acercarme al brío incomodado, y acercarme, acercarme y olerlo, y ser el ímpetu</p> <p>que muerde montaraz y con liana de baba salpica las pupilas del eclipse sangrante, y gozar del dolor: ser un dolor alegre: la ola más alegre de los mares inmensos y la nube más roja de todos los ocasos. (90)</p>	<p>Ah to be the sad sheep that facing the fearsome dog insists in gallantries of profuse clumsiness, and to approach, approach the troubled energy and to approach, approach, and smell it, and to be the impetus that bites coarsely and with lianas of drool splashes the pupils of the bleeding eclipse, and to delight in pain, to be a happy pain: the happiest wave of the immense seas and the reddest cloud of all the sunsets.</p>
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As the central semantic structural element of the poem, the refrain captures its essence: the speaker wants to do all, experience all, be all, know all; he wants to extend himself to the

limit in both positive and negative directions, to feel what it is like to be the giver and receiver of pain as well as delight and joy. The breadth of the variety of desires expressed, the repetition of the refrain, and the exclamatory note on which the poem finishes enable it to match the emotional intensity of "Con su sogá oportuna me ahorca...." However, instead of wishing for the nothingness of non-being as the speaker wished for in "Cómo me gustaría...", the speaker in this poem wishes the opposite: to experience all that can be experienced, both good and evil, in his current state of being that is life.

Rosenmann-Taub uses oxymoron and catachresis as well as syntax to increase the potency of these images. For example, the phrase "to delight in pain, to be a happy pain" is a way to express the desire for intensity of experience to the maximum degree possible. "To be the fleeting disgust of the astonished algae" is a phrase that has no literal meaning to the reader; its appearance in the poem invites the reader to imagine experience beyond his normal perceptions of experience. The personification of the wave in the phrase "ser la ola más alegre de los mares inmensos" in combination with the phrase's syntactic construction—the use of the infinitive verb form to imply desire and the use of the superlative—invites the reader not just to imagine himself as a wave, but to imagine a happiness that could be at the level of one in a million.

As shown above, "Con la sogá oportuna me ahorca" illustrates man's tendency towards death at the same time that it manifests the possibility of and desire for conscious life; and in "Ah ser la triste oveja que ante el perro temible..." the wish for the total experience of all that life has to offer as well. A poem from *El Mensajero* that is the poet's homage to his maternal grandmother, "Jávele" suggests that the tendency of the conscious individual is to move towards the realization of a fully conscious life.

V

Jávele

Lentiscos,
pestañas deladoras,
los dedos del granizo
entornan la petunia:
te asomas:
el rocío te alumbra. (15)

Jávele

Lentisks,
tell-tale eyelashes,
the fingers of hail
half-close the petunia:
you appear:
the dew illuminates you.

For Riffaterre, the poem's significance is created through displacement, distortion, and/or creation, all of which threaten mimetic representation and create ungrammaticalities.¹⁴ The poem "Jávele" demonstrates these varying forms of indirection as explained by Riffaterre's method of semiotic analysis.

The title encapsulates the poet's feelings toward his grandmother by using her Yiddish name in the diminutive, a term of endearment (Java – Jávele). At first blush, the poet appears to be comparing his grandmother to the mastic tree as well as to a petunia, with their corresponding characteristics of strength and beauty. The leaves of the mastic tree may correspond to her "pestañas deladoras," and its hard fruit may be the "dedos de granizo" which enclose her. Nevertheless, ungrammaticalities abound in this text. The mastic tree is far removed from the petunia, so the fruit of one cannot enclose the flower of the other. "Lentiscos" is plural, so it is impossible to reconcile this image as a description of his grandmother, who is singular. There is no explanation for the description of the leaves as "deladoras." And there is no recognizable connection between the first four lines of the poem and the last two: Jávele's appearance in the penultimate line and the dew that illuminates her have no direct connection to the lentisks, eyelashes, hail and petunia of the poem's first four lines. Since this mimetic representation of the grandmother fails, we turn to semiotic analysis to understand the poem.

At the hermeneutic level of reading, we find that the isotopy of concealment and revelation runs throughout every line in the poem. The first two lines of the poem contain the appositions “Lentiscos” and “pestañas deladoras.” Syntactically, these nouns function as adjectives and describe the “dedos de granizo” that “entornan la petunia” in some way. Mastic trees are bushes with leaves that partially conceal the flowers and fruit that are the essential part of the plant. The “pestañas deladoras” fulfill the same function with the human being; if the eyes are the proverbial “windows to the soul,” then the eyelashes have the ability to either conceal or reveal the individual’s internal being. This opposition of concealing and revealing is also evident in the line that these appositions modify: the use of the verb “entornan” in the poetic line “los dedos de granizo entornan la petunia” suggests that this force of nature that conceals and destroys may be revelatory as well. In fact, it is the destructive power of the hail in its effort to conceal and kill the petunia that demonstrates the power of Jávele: facing an almost insurmountable attack from the external world, she is nevertheless able to appear, survive and inspire, as the fifth and sixth lines of the poem indicate.

These ungrammaticalities all share the same hypogram: the ever-present drive of nature to conceal and destroy essence, and, in opposition to nature, the will and effort of the individual to reveal and live his essence. In all three of these examples, the object being concealed is precious: the fruit and flowers of the mastic tree, the soul of the individual, the flower that is the essence of Jávele. The leaves, eyelashes and hail all serve the same function: to cover and thus erase the essential part of being. Yet also, the images indicate that the lentisk fruit and flowers, the human soul and the flower are not fully concealed but are at least capable of being seen.

Other elements of this isotopy appear in the poem’s fifth and sixth lines as well. “Asomar” is to appear, or show oneself, and “alumbrar” is to illuminate. In these last two lines,

“concealment” has disappeared and only “revelation” is present. Formed by the unification of the hypograms of these ungrammaticalities, this isotopy of concealment and revelation is the first step towards the significance of the poem.

The second key structural element of the poem is syntactic in nature: the colons that connect the three syntactic elements of the poem. This punctuation signifies that these three elements are part of a series. The first element portrays the conflictive aspect of nature as it attempts to conceal essence at the same time that the individual wants to reveal it. Now, in the second element of the poem, “Te asomas,” the grandmother appears, shows herself, prevailing over nature’s wish to conceal and kill her. In the third syntactic element of the poem, nature itself, in the form of dew, illuminates her; with her will and consciousness, Jávele is able to triumph over the forces of nature. The “rocío” is water in its natural state, as opposed to the hail that is water hardened into rock: nature has been unable to triumph over Jávele; instead, transforming hail into water, Jávele triumphs over nature.

The third key structural element that lends meaning to the poem is the metric isotopy of the first and fifth lines. The poem’s versification is heptasyllabic, with the exception of these two lines, which are trisyllabic; this metric isotopy calls attention to these two lines. The juxtaposition of “Lentiscos” and “te asomas” highlights the conflict between the forces of nature on the one hand, and the force of the human being on the other. In the poem’s first line, nature succeeds in concealing the essence of the mastic tree, but in the fifth line, in contrast, the human being appears, shows herself. The contrast of these two lines summarizes the entire poem: nature triumphs over unconscious life, but conscious being triumphs over nature.

The final structural element that creates meaning is the phonological isotopies that appear throughout the poem. As we have discussed in other poems, Rosenmann-Taub uses rhyme to

link key words semantically; he employs that technique in this poem as well. “Lentiscos,” “granizo” and “rocío” are all representations of nature; “delatoras”, “entornan” and “asomas” all have to do with revealing or enclosing; and “petunia” and “alumbra” are representations of the grandmother.

The poem’s syntactic and phonological structures thus enable the reader to understand the Riffatterrian “displacement of meaning” that takes place as the semantic elements undergo the transformation from mimesis to semiosis. Once it is understood that the first two lines are appositions and that the colons establish the concept of a series, the metaphors and metonymies become understandable.

Riffatterrian “distortion” is also present in the poem. The poet’s presentation of nature is ambiguous. The “dedos of granizo” only partially surround Jávele; they still allow for the possibility of revealing herself. Nature is a force that kills, but also one that illuminates. The description of appearance is also ambiguous. On the one hand, Jávele’s interior being is betrayed by her eyelashes, but on the other hand, she shows herself. The former may be an involuntary betrayal, while the latter is a conscious decision, both leading to the same end.

Thus, the poem starts as a mimetic representation of reality but becomes transformed into a formal and semantic unity in a hermeneutic reading, through examination of its structural elements that create meaning, the displacement caused by its figurative language, and the distortion caused by its contradictions and ambiguity. The ungrammaticalities at the mimetic level of reading are hypograms at the hermeneutic level of reading, forming the isotopy that is the poem’s significance: the struggle, perseverance and triumph of the conscious human being over the forces of nature.

The next poem we analyze further amplifies this theme. Whereas in “Con su soga oportuna” and “Ah ser la triste oveja ante el perro temible” the individual only wishes for the gloriousness of a conscious life, and whereas in “Jávele” the individual manages to prevail against the force of nature with her inner strength, in “No el cadáver de Dios lo que medito” from *El Zócalo*, the speaker actually achieves transcendence through consciousness, will and action.

XVIII

No el cadáver de Dios lo que medito
ni su traslumbramiento lo que muerdo;
venero de veneros cuanto agito
y gano y beso y pierdo.

It's not the corpse of God that I meditate
nor his dazzlement that I bite;
Origin of origins the more I agitate
and win and kiss and lose.

A dentelladas, esplendor de ala
total en mi espadaña azul, resiste.
Copa, satisfaciéndome, resbala.
Pedernal fibra, embiste.

With tooth and nail, splendor of total wing
in my blue steeple, resist.
Cup, satisfying me, slip.
Flint fiber, attack.

O campana de túnicas divinas:
linfas siempre divinas
en las cumbres divinas...(49)

Oh bell of divine robes:
always divine lymphs
in the divine heights...

In the first two lines of the first stanza, the speaker announces the death of God at the same time that he indicates his own personal attitude towards the divine. To accomplish this, Rosenmann-Taub transposes the direct objects of the two clauses of the first two lines from their logical locations: instead of linking the corpse with biting and God's radiance with meditation, the poet links the corpse with meditation and the radiance with biting. This transposition renders the clauses nonsensical, since it is as impossible to meditate on God's cadaver (since God is eternal) as it is to bite His radiance, which is non-corporeal. However, the actual effect of this transposition is to invite the reader to confront the equally nonsensical nature of the clauses in their more normal form as well: one can neither bite the cadaver nor meditate on the radiance of

a God that doesn't exist. Accordingly, in these two lines the poet rejects completely the idea of an external God, consistent with his theological position as seen in previous poems, and invites the reader to do the same.

In the third and fourth lines of the stanza, starting with the phrase “venero de veneros,” the speaker now declares in biblical language that the individual contains his God within him, a recurring theme in the poet's worldview. With respect to the concept of an inner divinity, in Poem XXIV of *El Zócalo*, Rosenmann-Taub writes, “Era yo Dios y caminaba sin saberlo./ Eras oh tú, mi huerto, Dios y yo te amaba”. (“I was God and I was walking without knowing it. You, oh you, were my orchard, God, and I loved you (56).” As noted previously, when speaking about this poem in an interview, the poet states, “What I call divine is the expression of absolute earthliness. It has nothing to do with the concept of religions, in which I find no divine divinity (Berger, 4).” In the poem cited above, the poet again presents the idea that divinity lies within, whether or not the individual is aware of it. However, in the last two lines of the first stanza, Rosenmann-Taub asserts more precisely that the individual creates his existence and, even more, his own divine essence with his actions.

The poet utilizes different formal techniques to emphasize and confirm his concepts. The hyperbaton of the first two lines allows him to highlight the negative image of God, since its effect is to have both these lines start with a negative. The polysyndeton of the last line has the effect of giving more weight to the efforts that the individual must make. As described above, the *non sequiturs* of the first two lines draw the reader's attention to the insubstantial nature of the human's belief in a divine being. In addition, the poet's use of the biblical register employed in the phrase “Venero de veneros” bestows the same sacred quality that the Bible gives to its notion of divine creation onto the actions of man with which he creates his being.

The second stanza continues to develop the concept of the individual creating his own essence, now through the poet's use of imperatives. The speaker issues commands: to his own individual splendor, that it should resist to the maximum; to the cup that satisfies, that it should slip, and to his efforts (his own moral fiber), that they should charge forward, attack. Consciousness, will, and most important, action are the key ingredients for the individual's self-creation. Instead of using the indicative mode, the poet employs apostrophe and the imperative mode of address to effectively augment the force of his message.

Finally, the poet's lexical and phonological choices also strengthen his message. As noted in the first chapter, the epiphora of the first two lines of the first stanza, the insistent repetition of the "e-o" rhyme throughout the first stanza and the repetition of the "y," "y," and "y" in the polysyndeton of the last line of this stanza all give more energy to the actions the speaker describes. In this stanza also, the adverbial clause "A dentelladas" is a powerful image that conveys the intensity of the effort that the speaker demands. The sonority of the repeated sibilants in the verbs of the second stanza highlights the speaker's imperatives. In the third stanza, the epiphora "divinas" confirms the semantic relationship of these three lines phonically: body, essence and consciousness are all divine.

Rosenmann-Taub expands on this concept of the individual creating his own essence in his commentary on his poem "Autoalabanza" from *Quince*, in which he writes:

Yo tiendo mi papel –mi tienda -: tiendo, dentro de mí, la tienda: "habito" la morada que me "habita". Y la –lo –erogo. ...el papel: Dios se sitúa en el ser de su creación; yo me sitúo –extiendo mi papel – en el ser de mi creación: jocosa y alabeadamente, el real (no el "papal") intercesor" (213).

I tend my role – my shop -: I tend, inside myself, the shop: "I inhabit" the dwelling that "inhabits" me. And I contribute to it. ...the role: God is situated in the being of his creation; I situate myself – extend my role – in the being of my creation: funny and warped, the real (not the "papal" mediator." (translation mine).

In the above prose commentary, just as he does in the second stanza of this poem, the poet emphasizes that it is not a religious entity but the individual himself who plays the principal role in his own creation; both the commentary and the poem reject the traditional religious perspectives.

A closer examination of the principal image of this stanza serves to clarify the theme as well. In addition to its normally understood meaning as “wing”, the definition of “ala” from the *Diccionario Real Academia Española* reads: “Osadía, libertad o engreimiento con que una persona hace su gusto....” This metonymic definition of the word represents the “ala” as the expression of the individual’s essence. The “espadaña azul” encloses this “ala,” the individual’s essence; it is thus analogous to the individual’s body and consciousness that enclose the individual’s essence.

The interpretation above corresponds with other writings of the poet. For example, the image in the phrase “esplendor de ala total en mi espadaña azul” is similar to that of the “teclado azul de mi estandarte” found in the poem “Cuando, de vez en noche...” from *Quince* (141). In that poem, the “estandarte” is the speaker’s mind (141). Just as the keyboard is the method of access to the sound of the piano, the steeple is the part of the church that directs the viewer’s eyes towards the heavens; both images metaphorically represent the speaker’s consciousness, and both contain the adjective “azul.”

In the last stanza, the speaker apostrophizes the steeple bell and his own lymph, and the word “divine” connects all three lines. The poem’s first two stanzas indicate that divinity lies within and not outside the individual, and the reader must bear this in mind as he unravels the metaphors of this last stanza. The “campana” is always found within the “espadaña,” so if the “espadaña” is human consciousness, then the “campana” is the individual’s essential self. This

essence is clothed in the “divine” robes of the human being’s corporeal and conscious being. The colon at the end of the stanza’s first line indicates that the last two lines of the stanza are a further clarification of this metaphorical description of man’s essence and existence: the lymph is divine because it sustains bodily functions to keep the body and brain alive, and the “cumbres” are divine because consciousness is the highest aspect of the human being. Finally, the lack of predicates render this last stanza a description of the nature of being, in contrast with the previous stanzas with their many predicates that deal with present and future actions. The stanza thus expresses the divine nature of the individual’s body as well as his consciousness and essence.

The poem’s theme is thus the negation of an external God as creator and the celebration of man as his own Creator, through his conscious actions. In the first stanza, the poet satirizes the idea of an external divinity and employs biblical language to postulate that the individual himself is responsible for his own creation. With the imperative clauses of the second stanza the poet stresses the importance of man’s conscious actions. These clauses command the reader to ignore satisfying distractions and exert the maximum intensity in his life. The third stanza emphasizes the divinity of man that exists in his physical body as well as in his spirit. The description of man’s divinity in the third stanza suggests that the paradise of the after-life that traditional religions promise may be achieved in this world, predicated on the individual’s commitment to his own creation and development. It is indeed possible for the individual to achieve that glorious trajectory of the drop of water in “Con su sogá oportuna,” if only he is willing to make the effort.

The poems of this section begin with the desire to experience life, and end with the action of experiencing life and achieving transcendence. “Con su sogá oportuna” illustrates the

individual's wish for a conscious life, and "Ah ser la triste oveja que ante el perro temible" extends and expands that wish to include all possible positive and negative experiences that it is possible to experience. "Jávele" suggests that the conscious individual can survive and persevere, despite the malevolent forces that surround one. Finally, "No el cadáver de Dios lo que medito" demonstrates that transcendence is possible, if one is willing to put forth all one's effort and consciousness to experience everything that life has to offer.

This chapter has analyzed various aspects of the death in poems from Rosenmann-Taub's tetralogy. "Orco" illustrates the total interpenetration of death and life, the omnipresence, mystery and transitory nature of death in a multiverse that is itself transitory. This abstract vision of the penetration of death throughout the multiverse takes on concrete form in "Arambeles..." with the images of tatters, dry riverbeds and human flesh that decays both before and after death. This poem and others illustrate the universal movement from life to death of both animate and inanimate objects: essentially, the entropic nature of the universe described in Newton's Second Law of Thermodynamics expressed in poetry. The conflation of death and life is depicted at the microcosmic, human and cosmic levels in both the temporal and spatial domains, in "De vuelta a los rosales....," and the urge towards death that is omnipresent throughout nature finds its expression in "La zampoña serena," a poem that also portrays nature's duplicity in foisting its agenda on the human being.

Rosenmann-Taub is particularly concerned with how this movement towards death manifests itself in mankind: poems such as "Endriago encabritado" and "Físico" focus specifically on the presence of death and the movement towards death in the human being. "Cierto, el mismo descaro" and "Rapsodia" concretely demonstrate how this movement towards death in the individual starts at the moment of birth. His poems also show how the individual

colludes with the forces of nature as he consciously seeks death. “Cómo me gustaría...” is a plea for death as surcease from the hardships of life in a world so horrific as to be unbearable.

Similarly, poems like “Dominio,” “Aerolito,” “El ligero carruaje de la noche” and “Con su sogá oportuna me ahorca” all demonstrate mankind’s conscious desire for death and rejection of life.

Nevertheless, the poet is not totally pessimistic. Interspersed with the above poems in the tetralogy are also poems where he concedes the possibility that the individual may live a conscious life. In “Con su sogá oportuna” the speaker admires the consciousness of a humble drop of water and wishes for the gloriousness of that drop’s conscious life. “Ah ser la triste oveja que ante el perro temible” expresses the speaker’s desire to extend himself to his limits, to experience all that is both positive and negative in the world. “Jávele” expresses the ability of the human being to survive and manifest himself/herself, despite the menaces of an unfriendly world. Finally, in poems like “No el cadaver de Dios lo que medito” from *El Zócalo* and “Autoalabanza” from *Quince*, Rosenmann-Taub expresses the concept that the generative force for creation that is generally attributed to an external God lies within the individual, that his role is to create himself, and that the human being does indeed have the capacity to achieve “divine heights,” through consciousness, will and action.

CHAPTER 3

DEATH AND PERMANENCE

This chapter examines Rosenmann-Taub's multiple views of life after death throughout *Cortejo y Epinicio* and *Quince*. The poet's vision rejects both the nihilistic view of death as well as conventional religious views of death. Instead, starting with the viewpoint that the non-being of death may be as rich and varied as the state of being of life, he proposes a multitude of possibilities that span the gamut from a virtually existential concept of death that views it as the cessation of almost all material and spiritual existence on the one hand, to the imaginary continuation of a fully developed individual consciousness after death on the other. For the poet, just as death co-exists simultaneously with life during the life of the individual, life can co-exist simultaneously with death as well.

The poet's vision of life after death may be grouped into four areas. The first category of poems presents a view of death that approaches the existential perspective. Life after death is, or at the very least approaches, the total absence of being: man comes from nothing when he is born and returns to nothing when he dies. These poems depict the afterlife in terms of sleep, dream, shadow, echo, dust, memory, or negation. The second category of poems illustrates the poet's many imaginative views of death, distinct from conventional religious views and with or without a corporeal presence. The human essence may take the form of a corpse, a gob of spit, a swamp, a disembodied voice, the glow of light or a star. A third category of poems on death refers to the afterlife as an integral part of the eternal cycle of death and procreation in nature. Here, the poems employ phenomena from Nature to depict this version of the after-life. In a final

category of poems Rosenmann-Taub accords full powers of consciousness to the human being, even after his death. In these poems, the dead person may be the speaking subject of the poem, the interlocutor in a dialogue with the speaker, or an entity apostrophized by the speaker in a monologue. This chapter will analyze poems from each category in order to comprehend and appreciate the entire span of the poet's views in this domain.

1. The Existential Perspective: Views of Life after Death

In many of Rosenmann-Taub's poems that treat the theme of life in death, only a remnant of the human being remains after death, sometimes so small as to barely exist. In these poems, the poet seems to approach the existentialist perspective. However, this remaining remnant, no matter how small and insignificant, is the essential part of the human being. This essentialist view of the human condition distances Rosenmann-Taub from twentieth-century existentialist thought.

The first poem we examine is XVIII, from Rosenmann-Taub's *El Mensajero*. "Tú –rumor –atisbas..." Since the poem exemplifies the enormous range of possibilities for life and consciousness after death, it is a good starting point for the chapter.

XVIII

Tú – rumor – atisbas:	You – rumor – observe:
mástil de los límites:	mast of limits;
aspa	cross
de la encina.	of the holm oak.
Yo: cobijo manco:	I: one-armed shelter:
lance de afufones:	fleeting occurrence:
ni cuarzo, ni albatros.	neither quartz nor albatross.
Tú: incienso.	You: incense.
Yo: sombra.	I: shadow.
Plenitudes: tú:	Abundances: you:
potestad azul.	blue power.
Yo – sombra sin sombra -	I – shadow without shadow –

vadeándote iré.	will go, fording you.
De la encina, oreo,	From the holm oak, I dry out,
tú, en la sobrecopa:	you, above the treetop:

promontorio: eclipse:	promontory: eclipse:
norte de los nortes:	north of the norths:
aspa de las aspás:	cross of the crosses:
oblación: bajel,	offering: ship,
también eres sombra.	you are also a shadow.

The poem is a monologue in which the speaker addresses an unknown and silent interlocutor. The poet develops the poem's thematic elements through a series of paradoxical and opposing metaphors that alternately describe the speaker and his interlocutor.

At the mimetic level of reading, the poem contrasts two states of being: that of the speaker and that of the holm oak. The speaker first addresses this unknown entity as "rumor," perhaps due to the faint sound of the rustling of its leaves and branches in the wind; and with the word "atisbas" suggests that, given its height, it is well poised to observe. Rooted in the ground, it is a "mast of limits." The "aspa" or cross of the holm oak is its branches; like the sails of a windmill, they extend out from its trunk, forming crosses with the trunk in the form of an "x." The first stanza's fourth line finally identifies the interlocutor as the holm oak.

Further descriptions of the tree follow in the second and third stanzas. It is "incense" and "abundances," due to its sweet aroma and its foliage; and it is a "blue power," perhaps because it touches the sky.

The imagery in the third stanza now attributes human attributes to the holm oak. The word "copa" refers to the top of the tree, and the poet uses a neologism, "sobrecopa" to indicate the airspace above the "copa." Accordingly, when he writes, "tú, en la sobrecopa:" he seems to infer that the holm oak is more than just its visible structure. Like human beings, it may also

have consciousness, and that consciousness, its “tú” (its being) resides in the “sobrecopa,” above its physical being.

The last stanza describes the holm oak in greater detail, with imagery that gives it superhuman characteristics. The tree is a promontory, projecting out from the earth, and an eclipse, a rare occurrence that casts a large shadow. As the “north of the norths,” it is a metaphorical compass that can point the individual in the right direction. With this image, Rosenmann-Taub may be alluding to concepts from Classical antiquity: the ancient Greeks used the leaves of the holm oak both to foretell the future and also as crowns for people of distinction, so in both those senses, the holm oak is the “north of the norths,” giving the correct direction to the individual. With its lush foliage, the holm oak is “the sail of the sails.” It is an offering, the offering of nature to man. At the same time, like all living beings, the tree is a ship in the sense that all make the same journey and all these journeys have the same terminus: death. Finally, also like mankind the holm oak is a shadow: in appearance, it is substantial, but in reality, like the human being, it is ephemeral and will ultimately perish. The poet understands the holm oak as a living being, superior to mankind, but ultimately facing the same end.

At the mimetic level of reading, the poem contrasts the substance, consciousness and plenitude of the holm oak with the shadow, temporality and mortality incarnated in the speaker, although ultimately conceding that the holm oak is no less immune to death than the speaker. However, ungrammaticalities abound in this interpretation, since the poet attributes human and even superhuman attributes and capacities to a species that is at a lower biological level than that of the human being. A reading of the poem at the hermeneutic level produces a more consistent and coherent interpretation.

In the poem's first three lines, the speaker both apostrophizes and describes his interlocutor. The metaphor "rumor" highlights the uncertainty of the reality of this unknown entity. Nevertheless, since he is addressing this entity, the speaker attributes auditory capacity and intelligence to it and, with the word "observe," the ability to see and evaluate as well, which requires vision and judgment. So the "rumor" may well be a human being, not the holm oak that the mimesis indicates.

Coupled with the idea that the "rumor" is a human being, the abundance of Biblical imagery throughout the poem and, in particular, the striking contrast between the speaker and his interlocutor leads to a different version of the poem's significance: the description of the holm oak is a series of metonyms that describe the highest level of consciousness in the human species: Jesus Christ. Rosenmann-Taub employs the figure of Jesus Christ as an example of fully developed consciousness in many of the poems from *Quince*; in these poems Jesus Christ is presented as a man, and not as the Son of God, and this seems to be a viable interpretation in this poem as well. We examine formal and semantic structures to show how the poet develops this hidden interpretation.

The poet generally uses a colon or series of colons to equate phrases that precede and follow them; in this way, not only does he reveal and amplify his poetic concepts with the minimum of words, but also the phrases connected by colons form an isotopy, since they all refer to the same referent. The colon at the end of the poem's first line indicates that the following lines are all clarifications of this "rumor." The "Mast of limits" and the "aspa de la encina" are the two images that characterize this rumor that is a human being. The "Mast of limits" is itself a paradox, since masts reach to the sky; this mast, limited, doesn't reach to the sky but is instead

tied to the earth. Like the holm oak, planted in the ground, this metaphorical human being also has his feet planted in the ground; however, this is a man who reaches to the sky as well.

The line “cross of the holm oak” may also be interpreted metaphorically. Holly is the tree from which Christ’s cross was made, and is a subspecies of the holm oak. The word “aspa” means “cross,” but it also refers to the sail of a windmill. So, the “mast of limits” may refer to the holly tree, the Cross, and the “aspa de la encina,” the “sail of the holly tree,” may then be considered the body of Jesus Christ, since he was tied to the Cross just as the sail is tied to the mast. This interpretation finds further support later in the poem, when the poet describes his interlocutor as “aspa de los aspas.”

In addition to the interpretation of the “aspa” as a sail, it may also be interpreted as a cross; and in relation to our second interpretation, *the* Cross. The “aspa,” as a cross, is typically in the form of an “x,” as noted in the first interpretation, and since it is on a diagonal, the Cross itself can be thought of as crucified. If we accept this interpretation, then the poet is directing our attention to Jesus Christ the man, not the son of God: like the holly tree, he is earthly, a “mast of limits,” and his Cross, crucified, loses its potency as a religious sign at the same time that it identifies him as the Christ.

Thus, the “aspa” as a sail refers to Jesus Christ on the Cross; and the “aspa” as a cross refers to a Cross that is itself crucified and impotent. In both cases, the metaphor of the first line may now be interpreted as above: the “Tú” is Jesus Christ, not as the Son of God, but as a man. His existence, as a rumor, is unverifiable, but to the speaker in his dramatic monologue, Christ does indeed exist. He hears, sees, and observes; with his feet planted on the ground, he reaches for the sky; tied to the Cross like the sail to its mast and on a deformed Cross that suggests the impotence of religion, he is first and foremost a man and not a divine entity.

Contrasting his own being with that of Christ, the speaker describes himself with another series of paradoxical metaphors. He is first a “one-armed shelter,” that is, a shelter that is not a shelter or, at the very least, an ineffectual shelter. This metaphor contrasts the false shelter of the human being with the true shelter of Christ. Then, the speaker describes himself as a fleeting occurrence, contrasting the ephemeral nature of the human being with the eternal nature of Christ. As “ni quarzo, ni albatros,” the speaker contrasts his being with that of Christ in two ways. Quartz is the only stone of the mineral kingdom that can be programmed to carry a vibration other than that which it was naturally given; metaphorically speaking, Christ is the only being who can fully enter into the “vibration” of the other. Finally, the albatross is itself a Christ symbol, as employed by Coleridge in his *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.¹⁵ In the succeeding two lines, the speaker once again contrasts the plenitudes of his interlocutor with the deficiencies of his own being: the former is a fragrant and pleasing aroma while the latter is total insubstantiality. With all these metaphors, the poet demonstrates and contrasts the insubstantiality of ordinary mankind with the richness that Christ contains, even in death.

At the end of the second stanza and the beginning of the third, the next set of contrasts is comprised of four lines: two for the interlocutor, and two for the speaker. First, the speaker describes Christ as “Plenitudes: tú: / potestad azul.” Here, Christ is symbolized as abundance and authority. The color blue symbolizes not only royalty and tranquility, but also learning: Christ taught wearing blue robes. For the poet, the color blue also has a special meaning: it seems to signify consciousness. As seen earlier, he writes “en el teclado azul de mi estandarte” and “esplendor de ala total en mi espadaña azul” to refer to human consciousness. With this understanding, this last line might well be understood as “conscious power.”

In contrast to Christ, the next two lines describe the speaker: “Yo—sombra sin sombra— / vadeándote iré.” The first line describes the speaker, even in his condition as a living human being, as almost nothingness, a “shadow without a shadow.” In the next line, the verb “vadeándote” suggests that the human being passes through Christ as an individual might ford a stream. The verb *iré* – “I will go” in Spanish – contains the idea of going toward a destination; thus, one might conclude that humanity goes to Christ through Christ. In the strictly religious sense, this might mean that the individual goes toward salvation in the next world through Christian acts in this world; in Rosenmann-Taub’s worldview, it more probably signifies that the individual becomes fully conscious through daily acts of consciousness, and/or that he attains consciousness through heeding the example of Christ the man.

In this last stanza the speaker commences his last series of metaphors. Christ is a promontory: a being that stands out from other beings, just as the promontory is distinct from the land mass to which it is connected. He is an eclipse: a rare occurrence that reveals a different reality, as well as one that casts a long shadow. He is not just a compass, pointing to true north, he *is* the true north. He is the true sail, on the ship that can carry the individual to salvation. He is the offering to God as penance for the sins of humanity. He is the ship upon which one travels as one makes his journey through life.

And finally, Christ is also a shadow: a man, like the rest of mankind. With this last paradoxical metaphor the speaker has come full circle. The “Tú” that at the beginning is only a murmur, takes on reality and then divinity over the course of the poem, becomes man’s “compass” and his hope for salvation in the last stanza; however in the poem’s last line, this “Tú” is revealed to be “also a shadow.” The speaker does not negate all that he has indicated previously; he doesn’t say “only a shadow.” Jesus Christ is all that the speaker has indicated,

and in addition, he is also a man. The poet recognizes in this last line the simultaneous existence of the eternal Christ and the ephemeral Christ, the presence of Christ that has transcended his physiological death in the form of his teachings, and the man himself.

Thus, when read at the hermeneutic level, the metaphorical and metonymic images of the poem are unified in their portrayal of the poem's significance: the contrast between Jesus Christ and the rest of mankind, along with the realization that he is also a man, the same as the rest of mankind.

The prosodic and phonological patterns of the poem reinforce its semantic elements. The poem contains four lines with masculine rhymes. The first two are located in the center of the poem, the tenth and eleventh lines: "Plenitudes: tú. / Potestad azul," and have the same rhyme scheme as well as the same accentuation. The poet directs our attention to the consciousness of the speaker's interlocutor, by stressing the "tú" and the "ázul" of these two contiguous lines. The other two lines are "vadeándote iré" and "oblación: bajel." In both of these lines, also connected both by the rhyme pattern and "verso agudo" accentuation, the poet highlights the isotopy of travel. In the first line the speaker goes, fording Christ; and in the second line, Christ is the "bajel," the ship that the speaker may figuratively "board," using the consciousness of Christ as an example, on his journey through life.

The typographical construction of the poem also lends weight to this interpretation. The first stanza appears visually in the form of an "x," with the word "aspa" at the intersection of the two lines that form the "x." The poet thus highlights the importance of the word "aspa" visually; in doing so, he makes it the central metaphor of the poem. This now seems to privilege the second interpretation of the two given here. If the "aspa" is both a representation of the Cross and of Jesus Christ tied to the Cross, it appears more likely that the poet does not employ the

symbol of the holm oak literally in the poem but rather as a metaphorical representation of Jesus Christ.

As illustrated in this poem, the poet's vision of life after death can be rich beyond comparison. For Christ, the afterlife is a period of observation, of abundance and of heavenly power; it is a period in which he can be a spiritual guide to mankind, and a path to mankind's salvation on its journey through life. Yet the poem's first line states that even for Christ, the afterlife may be rumor, and the last line indicates that like other men, he is a shadow as well. Nevertheless, even as a shadow in death, the poet seems to suggest that he has far more substance than ordinary man, who even in life is nothing more than a "shadow without a shadow."

So the poet's vision of life after death in this poem spans the entire spectrum of possibility. On the one hand, death for the ordinary man renders him no more than the shadow of the "shadow without a shadow" that he is in life. On the other hand, for a man who has reached the level of development of Jesus Christ, the afterlife may be one of the "incienso," "plenitudes" and "potestad azul" that appear at the very heart of the poem.

The poem "Cómo me gustaría..." already analyzed in the first chapter as an expression of the human being's conscious desire for death, returns in this chapter as another example of poems that describe a wide range of possibilities of life after death. I repeat only the first six stanzas of the poem below:

LXIII

Cómo me gustaría ser esa oscura ciénaga,
libre de lo de ayer, qué alivio, oscura ciénaga
dejar correr el tiempo. ¡La más oscura ciénaga!

Cómo me gustaría jamás haber nacido,
libre de lo de ayer, jamás haber nacido,

How I would like to be that dark swamp,
free from yesterday, what relief, dark swamp,
to let the time pass. The darkest swamp!

How I would like to never have been born,
free from yesterday, to never have been born,

dejar correr el tiempo, jamás haber nacido.

to let the time pass, to never have been born.

Cómo me gustaría lograr morirme ahora,
libre de lo de ayer, lograr morirme ahora,
dejar correr el tiempo, lograr morirme ahora.

How I would like to be able to die now,
free from yesterday, to be able to die now,
to let the time pass, to be able to die now.

Cómo me gustaría rodar por el vacío,
libre de lo de ayer, rodar por el vacío,
dejar correr el tiempo, rodar por el vacío.

How I would like to wander through the void,
free from yesterday, to wander through the void,
to let the time pass, to wander through the void.

Cómo me gustaría ser el cero del polvo,
libre de lo de ayer, ser el cero del polvo,
dejar correr el tiempo, ser el cero del polvo.

How I would like to be the zero of dust,
free from yesterday, to be the zero of dust,
to let the time pass, to be the zero of dust.

Para no cavilarme, para no volver nunca,
Dios mío, yo creyera en Ti para no ser.
Cavíleme en tu nada, no me hagas volver nunca.

To not reflect, to never return,
My God, I would believe in you in order not to be.
To reflect on your nothingness, don't make
me ever return.

¡Dios mío, yo creyera para nunca creer! (91) My God, I would believe in order to never believe!

As we have already seen in the previous chapter, the speaker pleads for escape from a life which he never wanted in a world that he finds unbearable; the more he is conscious of the life and world in which he finds himself, the more he desires the state of non-being that is death. In this poem, he imagines this state in many ways; the images of death may be divided into two major categories.

The first category is that of the cessation of existence and the state of non-being: the existential view. In phrases such as “olvidarte, Dios mío,” “lograr morirme ahora.” “¡No me hagas volver nunca!” “yo creyera para nunca creer!” the speaker, alive, expresses his desire to die: he wishes the oblivion that comes with death rather than continued existence in this world, as a relief from the horror that his consciousness brings him. Also, in phrases like “ser el cero del polvo,” “jamás haber nacido,” the speaker pleads not to be, nor ever to have existed. The poet’s choice of the conditional tense along with the exclamations and textual repetitions all

implicitly suggest that what the speaker so fervently wishes may not be possible. Also, the very intensity of his plea seems to belie the possibility of its success.

The other category of death images may be termed, “the transcendence of the physical and temporal world.” The speaker asks to “be without being:” “ser la más oscura ciénaga,” “dejar correr el tiempo,” “rodar por el vacío,” and “cavíame en tu nada.” Now, life is present in death; the speaker imagines that he still exists and acts as he does in life, even though he is no longer alive. He wants to be a swamp, to let time run, to wander through the void and to reflect on himself in the nothingness of God. Even though the speaker wishes for oblivion, the poetic lines are replete with verbs of being and action, both of which imply consciousness; with the verbs “ser,” “dejar correr,” “rodar” and “cavíame” the speaker imagines that his consciousness continues in some form or another, even after the death of the body.

I include the images from this poem in this chapter to illustrate again that Rosenmann-Taub’s concepts of life after death have a wide range of possibilities: all the way from the nothingness of “jamás haber nacido” and “el cero del polvo” to the images that suggest being and consciousness: “rodar por el vacío” and “cavíame en tu nada.” Although they vary in their portrayal of the afterlife, the images in this poem are nevertheless for the most part quite intangible, most probably Rosenmann-Taub’s way of expressing the intangibility of existence after death.

The poem “¿Posteridad?” from *La Opción* deals directly and exclusively with the theme of life after death, attempting to answer the question of what lies beyond.

VIII

¿Posteridad?
Superávit? ¿Decoro?
¿Interin? ¿Otra etapa
de anulación? ¿Reposo?

Posterity?
Surplus? Decorum?
Interim? Another stage
of annulation? Repose?

La máquina
se desbandó.
Se empalará:
mondongo.

*
* *

Oh
tizne,
te diriges
impersuasiblemente hacia tu No (20).

The machine
Scattered.
It will become stiff:
Tripe.

*
* *

Oh
soot,
you go
unpersuasively towards your No.

The first stanza of this poem consists of a series of metonyms that appear to share an unknown tenor. All of the interrogations could have “the nature of death” as their subject. Through the process of abduction, we hypothesize that death is the central tenor/isotopy of the poem, that the poem’s significance is “the nature of death,” and that the ungrammaticalities that appear throughout the poem are variants of this significance that describe the various characteristics of death at the hermeneutic level of reading.¹⁶ We now analyze each of the images to establish the validity of our hypothesis, and fully comprehend the poet’s view of this state of being.

With his first question, “¿Posteridad?” the speaker asks if the essence of death is the legacy that the individual leaves for future generations: material goods and possessions, memories and images, and/or his descendants. The next image of life after death comes with the question “¿Superavit?” If the individual’s life totally ceases with death, then his physical remains are only a “surplus,” since the essential aspect of his life no longer exists. On the other hand, the word “superavit” is a combination of “super” and “vita,” and as already noted above, Rosenmann-Taub employs internal words to expand the meaning of his poems. With this word,

the poet seems to be questioning whether death is a form of life that exceeds ordinary life, a “super-life.”

With the questions “¿Decoro?,” “¿Interin?” “¿Otra etapa de anulación?” and “¿Reposo?” the speaker proposes other conceptions of death. Perhaps death is simply an extreme form of politeness; a way to spare the individual’s family and friends the pain of his continued existence. It might be an interim stage: a state of non-being between two states of being. Perhaps death is “another stage of annulment;” the word “another” here implies that life may be one stage of annulment and death is “another stage.” Or,, the speaker may be saying that the original “stage of annulment” was that period before birth. Regardless of whether the earlier stage of annulment was the individual’s life or the period before his life, death is a stage that cancels out everything that the individual has done during his or her lifetime. Finally, perhaps death is just a time of rest, after all the hard work that life entails is completed.

Instead of questions and speculations, the second stanza now, describes as precisely as possible the physical state of death. The phrase “The machine scattered” describes the human body as a machine that became disorganized after death. The body becomes rigid after death; all that remains is the flesh, symbolized by one’s innards.

In the last stanza, the speaker addresses the body’s final remains with the words, “Oh / tizne, / te diriges / impersuasiblemente hacia tu No.” Rosenmann-Taub’s phrase “...tu No” infers that even in this final stage of disappearance, something remains. The poem expresses a sequence of events in the death of the human being which render his corporeal mass ever more intangible: first, the death of the body, then its cremation and conversion to ashes, then the soot from the cremation, the most ethereal of the body’s remains. In the last stage of this sequence of disappearance, the soot itself “impersuadably” desires to negate its own existence. Nevertheless,

the phrase phrase "...tu No" infers that even in this final stage of disappearance, something remains: what remains is not nothingness, not even a negation in general, but the negation of what that unique human being was in life. The speaker directs his words to an interlocutor who has died, been cremated, is almost completely intangible and is becoming something that he wasn't when he was alive... but nevertheless an entity who still seems to have sufficient consciousness to be the speaker's interlocutor. Regardless of the many questions and suppositions that question what remains of the individual after his death in the first stanza, despite the physical death of the body as described in the second stanza, and notwithstanding the movement towards negation in the last stanza, some essential part of the human being still exists. The poet doesn't know what form the afterlife may take; he doesn't know if something or nothing will exist after one's physiological death; but what he does affirm is that since the body no longer exists, the afterlife will be different from life as we know it: in some way, a negation of the life we live now.

Thus, the "nature of death" that is the poem's significance unifies all of its semantic elements. The hypotheses that constitute the interrogatory metonyms of the first stanza contrast with the objective descriptions of the second and third stanzas; and the descriptions of death in these last two stanzas gain greater force as a result. Death is first, the dispersion of the body's physical elements after death, second, the rigidity of even that part of the body that contains the most life force, and finally, the uncompromising movement of the self toward its negation.

Although its theme is quite different from the poems above, "Rapsodia" from *Quince* expresses a similar concept of death. In this poem, the speaker envisions a childhood scene with his school friends, his teacher, and his future wife, then cries,

¡Ayúdenme	Help me
a acordarme!	to remember!
Cienbillones de siglos	Hundreds of billions of centuries
o ayer: no queda nadie	or yesterday: nobody remains
ni el señor profesor,	not Mr. teacher,
ni un compañero,	nor a comrade,
ni, por supuesto, yo;	nor, of course, me;
ni Elbirita...	nor Elbirita...

The speaker looks back on his past, from a vantage point of what he hyperbolically calls hundreds of billions of centuries, or from yesterday, a point in time where nobody remains, and asks for help in remembering. Nothing remains, with the exception of his memory, now failing, and his reader. In his own commentary on this poem in *Quince*, Rosenmann-Taub says,

¿Quién – quiénes – platicaba – platicaban -? Mi memoria, no yo: función sin órgano: horra de período determinado, conciencia de memoria: memoria de memoria: ‘Uste(d)es, que me escuchan – (que me contemplan) que me leen -, ¡ayúdenme a acordarme! (56)’

Who—was/were talking—talking? My memory, not me: a function without an organ: it erases from a determined period, the consciousness of memory: memory of memory: “You, who listen to me (who contemplate me) who read me—, help me to remember!”

He concludes his commentary with the following:

El poema – leyenda (de hace cienbillones de siglos) o mito (de ayer) – nos alcanza. La memoria de la memoria de la memoria es el *rapsodia* que canta la escolar odisea de Elbirita-Elvira en el favorable/defavorable imperio divino – el periplo de vivir: la intemporal rapsodia de la realidad temporal – (64).

The poem—legend (of one hundred billion years ago) or myth (of yesterday)—reaches us. The memory of the memory of the memory is the rhapsody that sings the school odyssey of Elbirita-Elvira in the favorable/unfavorable divine empire—the voyage of living: the intemporal rhapsody of temporal reality—.

Despite the end of the speaker's physical existence, long ago, the legend/myth/memory continues to exist. The speaker continues to live as long as the "memory of the memory of the memory" exists; and the rhapsody of temporal reality, the journey of life, is atemporal, eternal.

The four poems analyzed in this section all vary widely in their presentations of the after-life. The poet's vision ranges from the abundance of Jesus Christ to the shadow of a "shadow without shadow" in "Tú – rumor – atisbas," and from the "cero de polvo" of "Cómo me gustaría" and the "memoria de la memoria de la memoria" of "Rapsodia" to the negation of being in "¿Posteridad?," with a multitude of possibilities in between these two extremes. The poet in each of these poems presents the possibility that nothing remains after death. However, the common thread that runs throughout all these poems is that the death of the body does not signify the entire death of the human being. The desire for nothingness and the movement towards oblivion is always present. At the same time, even in these poems that tend towards an existential viewpoint of death, there is nevertheless some unexplainable countervailing force that supports life and consciousness, a force that combats and overcomes this desire. The shadow of a "shadow without a shadow" is, nonetheless still a shadow. The desires to never have been born, to not believe, and to never return remain unfulfilled. And the wisp of a memory resists the forces of nature that have wanted to erase it for hundreds of billions of years. The poet approaches the existential position; but he never quite reaches it; instead the poems always search for and detect a manifestation of essence in the individual. The underlying conclusion is that essence is eternal.

2. Imaginative Views of Life After Death

The poems examined so far have already illustrated a number of unconventional views of the poet in his perception of the afterlife. This next section will discuss poems that have even

more imaginative views of death; life after death may be a disembodied consciousness, a gleam of light symbolizing illumination, a swamp, a star, or even another unimaginable state of being.

“PRELUDIO” is the first poem of *El Zócalo* and also of the tetralogy *Cortejo y Epinicio*; with its unique vision of life after death it is a fitting poem with which to commence this category.

I.

PRELUDIO

Después, después, el viento entre dos cimas,
y el hermano alacrán que se encabrita,
y las mareas rojas sobre el día.
Voraz volcán: aureola sin imperio.
El buitre morirá: laxo castigo.
Después, después, el himno entre dos víboras.
Después, la noche que no conocemos
y, extendido en lo nunca, un solo cuerpo
callado como luz. Después, el viento (21).

After, after, the wind between two peaks,
and the brother scorpion that rears up,
and the red tides over the day.
Voracious volcano: aura without empire.
The vulture will die: lax punishment.
After, after, the hymn between two vipers.
After, the night that we don't know
and, extended in the never, a lone body
silent like light. After, the wind.

Rosenmann-Taub himself explains the poem's first three lines in the following words:

El primer verso de "*Preludio*": "*Después, después el viento entre dos cimas*". Usted, como yo, ha nacido en este planeta. ¿Cuándo empezó usted, Patricio? Usted empezó a tener conciencia de usted mismo *después*. Todo es *después*. No hay "antes". Usted se informa de lo que le gusta, de lo que le disgusta, siempre, *después*. Nuestras percepciones son siempre posteriores: imposible la simultaneidad temporal. Estamos *después*, incluso *después de después*. Yo, como cualquier ser humano, me enteré de mi vocación *después*. Y el movimiento hacia el mundo exterior e interior, con todas sus dificultades y facilidades – toda la energía que representa estar aquí –, ocurre *entre dos cimas*. Enfrentamos *dos cimas*: hacer lo que tenemos que hacer, o no hacerlo. Y desde el punto de vista de *Cortejo y Epinicio*, mi vocación se halla *entre dos cimas*: un comienzo que desconozco y un final que también desconozco.

Desde el punto de vista de la memoria – elaboración y creatividad –, una *cima* es cuanto he presenciado, siempre *después*; la otra, expresarlo *después*.

...*el hermano alacrán que se encabrita*: el-que-parece-ser contra el-que-soy. Necesito luchar para verdaderamente ser uno con mi vocación. Y conseguirlo interna y externamente. Todos contamos con un hermano alacrán, que no quiere que suceda lo que nos proponemos.

En general, el maltratado es el hermano del *hermano alacrán*: tal como se vive, sucede *el hermano alacrán*, no el otro hermano, el realmente real. Estamos rodeados de *hermanos alacranes*. No sólo internos. También externos. La naturaleza, así como quiere que haya creación, pone todo de su parte para que no la haya. Constantemente la naturaleza nos ofrece un vaso perverso. Tenemos que defendernos. Amenazando ahogarnos en la sangre del universo, ese vaso, durante nuestra existencia aquí, intenta echar, de cualquier modo, su líquido en nuestra boca, para ahogarnos en nuestra propia sangre. Cuando un hombre decide "ser", se hace conciente de las *mareas rojas*, del *hermano alacrán*, de las *dos cimas*.

Éste uno de los niveles de sentido de los primeros tres versos de "*Preludio*". La poesía no existe si tiene un solo nivel. Expresar las cosas en un solo nivel es periodismo. La meta del periodismo: lograr exactitud en un solo nivel. Lo opuesto a la poesía, que puede contener periodismo, como un aspecto. (Rojas, 1)

The first line of "Prelude": "After, after the wind between two peaks". You, like me, were born on this planet. When did you begin, Patricio? You began to be aware of yourself "after." Everything is "after." There is no "before". It's always "after" that you find out what you like, what you dislike. Our perceptions always lag: simultaneity is impossible. We are "after", even "after after". I, like every human being, discovered my vocation "after." And the movement towards the exterior and interior world, with all its difficulties and easiness – all the energy that being here represents – happens between two peaks. We face "two peaks:" that of doing what we have to do, or that of not doing it.

And from the point of view of *Cortejo y Epinicio*, my vocation happens between two peaks: a beginning that I do not know and an end that I do not know either. From the point of view of memory – elaboration and creativity – one peak is what I have witnessed, always "after;" the other is expressing it, "after."

"...and the brother scorpion that rears up:" the-one-who-seems-to-be versus the-one-who-I-am. I need to struggle in order to be truly one with my vocation. And to attain it internally and externally. We all have a "brother scorpion," who does not want us to fulfill our goals.

In general, the one who is ill-treated is the brother of the "brother scorpion;" given how most people live, it is the "brother scorpion" who prospers, not the other brother, the really real one. We are surrounded by "brother scorpions." It's not just internal ones. Also external ones. Nature, while wanting there to be creation, does everything it can so that there won't be. Nature constantly offers us a perverse glass. We have to defend ourselves. Threatening to

drown us in the blood of the universe, this glass, during our existence here, tries to pour its liquid however it can into our mouth, in order to drown us in our own blood. When a man decides "to be," he becomes conscious of the "red tides," of the "brother scorpion," of the "two peaks."

This is one of the levels of meaning of the first three lines of "Prelude." Poetry does not exist if it has only one level. To express things on only one level is journalism. The aim of journalism is to achieve exactitude on a single level. The opposite of poetry, which can contain journalism as one of its aspects (Rojas, 1).

In Rosenmann-Taub's commentary, what initially seems a surreal landscape of death is instead a metaphorical description of the confrontation between life, the unconsciousness that for the human being is death, and the forces of nature that push him to that death. Coupled with the examination of the poem's phonological and lexical isotopies, this interpretation combines its seemingly disparate elements into a unified text.

The first three lines address the internal and external challenges that man faces throughout the course of his life. Between the peak of life in which he pursues his true vocation and that of death in which he ignores it, the individual has only his consciousness to assist him in this struggle against the powerful internal and external forces of nature that try to dominate him. Without that consciousness he is lost: like the "Endriago encabritado" analyzed previously, the "hermano alacrán" of this poem "se encabrita" to dominate his "brother," the individual's real being. The Other inside us, that force of nature that wants to destroy us, "rears up," an uncontrolled monster, to lead us to the death of unconscious life.

The assonant rhyme "i-a" that links the first three lines appears in the sixth line, and the first and sixth lines are related anaphorically as well; once again, phonological elements connect semantic elements to confirm this isotopy of man's confrontation with death in these four lines. Yet whereas in the first three lines it is the flawed human being who struggles to find his vocation despite the forces of nature aligned against him, the sixth line describes a divine

presence, a “hymn,” that is no longer between two peaks but now between two “vipers.” For Rosenmann-Taub, divinity is consciousness. “No el cadáver de Dios lo que medito...” describes man as his own Creator, through his consciousness, will and action. Also, in Poem XXIV from *El Zócalo*, the poet writes, “Era yo Dios y caminaba sin saberlo...,” (56) once again relating divinity to consciousness. In this poem, the “hymn” again manifests a divine presence that seems to be consciousness. In contrast, the two vipers are the forces of nature described in the second and third lines—one of the external world and the other inside the individual—that constantly try to erase this consciousness. Alternatively, the vipers may symbolize the unconsciousness that renders the individual lifeless throughout his life and the physiological death that takes him at the end of his life. Both interpretations echo the significance of the first three lines: conscious life confronts death.

The poem contains a second phonological isotopy: the assonant rhyme “e-o” that links the fourth, seventh, eighth and ninth lines. Whereas the first isotopy is that of conscious life confronting death, the four lines of this second isotopy treat only death. One of nature’s most violent displays of power, the volcano is “voraz,” existing to swallow up and destroy life. Of all our nights, “La noche que no conocemos” is that of death, the only night from which we don’t awake. “Extendido en lo nunca” refers to the eternity of death that is diametrically opposed to the temporality of life, and the phrase “un solo cuerpo” of that same line also alludes to death, since the reference to the physical body again connotes the absence of consciousness that is death. Finally, the poem’s ending, “Después, el viento” is one more reference, to the aftermath of death.

Significantly, there is only one body that is “quiet like light.” As the poet repeatedly demonstrates in *Quince*, and as we have already seen in “Tú—rumor—atisbas...,” the figure of

Jesus Christ is for the poet the concrete manifestation of the realization of man's potential. The poet's focus on this unique "body," distinct from all the other cadavers that result from man's mortality, again suggests the presence of Christ. In the darkness of the night of death, this body is "callado como luz:" its silence is like light, and in the context of the poem, the light seems to symbolize the light of consciousness and not the light of the electromagnetic spectrum. The use of synaesthesia to imbue silence with light recalls "Orco," in which appear the lines "Para penetrar todo, expresas nada"; in that poem as well, death and silence bring the illumination of comprehension. This poem also presents the idea that consciousness continues after the death of the body and that silence is a key ingredient.

Situated in the center of the poem, the fifth line does not rhyme with any other. Instead, "El buitre morirá" marks the transition between the first part of the poem that treats the theme of life and the last part that treats the theme of death. Between these two isotopies stands the vulture: a scavenger bird that subsists on carrion. Tied to the unthinking part of nature with his habitual and unconscious behavior, the vulture represents death in life; his death is a "laxo castigo" since he is already lifeless from the point of view of consciousness. A good illustration of this "laxo castigo" appears in "Asfódelo," the next poem of the chapter. This poem takes its name from the Asphodel Meadows, the domain of Hades where individuals without consciousness in life reside as unconscious automatons after death. For these individuals, death is also a "lax punishment," since without consciousness, death and life are no different.

The preceding analysis reveals the poem's symmetry. The first three lines and the sixth line speak of different aspects of life, the last three lines and the fourth line speak of different aspects of death, and the fifth line, the central line of the poem, speaks of the unconscious life that may be considered either life or death.

Other internal symmetries also exist. Surrounding the center of the poem, the sixth line (“el himno”) expresses the epitome of life in the first isotopy, while the fourth line (“Voraz volcán”) expresses the epitome of death in the second. A third symmetry is also present. The first three lines express concepts of life and the last three express concepts of death, so it appears that there is a general movement from life to death throughout the poem. However, the middle three lines express the simultaneous movement from absolute death (“el volcán”) to unconscious life (“el buitre”), to the divinity of fully conscious life (“el himno”). All these symmetries highlight the simultaneity of these two states of being.

In addition to the rhyme patterns, the phonological/lexical isotopy “después” adds to the poem’s meaning. A *leitmotiv* in the poem, its appearance at the beginning, the end, and in the sixth and seventh lines always signifies a change of state: from death to life or from life to death. As we have already seen, the repeated “después” of the first and sixth lines signifies life. Then, in the seventh line, the single “después” now signifies death: “la noche que no conocemos.” Finally, the “después” of the last line echoes the “después” of the first line; referring to the wind, this “después” once again refers to life. Life appears after the death described in the preceding lines; apparently, a new cycle is about to commence. This *leitmotiv* thus illustrates the cycle of life and death in nature that commences at the beginning of the poem and goes from death to life, then to death, and at the end of the poem, back to life.

The analysis and discussion of the poem’s various isotopies and other formal poetic structures may cause the reader to lose sight of its global significance. Paraphrase is useful to return the reader to the poem’s semantic level; the following paraphrase includes line numbers, to facilitate the reader’s comprehension.

Nature continually manifests its forces of creation and destruction, both in the external world and inside the human being (1-5). “After” (death or unconsciousness), man is born into this hostile world (1), and he finds himself constantly at war with his internal and external enemies as he tries to find and live his true life (1-3). The image of the volcano illustrates nature’s intent to destroy (4) and that of the vulture portrays the prevalence of unconscious life (5). “After” (death, now the commencement of life) and in contrast with the volcano and the vulture, appears the developed consciousness and eternal life of the conscious man (Jesus Christ) (6). The timelessness and silence of death arrive (7-8); but for the conscious individual, death is another form of life: illumination rather than oblivion (8-9). Finally, “after” the death in the two last lines, the cycle of life begins anew (9).

The discussion and paraphrase above describe only one level of this complex poem. The first three lines deal with life, but also with the omnipresence of death in life beginning with birth studied in the previous chapter. Exemplified by the image of the two peaks, the individual has the choice of whether or not to pursue his vocation, and, as outlined in the previous chapter, more often chooses the latter. Death in life takes on concrete form with the “hermano alacrán,” the “mareas rojas” and the “Voraz volcán,” and the theme also is visible in the fifth line, where the vulture is yet another example of death in life. However, in the second half of the poem, the theme changes: the poet now describes life in death. The sixth line also deals with life; but if “un himno entre dos víboras” does indeed refer to Jesus Christ, then this is a form of life that transcends not only the death of the body but also the efforts of nature to render the human being unconscious in life. The last three lines of the poem also address not only death but also the presence of life in death. The final line, with its “después” and its return to the symbol of the wind, again speaks of a new beginning: a life that begins “after” death. Accordingly, all the

possible combinations of these two states of being appear in the poem: life and death in life, and life and death in death.

The theme of time also runs through the poem. The word “después” signifies a beginning and, at the same time, an ending. As it recurs throughout the poem, the word resounds like the beat of a metronome, never allowing the reader to forget that he lives in time and that everything comes to an end. As already noted, when repeated in the first and sixth lines, the word links the flawed consciousness of the human being during his life with the divine consciousness of Jesus Christ. The repetitions of “después” marking the transitions between life and death and death and life suggest that there is little difference between these two states of being. Instead, what matters in both of these states of being is the human being’s level of consciousness.

In his commentary, Rosenmann-Taub states that everything is “after;” consciousness can only be awareness “after” what happened before. The human being cannot experience what happens in the present, since it takes time for his senses to relay information to the brain and for the brain to process that information. Thus, consciousness for the human being during life is only a rudimentary awareness of being, limited not only by time but also by the individual’s own physiology and subjectivity.

On the other hand, the phrase “callado como luz” presents the possibility that unlike the flawed consciousness the human being possesses during life, the illumination of true consciousness exists after death. The phrase “un solo cuerpo” suggests the uniqueness of that possibility; together with the phrase “un himno entre dos víboras” it implies that true consciousness after death is rare, found only in an individual whose consciousness during life is at the level of Jesus Christ.

The next poem to be examined, “Asfódelo,” also from *El Zócalo*, is another imaginative view of what life after death may be.

XXXV

ASFÓDELO

Donde tientan mamparas, a la izquierda
de la acera insondable, entre dos bloques
hoscas, junto a mi hospicio, en una veta
de mucha sombra y mucha orina, donde

una erizada escoria está enhebrando
decrepitud, donde la luna pone
un pan álfico, sombra en sombra, abajo,
donde aúllan, pujantes, los hedores,

con mis bisuntas gasas, tabernario,
escafilo un larguísimo deseo
de albañal sin atmósfera:

soy en mi sueño un denso escupo negro
de la acera insondable, cual ponzoña
u ojo aborrecido, desertor:

un denso escupo negro,
taciturno, en la orina legamosa,
rutilando, en la sombra, más que el sol (77).

Asphodel

Where screens tempt, to the left
of the unfathomable sidewalk, between two hostile
blocks, next to my hospice, in a vein
of much shadow and much urine, where

a bristling scum is threading
decrepitude, where the moon puts
a white bread, shadow on shadow, below,
where the pestilences, robust, howl,

with my soiled gauzes, rude,
I scratch a huge desire
for a sewer without atmosphere.

I am in my sleep a thick black spit
of the unfathomable sidewalk, like a poison
or a detested eye, deserter:

a thick black spit,
taciturn, in the muddy urine,
gleaming, in the shadow, more than the sun.

When a title appears in Rosenmann-Taub’s poetry, the reader may assume that it plays a significant role in the poem. “Asfódelo” refers to the Asphodel Meadows, a section of the ancient Greek underworld where, in Greek mythology, indifferent and ordinary souls were sent to live after death. It is generally described as a ghostly place that is an even less perfect version of life on earth, a land of neutrality where people are neither good nor evil and where they mechanically perform their daily tasks, becoming themselves something similar to a machine. In the *Odyssey*, Homer describes Odysseus’s experience in the meadow in the following words: “The dead approach him in swarms, unable to speak unless animated by the blood of the animals

he slays. Without blood they are witless, without activity, without pleasure and without future” (S. Cole 193). The poem’s title leads us directly to its significance: the comparison of the world and the human condition to the Asphodel Meadows of Greek mythology.

This Greek myth of the living dead of the Asphodel Meadows is a particularly appropriate vehicle to describe the unconscious life of the human being that for Rosenmann-Taub is death. The poem begins with an extended hyperbaton that runs through the poem’s first three stanzas: before the first subject and predicate appear, no less than nine prepositional clauses and an adjective describe the speaker and his world. The knowledge that the poem’s significance is the world as an Asfodel Meadows clarifies the ungrammaticalities that constitute these prepositional clauses; in a hermeneutic reading, the hypograms are all variants that describe and amplify this Asfodel Meadows that represents unconscious life in the world of the living.

Just as he does in “El Desahucio,” the poet employs this extended hyperbaton to emphasize his description of the speaker and his environment over the description of his actions. Like Chinese boxes, the poem’s initial series of prepositional phrases progressively define first the world, then the human being, and finally, his consciousness. We interpret the variants of this extended description either by identifying the metonym’s vehicles’ principal attributes or by correlating the image with similar images in other poems. The phrase “Donde tientan mamparas” figuratively describes a world of illusion where reality is screened from the human being, just as the plain of flowers that is the Asphodel Meadows of unconscious life tempts and at the same time conceals its true nature. The screens of our own multiverse are no less real: the real nature of human beings and the forces that motivate them, as well as the power and workings of nature, are always inscrutable. The “unfathomable sidewalk” is another description of the multiverse, not only dangerous (the speaker finds himself at the edge of this bottomless

abyss) but also unknown and unknowable, since the word “insondable” contains both these attributes. The speaker finds himself between two “hostile blocks,” similar to the “himno entre dos víboras” of “Preludio,” these external negative forces of nature and culture that destroy the individual’s true self, and situated next to his hospice, since death is always close at hand in life. The “veta” that is our own particular environment, that “vein” inside the matter that constitutes the multiverse, is our body, just as the apartment in the apartment building that represents the cosmos of “El Desahucio” is the speaker’s body. The poet describes this body as a vein of shadow and urine: the ignorance, emptiness and waste that constitute our mental and corporeal state. Inside this body, an “erizada escoria” weaves our old age; due to its function, this metonym can only refer to the passage of time that ultimately renders the human being decrepit and moribund. The moon that “puts white bread, shadow on shadow, below” is a solar body that gives reflected, not real light: “white bread,” light without nourishment, it is not even light but “sombra en sombra,” a shadow on the shadow that is our body. Furthermore, the speaker himself is hardly indistinguishable from his environment: recognizing his own filth and rudeness, and identifying with the scatological aspects of his being, he pleads for death—scraping a huge desire for a sewer without air—similar to the speaker of “Cómo me gustaría.”

The image of the speaker with his “bisuntas gasas” merits special attention; it is with these soiled gauzes that he expresses his desire for a conscious life different than the one he currently lives. This soiled gauze must therefore represent consciousness, since it is only with consciousness that one can desire more consciousness. This metonym of translucent material is found repeatedly in other poems. In “En el poniente de pardos vallados...,” a poem that we examine in the following chapter, the treasure of real consciousness hides itself from “la destreza de tules solares,” the ordinary quotidian consciousness. In “Arambeles,” the material that is the

poem's title represents both the body and the consciousness of the individual that decays over time. In "Con su soga oportuna me ahorca..." the "estropajo" is the worst part of the speaker, and the "harapos garduños" his wisdom. In "Diálogo Sepulcral," another poem that we examine in the following chapter, the "cendal aborígen" is the body, the origin of consciousness; and, later in the poem, "...tu mirada bordó fénix guirnalda / que anudó las cortinas y trizó las ventanas..." describes the gaze of death as it penetrates the curtains to open the individual to a new life. Rosenmann-Taub uses these images of different types of cloth to represent different forms of consciousness, since one of the primary attributes of all these materials is their permeability: curtains can close or open, and while gauze may be opaque it is always translucent. It is that quality of permeability common to all these examples that allows the individual to interact with the exterior world. Thus, with his repeated use of this metonym, the poet implies that a principal characteristic of consciousness, perhaps *the* principal characteristic of consciousness, is the ability to assimilate, process, learn and act based on information received from the outside world. In this poem, the speaker's gauzes are soiled; although he has sufficient consciousness to ask for more consciousness, his consciousness is still imperfect.

In the poem's last two stanzas the speaker describes his vision of life after death. The phrase "en mi sueño" seems to refer to a conscious wish for death; the poet's use of the colon implies that this description is an explanation and amplification of his "larguísimo deseo," rather than a dream. The speaker, in his dream, wants to be a "denso escupo negro, taciturno... rutilando, en la sombra, más que el sol," not just a "denso escupo negro." He understands his human condition: to be and to be surrounded by filth and waste, on the corporeal level and in the material world. He understands that as long as he is alive, in his body, he will be a prisoner of

that body, in that world. He accepts that part of himself; but instead, he desires something that is for him, only a dream: true consciousness.

Initially, this seems to be another ugly image of death similar to the previous images of ugly life in an ugly world. Yet closer examination shows it to be different. The “escupo” is no longer at the side of the abyss but *in* the abyss, merged with the multiverse. It is like a poison or a loathed eye to that multiverse, which abhors it due to its consciousness. It is a deserter, because it “deserts” the typical state of unconsciousness that is the fundamental characteristic of the multiverse.

The poet characterizes this life after death as “silent” and “gleaming more than the sun.” The latter phrase again recalls the poem “Preludio” with its similar phrase “callado como luz;” once again, poem and poet imply that consciousness, symbolized by illumination, can survive the death of the body. The poem contrasts the moon that reflects a non-nutritious light with the gleam of the “escupo negro” that is even brighter than the sun, as if to say that real consciousness is stronger than even the sun. The word “taciturno” recalls to us the line of the poem “Orco,” “Para penetrar todo, expresas nada...,” where silence is necessary to truly penetrate and understand all.

Thus, the poet has described a world similar to the world of the dead in Greek mythology, where consciousness is non-existent, people are machine-like, the world is illusory, and mankind is impotent, ignorant and powerless against the passage of time and the forces of nature. Nevertheless, the little and “soiled” consciousness that does exist in this Asphodelean world pleads for a death that may result in a real life and greater consciousness, regardless of its material manifestation. The poet’s conception of life after death is not the “denso escupo negro”

that is its material and literal representation but instead, the metonymic and symbolic representation of life after death that is the silence and illumination of true consciousness.

The poet uses the contrast between light and shadow and the word “sombra” itself to contrast the unconsciousness and false consciousness of life with the true consciousness that may lie beyond. In the first stanza, the speaker locates himself “en una veta de mucha sombra...”; figuratively, he is without the illumination of consciousness. In the second stanza, the reflected light of the moon transmits non-nutritious light; this light puts a “sombra en sombra”, another shadow on the existing shadow that is the human being. In the third and fourth stanzas, the poet transmits the concept of shadow both semantically and phonically. The speaker desires an “albañal sin atmósfera”; a sewer is by its very nature dark; and the word atmósfera recapitulates “sombra” phonically. The “acera insondable” of the fourth stanza and the word “legamosa” from the last stanza also both phonically and semantically recall the “sombra” of the first two stanzas. In the poem’s last line, the contrary appears: the “denso escupo negro, / taciturno...” is now “rutilando, en la sombra, más que el sol.” The images of darkness and shadow throughout the poem again contrast both phonically and semantically the speaker’s state of unconsciousness with his desire for the illumination of consciousness.

The isotopy of filth and waste that appears throughout the poem accompanies this contrast between light and shadow to accentuate and underscore even more the speaker’s desire for consciousness. In his current state, he finds himself with “orina,” “escoria,” “hedores,” “bisuntas gasas,” “albañal,” “legamo.” He is surrounded by filth and waste, and also his urine and “soiled gauzes” show that he himself contains that same filth and waste. Yet none of that matters; in fact, in his dream, he says he would submit to even worse, if he could attain the consciousness to transcend death.

The idea of life after death being embodied in a material entity, such as this “denso escupo negro,” is not foreign to the poet. As we have already seen, in “Cómo me gustaría...” the speaker desires to be “la más oscura ciénaga.” In “¿Posteridad?” the poet pictures the individual’s afterlife consciousness as soot, presumably from the body’s cremation. In another poem, “Stellae” from *El Mensajero*, its one line reads: “Cuenca de castigados.” In this poem, “Cuenca” refers to the Milky Way, and the human characteristic of “castigados” leads us to the interpretation that the stars are the resting place, or even the transformation of the human spirit after death.

In contrast to these views of death which include some material manifestation, other poems indicate a disembodied consciousness that exists after death. “Otras voces reclaman otras voces...,” the second poem from *El Zócalo*, is found in the chapter entitled “PAGANO.”

II

Otras voces reclaman otras voces.	Other voices call other voices.
Otro río fulgura en otros hombres.	Another river gleams in other men.
Yo, sumamente lejos.	I, extremely far.
Contra mi lejanía el aguacero	Against my remoteness the downpour
rompe sus viejos odres.	breaks its old wineskins.
Otra amapola mece los cinéreos	Another poppy rocks the ashen
vestigios de otros dioses.	vestiges of other gods.

The isotopy of alienation, exemplified by the word “otro,” is found in the poem’s first three lines and recurs in the fourth, sixth and seventh lines as well. In addition, “otro” in its various forms echoes phonologically in “voces,” “odres,” “rompe,” “amapola” and “dioses.” Other voices, not his voice, call other voices, not his. Another river gleams in other men, not in him. He is “sumamente lejos,” farther than can be imagined; semantically, this phrase emphasizes this isotopy of alienation even more. The most extreme alienation possible is death; and the use of the superlative strongly implies that the speaker is dead. Yet the speaker is also

conscious, evidenced first by the fact that he speaks and second by the content of his discourse, which indicates his awareness of the difference between other men, nature, unconsciousness, and belief systems that cater to unconsciousness. The poem thus gives the reader another view of a disembodied consciousness that survives the death of the body.

The images of the last four lines provide additional indications to support this interpretation of the poem. Nature commits a violent act (“rompe sus viejos odres”) against the speaker’s remoteness. As noted in “PRELUDIO,” nature is a force against conscious life. The speaker’s “lejanía” from nature signifies that he is conscious, and it is this consciousness that isolates and alienates him from the other voices and men of the first two lines.

The poem’s last image supports this interpretation as well. The poppy is the fundamental ingredient in opium and other psychoactive drugs that diminish consciousness; and as in the first two lines, the recurring word “otro” disconnects the speaker from this image as well, reinforcing the idea of the speaker’s consciousness. The poppy is related to “otros dioses”; however, these “other gods” are now only ashen vestiges of their former selves. The speaker’s ability to see, understand and comment on these “ashen vestiges” shows his understanding that these “other gods” whom other men hold sacred are not eternal and so are both false and ephemeral. In addition, the speaker distances himself from the belief systems of other people. “Pagano,” the title of the chapter in which the poem is found, supports this interpretation: with his consciousness, the speaker is a “pagan,” refusing to believe in these false and ephemeral gods in which others believe. Thus, virtually every line of the poem points to the speaker occupying a state of being that is informed by consciousness.

The tetralogy also contains poems in which the afterlife has nothing to do with consciousness. The poem “Sepulcro” from *La Opción* has two lines: “Lo fácil / entretanto”

(36). Similar to the words “¿Decoro?,” ¿Interin? and “¿Reposo?” in “¿Posteridad?” the poet is simply expressing that the afterlife may be another state of being between two other states of being: an “easy,” “decorous,” “interim” or “restful” state.

As demonstrated in this section, the poet’s views of the afterlife span a wide range. They may be the pure consciousness illustrated in “Preludio,” “Asfódelo” and “Otras voces reclaman otras voces...,” but also they may be material substances, such as a swamp, a gob of spit, soot, or a star. Or, they may even be another state of being, having nothing to do with consciousness or materiality at all.

3. The Connection with Nature and Natural Cycles

The poems illustrating life after death that we next examine link the afterlife to nature and natural cycles. In these poems, death is a “natural” part of life, not something to be feared, but instead another state of being in nature that is as valid and real as our normal state of being. The poem “De vuelta a los rosales,” discussed in the previous chapter, is a good introduction to this category of poems.

XVI

De vuelta a los rosales,
pavesas en los rayos de parques agostados,
hacia su paraíso las rosas se dispersan.
Ser sin ser, mis corimbos,
marchitos, se preparan.

¡Redentores
nidos! ¡Brisas! La luna
muere al nacer mañana.
Noche antigua, esta noche
tejió, aterida, huérfana, el sudario
que hoy es dueño del sueño.

Los pámpanos, estevas,
frotan la primavera: criaturas
de pan de sortilegio

Back to the rosebushes,
soot in the rays of withered parks,
the roses disperse towards their paradise.
To be without being, my corymbes,
Withered, prepare themselves.

Redeeming
nests! Breezes! The moon
dies when the morrow is born.
Ancient night, this night
wove, frozen, orphaned, the shroud
That today is the master of sleep.

The vine branches, plow handles
rub the spring: creatures
of the bread of sorcery

ondean, en lo hondo de la almendra,
porvenires vividos:
inerrantes glicinas de celajes:
gaviotas: Dios viajero:
mármol:
mar (45).

ripple, in the depths of the almond,
waves of lived futures.
immobile glycines of cloudscapes:
seagulls: traveler God:
marble:
sea.

The poem's imagery is lavish in its descriptions of the cycles of birth and death in nature. Flowers and bushes die, the moon dies as the day is born, vine branches till the soil to bring new life, DNA and glycines bring forth life and connect the past to the future, and everything in nature has its own cycle of life and death. Linked to nature, man is in this aspect the same as all other flora and fauna. Similar to the vine branches that become plow handles and till the soil to bring forth new life, his corpse becomes fertilizer to also bring forth new life. Like that of the almond, his DNA is a genetic map of both his past and future lives; and the glycines that appear in cloudscapes are essential building blocks of human beings as well. He is one more aspect of the eternal cycle of procreation and death that characterizes nature.

"Pasión," the last poem of *El Zócalo*, is another statement of the connection between the human being and nature. The sixty-line poem commences with "La tierra invoca al cuerpo. / Agua de tierra y sal de tierra me penetran" (153). ("The earth invokes the body. / Water of earth and salt of earth penetrate me.") Starting with this statement of the connection between man and nature, the poem continues to develop the theme of the interconnectedness of the earth and man throughout the poem. In the second stanza, the speaker says "Desvelo mis raíces / con mi canto de tierra alborozada". ("I unveil my roots / with my joyous song of earth.") Here, he points to his own biological roots in the earth as he sings the song of the earth. At the poem's halfway point comes "Muero. / Desde los ejes, infinitamente, / tierra y alma, en la luz, se precipitan." (I die. / From the axes, infinitely, / earth and soul, in light, precipitate themselves.") Now, with his death, earth and soul plunge into the light, together; the speaker links himself to both. In the next

stanza, “Abajo, aquí, la tierra; / arriba, aquí, su canto. / El llanto, cavidad / y cavidad, refluye, / se avellana, / y su canto mi canto.” (“Below, here, the earth; / above, here, its song. / The sobs, a cavity / and cavity, flows back / shrivels, / and its song my song.”) Again, the human being unites with the earth: his tears and song are the earth’s tears and song. The speaker continues, “Hay que dormir el sueño de la tierra. / Hay que dormir. / Dormir....” (“One has to sleep the sleep of the earth. / One has to sleep. / To sleep.”) The speaker’s sleep is the sleep of the earth. Then, in the next stanza, “Hálito oscuro, el tiempo irá al remanso: / “¿Grumo de tierra el sueño?” (“Gloomy breath, time will go to a haven: / Is a lump of earth sleep?”) The human’s sleep is the sleep of the earth, time is of the earth, the dream is of the earth.

The final stanza of the poem reads “No sabré si decir / “Quiero” o callar. / No ha de cesar el tiempo su pasión. / No sabré / si hueso o tierra lo que roza el sueño.” (“I don’t know whether to say / “I desire” or to be quiet. / Time shouldn’t stop its passion. / I won’t know whether bone or earth is rubbing the dream.”) (153-55). The speaker is dead, but his consciousness survives, as part of the earth. Even in death, the individual wonders whether to move forward or be still: the dream is all that is real, and in the dream, the speaker can no longer differentiate between his body and the earth. The passion that the poem describes is the passion of creation, existence and death that is the essential character of everything on earth, including the earth itself as it exists in time. Every aspect of the human being’s existence is inextricably bound to the earth and its passion, and his life continues after death when he becomes one with the earth.

“GENETRIX” from *El Zócalo* continues this theme of the interconnection of the human being with the earth. This two-line poem reads as follows:

XVII

GENETRIX

Acabo de morir: para la tierra
soy un recién nacido. (46)

I just died: for the earth
I am a new-born.

The poem compares the corpse of the dead and recently buried individual to the body of a newborn child for the earth that receives it, thus underscoring the subjectivity and relativity of life and death. Perhaps like the cadaver of the poem, the human being is also a “recién nacido” from another prior form of consciousness.

The word “genetrix” is the word for “mother” or “ancestress” in Latin. In this poem, the earth is the mother of the newly dead being, at first receiving the body and its coffin at the moment of “partum,” the interment, and then bringing it into its new state of being. But is not the earth a mother in a larger sense? In fact, the earth is the mother for all the flora and fauna of the planet, bringing them into existence and sustaining them throughout their lifespan. Thus, the poem suggests that life after death is another birth, engendered by the Earth as mother: the corpse returns to the earth’s womb, to be born anew. Once again nature and the human being intermingle, as the poet posits the possibility of a life after death.

The poet illustrates this concept in a different and dramatic way in “Canción de cuna” from *El Zócalo*.

XI

CANCIÓN DE CUNA

Lullaby

Dinde

Interment for a child

Con retales de musgo, cariño mío,
te envolveré. Haga tuto mi niño lindo.
Te envolveré bien, hijo,
con esmeraldas y halos alabastrinos.
En tus manos, goloso cariño mío,

With remnants of moss, my dear,
I will wrap you. Go to sleep, my pretty child.
I will wrap you well, my dear,
with emeralds and alabaster halos.
In your hands, my sweet dear,

mil gusanos bonitos.
Haga tuto mi niño, niño podrido.

(Cuidate, aliento mío, por los atajos.
Adiós, aliento mío.)

Tranquilo, que te acompaño.
Muy luego con barbero de barro:
niño violáceo.

Duérmete para siempre, mi lucerito.
Ciérrense tus ojitos, mi lucerito.
Ciérralos para siempre, niño podrido.

(Cuidate, aliento mío, corazoncito.
Aliento mío, aliento mío.)

Con pañales de hormigas, cariño mío,
te abrigaré el potito.
Duérmete para siempre, mi niño lindo.
Duérmete, hijo.
Hazle caso a tu Nana: ¡duérmete, hijo! (39)

a thousand beautiful worms.
Go to sleep, my child, rotten child.

(Watch out, my breath, for the shortcuts.
Goodbye, my breath.)

Be tranquil, I go with you.
In a little time, you will have a bib of mud:
violet child.

Sleep forever, my little star.
Close your little eyes, my little star.
Close them forever, rotten child.

(Watch out, my breath, little heart.
My breath, my breath.)

With diapers of worms, my dear,
I will shelter your little bottom.
Sleep forever, my pretty child.
Sleep, dear.
Pay attention to your Nana: sleep, dear!

At first glance, due to the poem's title, the reader might expect a connection with the poems of Gabriela Mistral. However, as the following analysis will show, although both poets highlight the pain that is a natural consequence of the parent's love for the child, Rosenmann-Taub's subject matter in this poem differs substantially from that of the Chilean Nobel laureate's poems of this genre.

The epigraph of the poem, "Interment for a dead child," states the poem's overall significance at the outset: this "canción de cuna" is anything but a normal lullaby. The speaker croons this lullaby as he would when putting the child to sleep; but instead, the child is dead and the speaker is burying him, putting him to sleep permanently in the earth. The poem is unsettling due to its shocking and morbose imagery: the child's bed is the earth, his hands full of worms, his body wrapped in moss, his diapers filled with ants, his skin purplish and his body rotten.

The poem surprises in other ways as well. The first surprise is the dialogic nature of the poem. The speaker addresses his dead child throughout every stanza, highlighting his belief that the child has the ability to hear and understand. Also, at the poem's end the speaker insists that the child pay attention...to Death! "Nana" is capitalized; this is not just any nana but *the* Nana. Not only capitalized and feminine, but the only entity with whom the child can now be in contact, She can be none other than Death personified.

The speaker's grief and despair over the loss of his loved child is revealed in both its semantic and structural elements. The poet employs terms of endearment ("mi niño lindo," "cariño mío," "aliento mío"), slang ("Haga tuto") and diminutives ("lucerito," "ojitos," "potito," "corazoncito") to bring to light the speaker's affection for his child. He covers him with emeralds and alabaster halos, to demonstrate the child's value to him. Even more importantly, the speaker calls him "aliento mío." Nothing is more important to a human being than his breath: when he says "Adiós, aliento mío" the speaker is practically saying goodbye to his own life, since there is nothing worse than the death of one's child.

The poem's parentheses give the speaker two voices with which he can speak to his child. Instead of being overcome with grief and despair at the premature death of this loved one, the public voice acts as if this were just another event in the life of the child. He sings this lullaby as if putting him to sleep in a normal way, rather than saying goodbye forever. In contrast, the private voice marked by the parentheses portrays the intense love and grief that the speaker suffers for the loss of his infant.

The speaker's description of the burial of the child and his return to the earth may at first strike the reader as repulsive. Nevertheless, this imagery, so out of place in normal lullaby lexicon, makes sense in the context of the poems discussed up to now. The "retales de musgo,"

“gusanos bonitos,” “niño podrido,” “niño violáceo” and “pañales de hormigas” to which the speaker refers in such matter-of-fact tones are completely in keeping with the poet’s vision of the interconnectedness of the human being and the earth. The grief is apparent, but so is the poet’s vision that this death, like all others, is part of the natural order of things on earth, and that his child is returning to the place from where he came, to be one with the earth, possibly to be reborn into the next phase of his existence.

El Mensajero continues this same theme with “Conjuro.” In this four-stanza poem the speaker entreats snow to descend in each of the stanzas. The last stanza reads as follows:

Muy suave, inequívoca,	Very soft, unequivocal,
almohádame y mádreme y créceme.	Pillow me and mother me and raise me.
Oh, blanca tiniebla de fijeza viva.	Oh, white shadow of living firmness.
¡Desciéndeme, Nieve! (14)	Descend to me, Snow!

The speaker, apparently dead, begs the Snow to descend to him, pillow him, mother him, and raise him. The poet’s capitalization of the word indicates to the reader that this is not everyday snow, but the Snow of Death. By apostrophizing and anthropomorphizing Nature (or Death), the poet intimately links the human being to the forces of nature. As he asks the Snow to cover him and raise him, the speaker implies that he still has a body; but it is just as clear that he expects to start a new form of life now, with the Snow as his mother.

“Tajrijim” from *El Mensajero* is another exemplary expression of the imagery of death in nature.

LXX

TAJRIJIM

Honrando lo impoluto de un laudable mefisto
sobre este basural de eficacia omitida,
la prole de Ramrram y la prole de Cristo

Shroud

Honoring the purity of a praiseworthy
Mephistopheles
on this inefficient rubbish heap,
the offspring of Ramrram and the offspring
of Christ

veneran la juiciosa culebra parricida.

venerate the judicious snake parricide.

Letame de tarántulas, hemisferio de flema
lápida de las lápidas: reclamo mi sudario.
Cloaca, tu diadema:
¡mi sudario!

Fertilizer of tarantulas, hemisphere of phlegm,
Tombstone of tombstones: I reclaim my shroud.
Sewer, your diadem:
my shroud!

...Negligencia, me acoges,
sin indagar con larvas, en tus trojes (101).

...Negligence, you accept me,
Without investigating with larvae, in your granaries.

In the Faust legend, Mephistopheles is the devil who visits Earth to either buy men's souls or find human beings whose souls are already compromised by their evil actions. The legend represents the break between Christianity and the modern secular world: Faust, thirsty for knowledge, rejects God and the soul's immortality. The legend parallels the Biblical tale of the Garden of Eden, where the serpent seduces Eve with the temptation of knowledge and thus introduces mortality into the world.

The Mephistopheles is "impoluto" due to his realistic and objective assessment of the human being as "fallen" from his primordial state: religión has not contaminated his more objective vision of the human condition. This conceptualization of Mephistopheles is one isotopic element of the adoration of the death of God that constitutes the remaining lines of the stanza; and the "inefficient rubbish heap" is another objective description of the world in which we live.

Corresponding to the Faust legend, the "culebra parricida" refers to the death of God. In the Biblical tale of the Garden of Eden, God apparently triumphs with the Fall. However, the human being's curiosity and desire for knowledge that first enabled the serpent to seduce Eve also produced the Renaissance, humanism, the scientific and industrial revolutions. Eventually, the belief that man could understand and control the universe through science that culminated in the nineteenth century led to the advent of logical positivism and Nietzsche's pronouncement of

the death of God. The stanza's last two lines tell us that it is not just the Western world but all mankind who rejects God in their search for meaning. Thus, the stanza is an isotopy of the glorification of God's death: the first isotopic element venerates the purity of a vision that precludes God, the next condemns his "creation" as a rubbish heap, and the last element tells us that all mankind venerates the death of God that the serpent, God's "son," initiated with his seduction of Eve, even going so far as to describe this parricide as "judicious."

The second stanza further describes the "basural," this rubbish heap that is the world, in increasingly repugnant terms. The world is the dung of tarantulas, a hemisphere of phlegm and the tombstone of tombstones. The most striking image of all comes in the fourth line: the sewer's diadem – human waste – is the speaker's shroud. In the Jewish tradition, the *tachrihim* are simple white burial garments, used commonly to wrap the body before burial. However, here the poet describes death and burial in more objective terms, regardless of their unflattering nature: the corpse returns to an earth that is a rubbish heap of human and animal excretions. In direct contrast to the pure white of the "tajrijim," this is the true burial shroud, since the human body's ultimate purpose is to serve as fertilizer for future life.

In the last stanza, the speaker apostrophizes Nature using the metonymy "negligence," thereby highlighting Nature's randomness and lack of precision. Nature does not distinguish, but receives all. The image of the speaker being received "sin indagar" indicates that unlike mankind, Nature is concerned not with acquiring knowledge but only with furthering existence.

In this poem, the image of the afterlife is unflattering: Nature receives the individual only as fertilizer. And yet, fertilizer is both life and also the source of more and higher life forms. The poem again emphasizes the cyclical nature of life and death common throughout the multiverse, this time with specific reference to the human being.

This category of poems that illustrates Rosenmann-Taub's conception of life after death as it relates to nature and natural processes is a category that produces some of the poet's most vivid images. "Asfódelo" and "Cómo me gustaría" from the previous section painted the individual's life as an "oscura ciénaga" and a "denso escupo negro." However, those images are tame in comparison with those presented here. Life after death is envisioned progressively in various poems as a consciousness who can't distinguish between the bones of his body and the earth; as a child newly born to the earth that has just received him, a baby covered with moss, worms and ants who is ordered to mind his new Nana, Death, and as a cadaver whose burial shroud and principal use is fertilizer. Whereas in the first two sections of the chapter, poems portrayed the poet's conception of life after death in abstract and noncorporeal ways, here the poems portray the corporeal aspects of life after death for the human being, as well as the intimate connection between the body, the earth, and all natural processes, in objective, vivid and unflattering ways.

4. Full Human Consciousness after Death

The final category of poems that express Rosenmann-Taub's conception of life after death propose that life after death may have a fully developed consciousness, no different than that of a living being. The poet expresses this conception in two different ways. The speaker may be dead, but nevertheless demonstrates his consciousness as his voice is heard in the poem. We have already observed this in poems such as "Otras voces reclaman otras voces..." and "Conjuro." Alternatively, the speaker addresses an interlocutor who is dead, and either through the act of addressing the interlocutor or through the content of his address it becomes apparent that the interlocutor possesses the consciousness of a living being. This has already appeared in

poems such as “Tú, rumor, atisbas...,” “¿Posteridad?” and “Canción de cuna.” We focus specifically on these conceptions of afterlife consciousness in the poems that follow.

The last poem from *Auge* and the first of *Quince*, “El Desahucio” conveys many of the poet’s ideas of being and non-being at the same time that the speaker manifests his consciousness even after death.

I

El Desahucio

Del edificio de departamentos
– ocupo uno mediano,
en el segundo piso,
desde tanto ajeteo
que no recuerdo
cuánto –
el propietario,
firme, tempranísimo.
Yo no lo conocía.

Nos dió a cada inquilino
diferentes motivos
para que nos mudáramos.
Salí a comprar el diario
“Tu Pasquín” - .
Buscando los arriendos,
eché de ver
la fecha: el mes y el día
vibraban bien;
aberración, el año...

Entonces comprendí (19).

The Eviction

From the apartment building
- I occupy a middle one,
on the second floor,
since such a coming and going
that I don’t remember
when -
the landlord,
firm, very early.
I didn’t meet him.

He gave every tenant
different reasons
to leave.
I went out to buy the paper
- “Your Lampoon” -
Looking for rentals,
I glanced at
the date: the month and the day
corresponded;
aberration, the year...

Then I understood.

In this poem, Rosenmann-Taub employs a quotidian and “non-poetic” language instead of his more typical poetic language, along with a simplified and shortened versification instead of his more typical hendecasyllabic and heptasyllabic patterns. He uses this everyday language to place normal reality into a new context, as he compares man’s birth, life and death to his residence in an apartment building and his eviction from that same building. Throughout the

poem, instead of using *poetic language* to describe a *familiar* reality, the poet reverses that scheme. Speaking of the process of “defamiliarization,” in *Structuralism and Semiotics*, semiotician Terence Hawkes proposes that

We very readily cease to ‘see’ the world we live in and become anaesthetized to its distinctive features. The aim of poetry is to reverse that process, to *defamiliarize* that with which we are overly familiar, to ‘creatively deform’ the usual, the normal, and so to inculcate a new, childlike, non-jaded vision in us. The poet thus aims to disrupt ‘stock responses’, and to generate a heightened awareness: to restructure our ordinary perception of ‘reality’, so that we end by *seeing* the world instead of numbly recognizing it: or at least so that we end by designing a ‘new’ reality to replace the (no less fictional) one which we have inherited and become accustomed to. (47)

The metaphorical representation of the human condition in life in the first stanza and in death in the second stanza defamiliarizes that condition conceptually rather than semantically. Contrary to, Hawke’s concept of defamiliarization stated above, Rosenmann-Taub employs *non-poetic and colloquial language* to describe an *unfamiliar and shocking* reality, in order to achieve his desired effect.

The poem itself is comprised of three stanzas: the first with nine lines, the second with ten lines, and the last with one line. However, closer examination reveals that the lines are in actuality a combination of heptasyllabic and broken hendecasyllabic verses. The first stanza is comprised of one full and one broken hendecasyllabic line, and four full and one broken heptasyllabic lines. The second stanza is in actuality comprised of four heptasyllabic and three broken hendecasyllabic lines. Thus, with this versification, both stanzas contain seven lines. The poet connects the third “stanza”, only one heptasyllabic line, with the second stanza by means of the ellipsis at the end of the second stanza; the silence between the two stanzas and the one-line stanza at the end both create dramatic suspense and call attention to the revelation of that last line.

Read literally, the first stanza describes the speaker's lodgings, the uncertain circumstances in which he arrived and the oddity of a landlord whom he has never met. The second stanza recounts his notice to move and describes his search for new lodgings in a tabloid paper. The third stanza, consisting of only one line, portrays a sudden insight by the speaker as to his condition: "Entonces comprendí;" and the impossibility of reading the poem at the mimetic level and the necessity for a hermeneutic reading immediately becomes clear.

The speaker's insight at the end reveals that the poem in its entirety is a metaphysical conceit. The speaker's apartment is his body, in an apartment building that represents the cosmos, and the poem metaphorically portrays significant truths about human existence. Mankind's existence in the multiverse is "mediano:" his state of being and consciousness is higher than vegetable and animal life, but lower than that of other as yet unknown life forms. Neither the speaker's body nor his life nor his consciousness is his own, but instead "rented" to him for an unspecified period of time, by a "landlord" (God?) whom he doesn't know, but who certainly predated his existence; he doesn't know when he or his world came into existence, nor who created him, nor the time of or reasons for his death.

In the second stanza, the speaker has to move out of his apartment and begins to search the want ads of the local tabloid for new lodgings. If the apartment is his body, then his "eviction" means that he is to die. In searching the want ads, he happens to notice the date, which doesn't make sense: although the day and month are correct, the year is incorrect. However, in the final stanza the speaker understands: since the year in the paper's date doesn't correspond to the present year in which he is living, he suddenly realizes that he is no longer alive.

The poem's tenses validate this interpretation. The first stanza uses the present tense, and even the imperfect tense of the verb "conocía" in the last line refers to a past action that continues through the present. On the other hand, the verbs of the second and third stanzas are almost wholly in the past tense. Beginning with the verb "salí", the speaker leaves the interior space of his apartment (that represents his life) to look for a different place (the space that he will occupy after his death). Everything that follows in the poem now takes place in the past. The speaker relates the story now in the past tense, from the perspective of a protagonist who, noticing the anomaly of the newspaper's year of publication, suddenly realized that his life is over.

The title of the poem also confirms this interpretation. The "desahucio" is an eviction: the end of the individual's stay in his habitation. But also, the "desahucio" is the doctor's diagnosis of a terminal illness. So this secondary meaning indicates that the apartment does indeed refer to the individual's life, and that the eviction refers to his death.

The uninterrupted quality of the narration implies that the speaker's consciousness and self-consciousness in the last stanza are no different than they were in the first, when he was still alive. This interpretation parallels that of the poet in his own commentary on this poem in *Quince*, especially when he observes that the energy of being exists simultaneously with that of non-being. For Rosenmann-Taub, appearance and disappearance are the same, and being and non-being merely two different aspects of the same thing (30). Describing a version of life after death where the individual retains his full powers of consciousness, including his own personal self-awareness, the poet asserts that consciousness can indeed transcend the death of the body.

The next poem to be examined also comes from *Quince*. Poem VIII, with the same quotidian language as “El Desahucio,” is entitled “Noailles” and its subject is the French poet Anna de Noailles.

VIII

Noailles

¿Un lirio de relámpagos? ¿Un dátíl
de sed?
¡Oh, sí, condesa:
pase usted!
Qué gentileza
la suya: ¡haber venido
a mí salón prohibido,
ahora! Aguarde, pues,
a que la limpie de su perlachés.
No se merece, juvenilversátil
Ana,
que la vean así por la mañana. (127)

An iris of lightning? A date
of thirst?
Oh, yes, countess:
come in!
How kind
of you: to have come
to my prohibited salón,
now! Wait, then,
for me to clean you from your Père Lachaise.
You don't deserve, youthful/versatile
Ana,
to be seen like this in the morning

The countess Anna de Noailles (1876-1933) was a widely recognized poet and writer of *fin-de-siècle* Paris; she also achieved fame as a hostess for one of the most important literary salons in Paris of that period. The poem is a homage to her in which the speaker addresses her as if she still possesses consciousness.

Consisting of ungrammaticalities at the mimetic level of reading, the first two lines of the poem are a metaphorical description of the poetess at the hermeneutic level of reading. The metaphor “lirio de relámpagos” describes the poetess and her poetry as on the one hand as fragile as a flower, and on the other hand as brilliant as a lightning bolt. The second metaphor, the “dátíl de sed,” portrays Anna and her poetry as a succulent fruit that satisfies, and for Anna in particular, a fruit that itself has an insatiable thirst. Since Anna de Noailles both wrote and hosted literary salons, this thirst must be for knowledge: she satisfies the intellectual thirst of her guests and has an “unquenchable” thirst for knowledge herself.

The speaker addresses Anna: he welcomes her to his salon, prohibited to her now that she is dead, just as her current “salon,” the cemetery, is prohibited to him since he is still alive. In his commentary to this poem in *Quince*, Rosenmann-Taub writes, “...recibo esta flor-eciente fogata primicial que perfuma e “ilumina”, y la hago pasar al salón de mi mundo, *prohibido*, para ella, como, para mí, el polvoriento *salón* en donde ella “habita” (131). (“I receive this primal blossoming bonfire that perfumes and ‘illuminates,’ and I have her enter the salon of my world, prohibited, for her, just as, for me, the dusty salon where she ‘lives.’”) He asks her to wait until he can clean her shroud from the dirt of the cemetery, and tells her that with her youth and versatility, she doesn’t deserve to be seen in the morning as she is.

The poem’s initial metaphors describe Anna’s persona, and the speaker continues this description in the final lines, noting her courtesy, youthfulness and versatility. All these qualities may be why she was able to retain her consciousness and exit the cemetery.

Internal and hidden words inform the meaning of the poem as well. As noted in previous poems, the poet uses words within words, combinations of words and parts of words to amplify his meaning. Here the technique surfaces in a number of lines, and Rosenmann-Taub clarifies the significance of these internal words in his own commentary. In the line “¡Oh, sí, condesa!,” the sound of the first three syllables, combined as one word – “Oh – si – con,” produces the word “hocicón:” snout or muzzle. In his commentary, the poet uses this image to evoke the image of the skull with its dentition, the classical image of death (131).

The word “Ana” appears three times in the poem: once in the penultimate line, and twice, hidden, in the final line. In the penultimate line, “Ana” is the entire line: the poet separates her both temporally and spatially from the two adjacent lines, just as she is now separated temporally and spatially from life. In the last line, “ana” first appears in “...que la

vean así en la mañana.” The speaker doesn’t want the others to see Anna, covered with the dirt of the cemetery, in the morning. However, again according to the poet in his own commentary, this passage takes on two other meanings when the letters are configured differently. The configuration “que lavé a *ana* así por la mañana...” signifies that the speaker “washes” Ana with the light of the poem, so that Anna appears as brilliant in the poem as when she was alive. Another configuration is “*Vea: nací* por la mañana.” In this configuration as the speaker in the poem, Anna herself speaks: she tells the reader that she was born to give light to the morning, to bring light into the world with her poetry. In that sense, through her work, she never dies. Anna’s final appearance comes at the very end of the poem, in the word “mañ-*ana*.” Here, she is intimately and inextricably related to the eternal morning (132-33).

Thus, Anna’s life seems to extend beyond her physiological death. Rosenmann-Taub uses her name in different ways to indicate her presence, although she has been dead for many years. Her personal qualities—her brilliance, thirst for knowledge, youthfulness and versatility—may be the reason behind her ability to transcend her physiological death.

In his commentaries on both “Desiertos” and this poem, Rosenmann-Taub emphasizes that just as the aptitude for death can sustain life, the aptitude for life can sustain death. In “Desiertos,” the poet comments on its opening line “Ante la mano, seca /” as follows: “La mano –la corporeidad -, mía o de otro, “húmeda” aún. ¿Viva? Muerta en latencia: la aptitud para morir sus “tenta” la vida (101).” [“The hand – corporeality – mine or that of another, still ‘humid.’ Alive? Latent death: the aptitude for death sustains life.”] The poem begins with the portrait of an individual facing his own hand, dry: the portrait of a man consciously facing his own death, even though still alive. The poet notes that this psychological position of consciously and continuously facing death is what, perhaps more than anything else, informs and sustains the

way one lives his life, a theme that has already surfaced in several of the poems examined in the second chapter of this study. Now, in his commentary to “Noailles,” Rosenmann-Taub inverts this idea. Commenting on the image of the skull that is the metonymic image of Anna’s death, he writes: “¿Muerta? Viva en latencia: la aptitud para vivir sus“tenta” la muerte (131).” [“Death? Latent life: the aptitude for living sustains death.”] In direct contrast with the citation of “Desiertos,” Rosenmann-Taub suggests that the way one lives one’s life also informs and sustains the way one lives one’s life *after* death. This concept has already appeared earlier in this chapter, in the poem “Tú –rumor –atisbas,” where Jesus Christ, a man who faced his life and death perfectly is described as a “potestad azul” and characterized by the word “abundancias.” We have also witnessed the same idea expressed in the line “Después, después, un himno entre dos víboras” from “Preludio.” Now, as expressed in “Noailles” and also with the addition of Rosenmann-Taub’s own commentary, it seems that for the poet, life does exist after death and is largely determined by how one lives one’s life before the death of the body.

Originally appearing in the poet’s 2007 book *Auge*, the poem “En el náufrago día de mi nave más bella...” is also found in *Quince*. As in “El Desahucio,” the poem is an internal monologue that apparently takes place just after the individual’s death, and is our last example of Rosenmann-Taub’s portrayal of full consciousness after the moment of death.

LVII

En el náufrago día de mi nave más bella me encaramé sobre su mastelero para mirar el mar.	In the shipwreck day of my most beautiful ship I climbed its highest mast to look at the sea.
No había mar: no había ni su huella: no había ni el vacío de ese día postrero. Sólo había mirar.	There was no sea: there wasn’t even its trace: There wasn’t even the void of that last day. There was only the looking.
Miré el mirar del navegar que espero.	I looked at the looking of the sailing that I await.

As with other poems in this chapter, reading the poem at the mimetic level yields only ungrammaticalities. If the speaker's "most beautiful ship" is shipwrecked, there is no reason to climb the mast nor to look at the sea. Then, both the sea and the day of the shipwreck have disappeared. "Only the looking" is nonsensical, since "looking" doesn't exist independently of a human being. And finally, the speaker looks at something that doesn't exist, which is impossible.

Accordingly, the poem must be read at the hermeneutic level. The metaphor's tenor in the poem's first line is unknown. However, the predominant attribute of "shipwreck" is total destruction, and one's "most beautiful ship" can only be one's most prized possession. Thus, the metaphor refers to either the individual's actual death or the death of the best part of him. In his commentary on this poem in *Quince*, the poet says, "...lo mejor *mío* – lo *más* venerado y fiel – : *lo más bello* *mío* fue escoger *lo más bello* *mío*: acto que me definió: *mi nave más bella*: el máximo 'yo' (83)." ("... the best of myself – the most venerated and faithful - : my most beautiful thing was to choose my most beautiful thing: act that defined me - : my most beautiful ship: the maximum "I.")

The metaphor extends throughout the poem. In the poem's second line, the speaker climbs his ship's highest mast to look at the sea, and the verb chosen to express this action is "encaramarse." Rosenmann-Taub's technique of using internal words again appears here: the verb phrase "me encaramé" contains "cara," the Spanish word for "face", as well as the word "me" twice. With these two words, the poet indicates that in addition to climbing the mast to see, or "face" one's external situation, one must also "face" or confront oneself. This line also implies that there is a conscious existence after death, since the speaker's actions take place after the "náufrago."

Although the speaker is presumably dead, his intention is to “mirar el mar.” Since for a ship the primary attribute of the sea is its omnipresence, here the sea metonymically describes the speaker’s temporal and spatial environment. The infinitive “to look” represent the speaker’s consciousness, since “looking” requires intelligence, will and visual capacity, all essential attributes of consciousness. Accordingly, even after death, the speaker’s ability to look implies his consciousness.

In the the second stanza, the speaker’s view from his new vantage point reveals that the entire external world that he thought was real has disappeared, and the temporal context of the disaster is erased as well. By the stanza’s last line everything has disappeared, including the speaker’s own ego; now there is only pure consciousness: the “looking.” “Mirar” is here used as both an infinitive and as a verbal noun and is translated as a gerund: “looking;” it thus contains both verbal and nominal qualities and metonymically symbolizes consciousness even more forcefully than the simple infinitive “mirar” of the first stanza. Furthermore, with the phrase “Sólo había mirar” the poet indicates that consciousness is not only omnipresent but also uniquely present, the only thing that exists. In his *Quince* commentary Rosemann-Taub writes, “¡Estela *de nada en mar de nada!*....¿Un *día postrero*? Nunca un *día*....¿*Mirar!*: conciencia *de ninguna conciencia*.... Tiempo y espacio: irreales (83).” (“Wake of nothing in the sea of nothing! ...A final day? Never a day... To look!: consciousness of no consciousness... Time and space: unreal.”

By the end of the second stanza external reality and internal awareness have disappeared, but in the last stanza they return. The phrase “Miré el mirar...” signifies that consciousness exists both internally and externally: the speaker displays his own consciousness with the verb “Miré” and the external consciousness is the “mirar.” The phrase “...del navegar que espero” is the

contemplation of the speaker's future; thus the line paraphrased may read: "My own internal consciousness contemplated an external consciousness contemplating my future." The speaker thus introduces the idea of two kinds of consciousness: one that is internal and subjective, and another that is external and objective. In this stanza, the expression of consciousness takes on even more force than in the preceding stanza: not only does the verb "to look" appear both in its infinitive and gerund form, but in addition, the other verb, "espero," implies consciousness as well.

The final extension of the poet's original metaphor is that of the "navegar," the "sailing." The author locates it as the object of the verb "espero," which in Spanish means "to hope" as well as "to wait," so this verbal noun metaphorically represents the speaker's future: the "navegar que espero" may be understood as "the future that I anticipate." External and internal reality have reappeared, along with the speaker's ego and sense of time, but whereas in the second stanza consciousness is non-localized, here in the third stanza it is situated in the speaker. With his own internal consciousness, the speaker, observing himself both objectively and subjectively, contemplates his future.

In his own analysis of the poem in *Quince*, Rosenmann-Taub expresses a similar idea in different words. He proposes the idea that the "sea" is a sea of consciousness, and that the "mirar" – "m-ir-ar" – to go, through or by way of the sea – signifies that one "goes," or lives, through consciousness: "*Mirar*: m-*ir*-ar: *ir* a través del *mar* (84)." The "no's" of the second stanza which negate space and past time, are counterbalanced by the implicit "yes's" of consciousness of the third stanza: the "mirar" and the future ("el navegar que espero")(83-84).

As noted above, the verb "mirar" implicitly suggests intelligence and will as well as visual capacity. Utilized in its dual capacity as infinitive and verbal noun, the verb indicates

intention and action as well, and thus represents consciousness in the poem. Its multiple appearances in various forms and tenses throughout all three stanzas indicate that the central theme of the poem is consciousness. As expressed in the second stanza, one of the two forms of consciousness that the poem treats is a cosmic consciousness: consciousness is both all that exists in the multiverse, and the only thing that exists in the multiverse. The other form of consciousness, expressed in the first and third stanzas, is the individual consciousness that is present after one's physiological death: the speaker evaluates his life to understand his "máximo yo," he confronts himself, he "looks," he observes, and he waits, all qualities that require consciousness.

"En el naufrago día" focuses primarily on the continuation of consciousness after death: life after death exists in the form of both an individual as well as a multiversal consciousness. However, in the breadth of its scope, it touches on many of the other poems of this chapter. As in "El Desahucio," the continuation of the speaker's voice itself in the poem implies that his individual consciousness after death is at the same level as his consciousness before death. As in "Preludio" and "Asfódelo," the poem emphasizes that consciousness is the essential part of life, regardless of in what state of being the speaker finds himself. Finally, as in "Asfódelo," "Tú—rumor—atisbas" and "Noailles," the poem seems to imply that consciousness before death is a prerequisite for consciousness and/or conscious life after death.

In addition to the three poems analyzed above, other poems illustrate this same concept of a fully developed consciousness that continues to exist after the individual's death. The poet illustrates this concept by having the speaker address the deceased as his interlocutor; the interlocutor must be conscious, since if he were not, the speaker would not address him. As noted earlier, in "Canción de cuna," the parent speaks to his dead child, describing his actions,

warning him and admonishing him; the presupposition is that the child possesses a consciousness that will enable him to hear and understand what his parent is saying. Also, in “Tú – rumor – atisbas...” the speaker addresses Jesus Christ, dead for two thousand years. However, the three last poems of this chapter express in a more concrete manner the idea of a fully developed consciousness existing in the individual after his physiological death.

This chapter has categorized and described the many different forms that life after death may take in the poetry of David Rosenmann-Taub. In the chapter’s first category of poems we observed that life after death may be as intangible and ethereal as a shadow, a memory, soot directing itself to its own negation, or even the memory of other people. It could be another state of existence, such as rest, annulment, or even politeness to the living, having little or nothing to do with the individual himself. Nothingness may also be a desired state of being. Nevertheless, regardless of how much it is desired, and regardless of how intangible and ethereal the state of life after death may be, in Rosenmann-Taub’s poetry always some essential aspect of the human being remains after death.

More tangible visions of life after death are explored in the next category of poems. Rosenmann-Taub presents the possibilities that the individual may exist after his physiological death in forms as varied as a silent gleam of light, a dark swamp, a gleaming gob of spit, a star, a disembodied consciousness far from everything, or even another state of being, resting before the next stage of being. Once again, always some aspect of the human being remains after his death; and silence and light are two recurring aspects of the state of being that poems in this category illustrate.

The human being’s intimate relationship with nature and the earth enable him to continue to live in other forms even after his death as well. Various poems explore this relationship with

nature and how the individual's body might evolve after death. Along with the changes in the materiality of the body, the poems continue to posit a continuation of consciousness. The dead child still understands his father, the corpse asks snow to cover, mother and raise him, and the deceased demands his shroud of human waste. The atoms of the individual body merge with the other atoms of the multiverse, to fulfill their cosmic roles.

The final group of poems explored in this chapter delineates the poet's vision of full human consciousness continuing after death. The poet articulates this vision through the voice of the speaker or the presence and consciousness of the speaker's interlocutor; in either case, the poet's rendering of this after-death consciousness is so faithful to normal human consciousness that the reader cannot tell the difference between the two.

Through the exposition of these various visions and perspectives of life after death, Rosenmann-Taub expresses that the potential exists for human consciousness to continue after death. This consciousness may manifest itself in a multiplicity of forms, up to and including a form of consciousness identical to that of the living human being, and linked to or distinct from the consciousness of nature and the multiverse. Both the traditional religious viewpoint and the existential perspective are rejected; apart from those two conceptions of the afterlife, the breadth of the poet's vision indicates that the possibilities of life after death are virtually unlimited.

CHAPTER 4

DEATH AND LIFE JUXTAPOSED

This chapter examines the transitions between life and death that populate Rosenmann-Taub's poetry. As we have already seen, Rosenmann-Taub's poetry describes aspects of death that exist in life as well as those that exist after death. Given his continuous juxtaposition of these two states of being, it is not surprising that the instant of death would assume paramount importance, since that is the point in time where the two states of being intersect in the most tangible way. Facing death, the individual is most free, not only from social and cultural influences but also from biological and physiological limitations. No longer living in a past which has all but disappeared nor in a future that is unimaginable, but instead completely in the present moment, the speaker faces the end of his life as he knows it and, perhaps, the beginning of another existence.¹⁷

The poems that portray this juxtaposition of life and death may be divided into three categories. In the first category, the poet prolongs this instant in order to describe it more fully. This transition from life and death is not simply a transition from being to non-being but instead a transition from one form of being (or non-being) to another form of being (or non-being); and the poems describe the process of transformation as well as the transformation itself.

Second, the poet conceives of the juxtaposition of life and death during the individual's life. The poems imply that every moment of life can be one in which the individual actively chooses life, or, with his passivity and unconscious action, resign himself to a living death.

The chapter's third category of poems focuses on the attitude of the human being, either at the moment of death itself or in any critical moment during his life. In the second chapter we

analyzed poems that showed the individual's typical preference for the passivity and lack of consciousness that constitutes death in life throughout the course of his life, as well as poems that demonstrate the individual's possibility and capacity of choosing to live a conscious life. In this last area, the individual's attitude is all-important. Does he choose death, either consciously or unconsciously, or does he choose life? Does he react unthinkingly and emotionally, or does he act rationally and objectively? Or, does he doubt his mortality and refuse to even consider the issue? In his discussion of Rilke's attitude towards death as manifested in his poetry, Maurice Blanchot observes that

No one doubts death, but no one can think of certain death except doubtfully. ... This in itself indicates that if men in general do not think about death, if they avoid confronting it, it is doubtless in order to flee death and hide from it, but that this escape is possible only because death itself is perpetual flight before death, and because it is the deep of dissimulation. Thus to hide *from* it is in a certain way to hide *in* it. So the ability to die ceases to be a meaningless issue, and we can understand how a man's goal might be the search for death's possibility (95).

Rosenmann-Taub's ideas of being and non-being do not necessarily dovetail with those of Rilke or Blanchot; nevertheless, the speakers of his poems consistently refuse to hide *from* death by hiding *in* death. The speakers in the poems that constitute this category all confront death in one form or another: they display resignation or anticipation, objectivity or emotion, positive or negative energy. As Rosenmann-Taub portrays the individual's consciousness of and attitude toward the simultaneous nature of his being, he invites the reader to examine his own relationship to his being in this most universal and personal of all poetic themes.

1. Life and Death at The Moment of Death

The first and most prominent category of poems in this domain consists of those poems that describe the encounter between these two states of being that occurs at the instant of death. The poems may refer to Nature and natural processes and/or cycles of life and death, or they may

conceive of this transition in metaphysical terms. In general, however, the poems follow a pattern: first, a description of the instant of death; then, the suggestion of the possibility of an immediate or gradual transition to another form of being and a description of the process or form that transition takes; and finally, either an explicit or implied characterization of that new state of being.

The first poem that we examine is “Olvidamos los ojos...” from *El Zócalo*. This exemplary poem illustrates the pattern described above, as well as the poet’s technique of prolonging the instant of death to describe it more fully, while continuing to develop the poet’s fundamental concept of the simultaneity of being and non-being, in death as well as in life.

VI

Olvidamos los ojos
inhóspitos, la boca
que ríe amordazada;
las uñas, infinitas,
que la oquedad custodian;
las arrugas, la frente,
el ademán de playas;
el húmedo crepúsculo
que también nace abajo.

We forget the inhospitable eyes,
the mouth
that laughs, gagged;
the nails, infinite,
that guard the cavity;
the wrinkles, the forehead,
the gesture of beaches;
the humid twilight
that also arises below.

Antes que la luz tiemble
dentro de las gavillas,
Dios madura en el polvo
de los dorados surcos.
Un árbol nos doblega
sus ciegas ramas crédulas,
y nos vamos tornando
sombra y sueño en la sombra (32).

Before the light trembles
inside the sheaves,
God ripens in the dust
of the golden furrows.
A tree bends toward us
its blind credulous branches,
and we become
shadow and sleep in the shadow.

This poem is representative of many other poems that describe the transition from life to afterlife in its prolongation of the moment of this transition (among others, “¿Posteridad?....,” “TAJRIJIM” and “En el náufrago día de mi nave más bella...”). Citing this poem as an example of *El Zócalo*, Naín Nómez declares, “...predomina el tópico de esta muerte lenta que impregna la

conciencia del sujeto y que se amplía a todos los seres vivos, así como a la naturaleza” (“Sobre la poesía...,”(10). The “muerte lenta” is depicted as a transformation to “...sombra y sueño en la sombra.” The poem describes the changes that the individual undergoes at the moment of death as a transformation, a “tornando” from the state of being that is life to a state of being that is shadow and dream. The instant of death is prolonged for the duration of the poem in order for the poet to fully express his concept of this liminal moment (“Sobre la poesía... 1).

The first stanza speaks of all that initially disappears with the death of the body. The poet employs one long sentence, comprised of a subject, a verb and a multitude of objects, in which a series of synecdoches and metonyms expresses the major aspects and processes of life that are forgotten at the moment of death. As always, the knowledge that the poem is a unity and that the ungrammaticalities of this series of objects can be related at the hermeneutic level of reading permits the more transparent imagery of the stanza to inform the more opaque imagery. The powers of sight and speech, represented by eyes and mouth, are the first to be forgotten. Represented by the fingernails—the transition between the live tissue of the body and the infinity of the multiverse external to the body—the body’s sensorial contact with the outside world is forgotten. Man’s intelligence, symbolized by the forehead, is forgotten. All the effects of the passage of time, represented by the speaker’s wrinkles, are forgotten. “El ademán de playas,” the traces that flora, fauna and water leave on the sand of the beach, are a metonymic representation of the life experiences that leave their particular ephemeral traces on the human being; these are forgotten at the instant of death as well.

Since the poem is a unity, the “húmedo crepúsculo” must also be a bodily function. The word “crepúsculo” means either dawn or twilight. Understood as a “humid dawn” and in combination with the predicate phrase “nace abajo,” the phrase seems to refer to human sexuality

and the body's reproductive functions, since "humedad" generally symbolizes life in Rosenmann-Taub's poetry. In similar fashion to the other bodily functions delineated previously in the stanza, these functions also terminate with death. Additionally, when understood as a "humid twilight" that "arises below," the phrase is now an antithesis that refers to the creation of new life that stems from the body's twilight of death and decomposition. The bisemic nature of "crepúsculo" in the phrase the "húmedo crepúsculo que también nace abajo" thus allows the poet to not only represent the termination of the sexual and reproductive functions central to the individual and the species that comes with the physiological death of the body but also to simultaneously anticipate the next stanza's concept of the transformation of the body into another state of being, all in one phrase. This concept of the transformation of the body into another state of being at death is not unique to this poem. Suggesting that life continues after death in another form, the two-line poem GENETRIX from *El Zócalo* mentioned earlier illustrates this concept perfectly: "Acabo de morir: para la tierra / soy un recién nacido"(46).

In contrast with the description of the disappearance of the various aspects and functions of life that make up the first stanza, the lines of the second stanza suggest that after death a certain essential aspect of the human being remains and becomes transformed. The first two lines offer a powerful image of the premonition of a new life that follows the death described in the poem's first stanza: the beginning of life that comes "Antes que la luz tiemble" inside sheaves of grain. This image parallels the image of the "criaturas del pan del sortilegio" that "ondean, en lo hondo de la almendra, porvenires vividos..." ["the creatures of the bread of sorcery" that "ripple, in the depths of the almond, lived futures..."] from "De vuelta a los rosales..." In both images, consciousness exists before the beginning of new life, as the continuation of a transformation and consciousness that was present earlier.

The temporal reference “Antes que...” indicates that before this transformation takes place, “Dios madura” in the dust. At and after the moment of death we forget our worldly existence, become transformed into dust and the dust becomes transformed into new life. However, before this second transformation takes place, “God,” or consciousness, matures in that dust: our bodily functions may disappear, but our consciousness remains, to be transformed and reappear. The line “Un árbol nos doblega / sus ciegas ramas crédulas” confirms this interpretation with its recognition of this process of transformation. The tree inclines its branches to us, the recently dead, as a gesture of homage to the consciousness that is the essence of one’s being; it cannot see this process of transformation that takes place after death, but nevertheless intuits its presence and believes in its existence.

The last two lines of the poem describe this transformation further. The penultimate line, “y nos vamos tornando,” indicates that in death as in life, transformation is continuous: like life, death is a process of becoming. The final line, “sombra y sueño en la sombra” may be understood on many levels. At the literal or mimetic level, the speaker, recently dead, is transformed into a shadow and, even less, the unconsciousness of sleep or dream within that shadow. This interpretation is an ungrammaticality, since it is impossible for a corporeal human being to become an ethereal shadow, sleep, or a dream. Read at a hermeneutic level and taken in context with the rest of the poem, the line depicts man’s consciousness after death as a dream, surrounded by darkness. More precisely, the poem’s last line delineates the speaker’s transformation into *both* dream and darkness. In essence, this line suggests that there is little difference between these two states of being that we call life and death: in both, a small amount of consciousness is surrounded by darkness, and in both, the individual contains both light and darkness, both consciousness and unconsciousness.

Thus the poem gives a detailed description first of the process of death, then of the process of transformation, and finally of the form that consciousness might take at the end of this process. Consciousness manifests itself inside the sheaves, inside the furrows, in the dust, in the belief of the tree, and in the shadow and the dream within the shadow. In addition, the speaker himself is speaking to us from beyond the grave, so the entirety of the poem itself is an expression of the consciousness that remains after death.

The isotopy of light and vision that appears throughout the poem unifies it and reinforces the interpretation above. “Olvidamos los ojos...,” “el húmedo crepúsculo...,” “Antes que la luz tiemble dentro de las gavillas...,” “dorados surcos...,” “ciegas ramas crédulas” and “sombra y sueño en la sombra” are all elements of this isotopy. However, what stands out in the examination of these isotopic elements is not the presence but the absence and/or compromised nature of light and vision: the eyes are forgotten, dawn and twilight have a different quality of light than ordinary daylight, the interior of the sheaves of grain is described in its “pre-lit” condition, the furrows are golden, but golden in the blackness of the tilled earth, the tree’s branches are blind, and the speaker becomes shadow, the negation of light. Thus, light simultaneously exists and does not exist; when it doesn’t exist, it is about to reappear, it is believed, or is an innate quality. In this way, the poet employs light as a metaphorical representation of consciousness: the speaker forgets it, it seems to disappear, it exists in its negation, but also it is present in the dust, inside the sheaves of grain, in the furrows of the earth, and is sensed and believed by even lower forms of sentient beings.

The alliteration of the “s” in the last line (“vamos tornando / sombra y sueño en la sombra”) represents the sound of sleep and phonologically reenacts a slumber that precedes the next state of being. Also, the repetition of the word “sombra” that both begins and ends this line

encloses the word “sueño” in the middle of that last line, just as the darkness of the unconscious multiverse surrounds the “sueño” that is the remaining fragment of consciousness from the previous life and the kernel of a conscious life to come. Finally, the “s” sound links all three of these words, thus reinforcing the idea that both “sombra” and “sueño” exist within the human being, after death as well as before, and in unequal quantities, with there being more shadow than dream, more unconsciousness than consciousness.

The use of an implicit verb throughout the first stanza also highlights the idea of death as a gradual process of transformation as well. The combined subject and verb “Olvidamos” that is explicit in the first line is implicit throughout the rest of the stanza, as the poet enumerates a series of corporeal parts and functions that are forgotten. Nevertheless, the reader can’t help but mentally precede these direct objects with the subject-verb “olvidamos” as he reads the poem: “Olvidamos los ojos...; olvidamos la boca...; olvidamos las uñas...” As the poet develops this semantic isotopy – the loss of corporeal consciousness, awareness, and other attributes of life—he again foregrounds his vision of the gradual nature of this transformation, as opposed to the conventional concept of death as instantaneous.

The poem thus illustrates Rosenmann-Taub’s technique of prolonging the instant of death to more fully describe the transformation that takes place as the individual moves from one state of being to another. It also describes the transformation itself: from corporeal materiality to ethereality, a state that resembles but is still not the same as nothingness, where the body disappears but consciousness undergoes a process of transformation and continues to exist. The speaker’s awareness of internal and external processes and events that occur after death, the prolongation of the description of this process of transformation, and the many forms of consciousness that appear throughout the poem all point to the existence of consciousness that

exists after the physiological death of the body. Finally, the poet uses the metaphor of light and the dialectic between light and darkness to describe the juxtaposition and transformation of consciousness and unconsciousness during and after death.

The first stanza from “De vuelta a los rosales...” is another example of this gradual and prolonged movement towards death:

De vuelta a los rosales,
pavesas en los rayos de parques agostados,
hacia su paraíso las rosas se dispersan.

Ser sin ser, mis corimbos,
marchitos, se preparan.

Back to the rosebushes,
soot in the rays of withered parks,
the roses disperse towards their
paradise.
To be without being, my corymbs,
withered, prepare themselves.

The rosebushes that become soot in the hot August parks, the roses that disperse to their paradise and the speaker’s corymbs that prepare to “be without being” are all additional descriptions of the concept of death as a process rather than as an instantaneous event. The thematic elements of “Olvidamos los ojos...”—the disappearance of the physical aspects of being, the suggestion of a transformation to another state of being, and the prolongation of the moment of death to allow the description of this transformation—appear in this poem as well.

The poem *¿Posteridad?...* from *La Opción* is a similar example. The poem’s second stanza describes the death of the body: “la máquina/ se desbandó. / Se empalará: / mondongo.” Again, the first stage of death and transformation is the description of the disappearance of the physical aspects of life. Immediately following, in the last stanza of the poem, the poet writes “Oh / tizne, / te diriges / impersuasiblemente hacia tu No” (20) . Even though the physical body dies, freezes and is cremated, the soot from the cremated remains still appears to retain some degree of consciousness, since the poet chooses to apostrophize it. This last line again suggests the possibility of a transformation. As he does in the previous examples, Rosenmann-Taub again

prolongs this instant of death in this poem as well, in his description of this process of death and transformation.

In all three of these poems the poet views the instant of the physiological death of the body as a moment of transformation from one state of being to another, and “stops time,” so to speak, in order to describe as fully as possible this moment of transition. Death is generally perceived as the end of life, a movement towards a lesser or greater degree of intangibility accompanied by some element of awareness or consciousness as a process rather than an instantaneous event.

The next poem we examine, “De camarada a camarada, cuerpo...” from *La Noche Antes*, also takes place at the instant of death and incorporates some of these same ideas as well. In this poem, the speaker addresses his own body.

CLXXVIII

De camarada a camarada, cuerpo,
te he pedido. Me has dado.
Pídeme. Anhelo darte
mi riqueza: los verbos del silencio:
sus hálitos
empiezan a habitar me (223).

As one comrade to another, body,
I have asked you. You have given me.
Ask me. I desire to give you
my richness: the verbs of the silence:
their breaths
begin to inhabit me.

Behind the explicit statements of the poem lies a multitude of implicit meanings. For example, the poem starts as a dialogue where the interlocutor is the speaker’s body; thus, the speaking voice must be the speaker’s consciousness. The speaker recognizes his body as a “comrade,” and speaks to it as one friend to another. In so doing, he implicitly recognizes that he has asked for much from his body, as much as he would ask from a friend, and that the body has consistently responded to all that it has been asked.

While it may be true that consciousness is the highest part of the human being, it is also true that without the body, consciousness is useless. Man’s achievements are due to his body as

much as his brain; human life itself is due to the functioning of the body's various organs and systems. During life the body has been asked much, on many occasions abused, and nevertheless has always given everything within its capacity to the human being. The speaker recognizes how much the body has given and wants to reciprocate; he tells the body to ask from him in the same way that he has asked from the body over many years.

The words "...Anhelo darte / mi riqueza: los verbos del silencio:" also contain implicit meanings. The paradoxical phrase "los verbos del silencio" suggests a contrast with two kinds of "verbs of noise:" those verbs or words that constitute the speech of human beings during life, and also, the constant mental "chatter" that permeates the human being's thought during all his waking moments. Both may be considered fraudulent consciousness, since internal and external chatter prevent the individual from any real understanding of either himself or the world.

The lines from the second stanza of "Orco..." the first poem discussed in the second chapter, reinforce this idea in the following words: "Para penetrar nada, expreso / todo" (30). For Rosenmann-Taub, mankind's limited human consciousness is capable of expression but not of any real comprehension of the reality of the multiverse. In the first stanza of "Orco," the speaker says, "Para penetrar todo, expresas nada;" contrary to the futility of expression, silence is the key for the merging with and understanding of the multiverse. In "De camarada a camarada, cuerpo..." the speaker wants to give his body precisely that richness: the "verbs of silence." These "verbs of silence" are the silence of death: the relief from the vicissitudes of life, the language of non-being, and—as shown in "Orco..."—the merging with the larger multiversal consciousness that contains the richness of knowledge as its breaths begin to inhabit the speaker.

In the last two lines, the words "sus hálitos / empiezan a habitarme" suggest that perhaps with death comes a life that surpasses our understanding of life. The breaths of the "verbs of

silence” are the breaths of multiversal consciousness, contrary to the breaths of ordinary life, and they begin to inhabit the speaker at the point of his death. It is in this instant, when “sus hálitos / empiezan a habitarme,” that the death that exists in life and the life that exists in death meet. The poem is the goodbye of consciousness to the body at the moment of death and the expression of gratitude for all it has done for the speaker over the years of his life. However, it is also the merging of individual consciousness with the multiversal consciousness as the breaths of that multiversal consciousness begin to inhabit the speaker and his body, at that instant when life and death intersect.

“De camarada a camarada, cuerpo...” thus amplifies the perception of death shown in “Olvidamos los ojos...” discussed above. The poem again demonstrates Rosenmann-Taub’s tendency to prolong the moment of death in order to more fully describe it. In this instance as well, death is not just the cessation of existence but the transformation to another state of being, and the instant of death is the instant that juxtaposes both these states.

However, the poem also evokes other themes. The speaker’s appreciation for his body in the last second of his life is a reminder of the importance of the body to human life, a fact that is often ignored or taken for granted in contemporary society. Like many of the poems discussed in the second chapter, this poem posits the existence of a life after death. The poem’s concept of death and silence as the *sine qua non* for knowledge and consciousness and the use of the word “riqueza” in reference to the “verbs of silence” that only come with death suggest that consciousness may increase after death, a theme that this study explored in its examination of “Orco....” Similar to “El Desahucio,” also analyzed earlier, the poem’s speaker retains full consciousness after death as he describes how the “breaths of the silence begin to inhabit him.” It

seems that the level of consciousness and awareness of the individual has not only remained but has actually increased with the movement from one state of being to another.

The poems examined above demonstrate that the juxtaposition of life and death at the point of death in Rosenmann-Taub's poetry may result in a variety of potential results. Either at or shortly after the moment of physiological death, both consciousness and corporeal aspects of life may slowly disappear. The individual and his body may begin to merge with the physical and conscious multiverse as body and consciousness, disappearing and negating themselves, may at the same time transform themselves. The death of the individual may result in a new life, depending on perspective. It is even possible that at the moment of death the level of one's consciousness may remain or even increase, regardless of the physical disintegration and disappearance of the body.

2. Life and Death during the Life of the Individual

This chapter has analyzed poems that examine the juxtaposition of life and death at or immediately after the moment of the individual's death. However, at times the depiction of the simultaneous nature of these two states of being is so strong that the reader must consider that in every moment of life the juxtaposition of these two states is just as pronounced as in the last instant of life. The one-line poem "Calostro" from *El Zócalo* eloquently illustrates the juxtaposition of life and death that commences starting from the birth of the human being.

XIV

CALOSTRO

Féretro de canela (42).

FOREMILK

Coffin of cinnamon.

The reader may initially ponder the poem's ungrammaticality, wondering how foremilk and cinnamon may be related to a coffin. However, the poem is logical in the context of the poet's vision of life and death as expressed in his other poems and commentaries. Foremilk is

the first milk that the mother gives to her newborn child: in that sense, it is the bringer of life and the accompaniment to the first days of life of the individual. However, given that life is so intimately intertwined with death in Rosenmann-Taub's poetry, and also given that the process of dying starts at the first moment of life, foremilk may also be understood as the bringer of death as well. Before conception, death is impossible. However, starting from the moment of conception death is a part of the individual's existence, and from that point on, everything that brings life also brings death. The poet thus proposes the juxtaposition of life and death, starting from the moment of birth, in this short poem.

The poet's description of the "féretro" as "canela" both confirms and amplifies the poem's meaning. In the primary definition of the word, taken from Martín Alonso's *Enciclopedia del Idioma*, the word "canela" refers first to "corteza del canelo de color rojo y amarillo, de olor y sabor agradable." (Tomo I 895). Just as the coffin is an enclosure of the body, the cinnamon bark encloses the tree. Also, just as the cinnamon bark has a red and yellow color and pleasing smell and taste, the calostrum is generally of yellow or orange color; and the common view of mother's milk is that it also has a pleasing smell and taste. The second definition of canela from the *Enciclopedia* cited above is "cosa muy fina y exquisita"(p. 895, Tomo I). This beginning of death that accompanies the beginning of life is fine and exquisite, just as the beginning of life itself is fine and exquisite, as yet undeformed by external influences. Rosenmann-Taub in this way equates death and life in this three-word poem: both exist simultaneously from birth; the former feeds the latter, and both contain similar qualities.

Prosodic and phonological similarities abound in this short poem as well. "Calostro" and "canela" both have three syllables; both begin with the "c" (the phoneme /k/); both have the same vowel pattern (two vowels, with one vowel repeated); and both have the same

accentuation. These two words are thus closely linked phonologically and prosodically as well as semantically. “Féretro” also has three syllables, also two vowels, with one vowel repeated, and its two vowels appear in the other three words of the poem, thus also connecting this word to the rest of the poem phonologically as well as semantically.

The poem “La Cita” from *El Mensajero* also examines the juxtaposition of these two states of being. Initially it appears that the poem is concerned with the moment of death, but closer analysis reveals that this poem examines the juxtaposition of these two states of being at all moments of life.

II

La Cita

Preguntarán en casa
por mí. ¡Tanto feriado sin tu zarpa!
Sepelio, ¿no me amas?

Paulatino diluvio.
Neutralidad. Borneo hacia el estuco.
Dios, celoso: “¿Te aburro?(12)”

The Date

They’ll be asking at home
for me. So much holiday without your claw!
Funeral, don’t you love me?

Gradual deluge.
Neutrality. I twist towards the stucco.
God, jealous: “Do I bore you?”

The poem’s first stanza appears to address the theme of death. In the first line, the sentence “Preguntarán en casa / por mí...” implies that the speaker may or will be absent from his house, and that people may or will be asking for him. This line appears to represent the speaker’s death, since the absence from one’s place of being is non-being, and as we have previously seen, Rosenman-Taub repeatedly employs the metaphor of “home” to refer to the individual’s essence.

In the third line, the speaker apostrophizes “sepelio;” more than just the funeral, this word also includes the other rites and rituals around one’s death, ranging from the wake to the embalming to the funeral service and interment. As such, “sepelio” seems to be a metonym

representing death. The speaker's question, "¿No me amas?" indicates that he is courting Death, with a coquettish and flirtatious language. The poem's title "La Cita" refers to a social appointment, a "date," and the interlocutor may well be the speaker's "date."

Since both the opening and concluding sentences of the stanza refer to death, the stanza's middle sentence, "¡Tanto feriado sin tu zarpa!" must refer to death as well. With the word "tu" the speaker apostrophizes an unknown entity here, and to understand the meaning of this line, one must identify this entity. Its proximity to "Sepelio" initially leads the reader to the conclusion that the speaker is again addressing Death, as stated above. However, if the claw of death prevents "tanto feriado," why would the speaker be "courting" it? At this point of analysis, the text has not provided sufficient information to confirm this conclusion.

In the second stanza, the speaker's courtship of death becomes far more pronounced, and the movement toward death is the predominant isotopy. "Paulatino diluvio," may be envisioned as the gradual submergence of the individual in a sea of unconsciousness over time: just as rain saturates the earth with water, death gradually saturates the individual's life. The poet adds to this death imagery with the metonym "Neutralidad" that also conveys the idea of death; life connotes values, be they positive or negative, and true neutrality is a quality of non-being. The phrase "Borneo hacia el estuco" contains a third image of the speaker's movement towards death. A building material that hides structural components of buildings with its smooth surface, stucco metonymically represents life's superficial and therefore false aspects; when one "twists toward the stucco," one intentionally turns away from his real life to the superficial life that for Rosenmann-Taub is comparable to death. Stucco's color is generally white – the neutral color of death. In addition, the word "estuco" contains the internal word "tú" (you); accordingly the line may be read "I twist towards you," signifying the speaker's movement towards the other and

away from himself. Finally, as opposed to the word “turn”, the verb “Borneo”—“twist”—suggests a movement that is both intentional and unnatural; this lexical choice suggests that the individual does not simply drift unconsciously towards death but intentionally seeks it, even though it might be unnatural and require contortion.

In the last line, a presumably rejected God asks the speaker “¿Te aburro?” God and his question here parallel the speaker’s question at the end of the first stanza: the same coquettish language of courtship again illustrates the speaker’s engagement with death. The speaker has apparently rejected God and the life force he represents so strongly that God himself now courts the speaker.

We now return to the first stanza, to see if we can resolve its ambiguity. The second stanza’s last line suggests that the “tu” of the poem’s second line may refer not to Death but to Life; when the speaker complains about the “zarpa,” it is the claw of Life that imprisons, not the claw of Death; and the speaker wishes to escape Life as he courts Death in the following line. Now the poem becomes a logically consistent unity. In the first line, the speaker begins by acknowledging his future death. In the second line, he exclaims happily about the relief from the vicissitudes of life that death brings. Then he begins to court death, with the coquettish language of the stanza’s last line. The images of the second stanza that delineate more ever precisely the characteristics of the speaker’s courtship of death render this movement towards death even more definite and stronger. By the end of the poem, the speaker has rejected his own Creator, so much so that God now begins to court the speaker in the same way that the speaker courted Death in the first stanza.

The poem’s principal semantic isotopies all seem to confirm this interpretation. The metonymic images “gradual deluge”, “neutrality” and “twist to the stucco” of the second stanza

all represent the rejection of life. Another isotopy, that of animality, may be found in internal words in the poem; the “zarpa” of the first stanza, the “oso” of “celoso” and the “burro” of “aburro” all imply a movement away from human consciousness and towards an animal level of consciousness. Finally, the isotopy of courtship, evidenced by the poem’s title and the last lines of each of the two stanzas, demonstrates the voluntary and active desire of the individual to embrace the living death of unconsciousness and to turn away from the holiday of life.

Although this hermeneutic reading has yielded a unified significance, this poem appears to have additional levels as well. Despite the conclusions reached at the semantic level of reading, much evidence at the discursive level of reading contradicts this interpretation. “Cómo me gustaría...” from *El Mensajero* is a plea for release from the struggle of existence; this theme finds its expression in the first and third books of the tetralogy as well, in poems like “Dominio,” “En las eras ajeno...,” “En el poniente de pardos vallados...,” and “La Traición.” All these poems tend to support the interpretation that the claw of the first stanza is the claw of life, from which the speaker seeks to escape as he courts death.

However, the opposite interpretation also finds support in other poems of Rosenmann-Taub. Poems such as “Era yo Dios y caminaba sin saberlo,” “Con su soga oportuna...,” “Ah ser la triste oveja que ante el perro temible...,” and “No el cadáver de Dios lo que medito...” celebrate life and advocate that life be lived in all its plenitude. Furthermore, “La Cita” is found in the chapter of *El Mensajero* entitled “Vitamortis,” and the poet’s linking of the two Latin words which signify life and death in the title of this chapter strongly suggests that for him, life exists in death as well as death in life. As we have already seen in the previous two chapters, many other poems throughout the tetralogy illustrate the simultaneous presence of these two states of being.

If the reader keeps these ideas in mind, the poem's first stanza may be better understood as being polysemic in nature. In addition to apostrophizing Life, the "tu" of the stanza's second line may apostrophize Death. Now, the "tu" of this line is syntactically consistent with the "tú" that is understood in the verb form "amas" of the succeeding line. The "zarpa" is the claw of Death as well as the claw of Life, and since mankind is on holiday without that "zarpa" the speaker here celebrates the positive aspects of life as well as its negative aspects. Also for the poet, as we have already seen, life exists in death. "Sepelio" refers to the entire ceremony of death, which includes the embalming, the service, the burial, and the wake; it encompasses many activities and involves the efforts of many people, of which the deceased is only one. In this interpretation, "sepelio," connoting an "active" death, speaks now of the presence of life in death: instead of representing death, now "sepelio" is a party that the speaker wishes to attend. And now, the other possible interpretation of "¿no me amas?" mentioned above takes on a new meaning: the speaker desires to know if the vitality that death represents loves him.

Thus, the poem is no longer solely an exposition of the presence of death in life. Informed by the discursive level of reading, this interpretation indicates that the poem has two different foci, one in each stanza. While acknowledging the inevitability of death, the first stanza celebrates life and even suggests the possibility of vitality in death. In contrast, the second stanza demonstrates the presence of death in life and suggests that man, through his very nature, inevitably seeks unconsciousness and death throughout his life.

The phonological elements of the poem also tend to support this interpretation of the poem. For example, in the first stanza, which deals with life, the three lines all terminate in the rhyme "a-a." This open sound may be a representation of life: the condition of being open to new experience. In contrast, in the second stanza, which seems to deal with the movement

towards death, the three lines terminate in the rhyme “u-o”, a sound that is closed, and thus reminiscent of death. These phonological elements combine to onomatopoetically suggest the presence of life in the first stanza and death in the second.

The poem’s morphosyntactic elements support this latter reading as well. The poem begins with a sentence that due to the use of the future tense of the verb introduces ambiguity from its first word: as well as indicating the future, “preguntarán” also suggests uncertainty. As a result, the poet is able to simultaneously convey the possibilities that the speaker may be either dead or alive. Also, the exclamatory and interrogatory clauses that follow in the first stanza introduce emotion and vitality into the poem. These syntactic elements highlight the stanza’s thematic content: the presence of life in both life and death. In contrast, the short sentences with their absence of predicates in the first two phrases of the second stanza as well as in the last line of the stanza give the poetic lines a tone of lifelessness. Just as he did in the first stanza, here again the poet employs syntax to further emphasize the thematic content of the movement towards death in this stanza.

The parallel constructions at the end of each stanza are perhaps the key elements to the confirmation of the meaning of the poem. At the end of the first stanza, the speaker’s question, phrased in the negative, explicitly conveys the desire for death; however, in the context of the stanza, the question implicitly conveys the idea of desire for life, even though that life the speaker desires is a life after death. The parallel construction at the end of the second stanza conveys the opposite: As God, the Creator of life, explicitly pursues the speaker with his question, the reader understands that the question’s implicit message is that the speaker desires only death: death in life and death in death.

Rosenmann-Taub thus finds a way to express both of the simultaneous and opposing tendencies of mankind: to seek the “neutralidad” of unconsciousness and death in life as well as in death, and to seek the “feriado” of life in death as well as in life. To do so, the poet employs as his vehicle the image of courtship with its underlying aspect of erotic desire, in order to convey the intensity of these tendencies.

The poem “En el poniente de pardos vallados...” from *El Zócalo* also expresses this concept of the juxtaposition of life and death throughout life. Here, Rosenmann-Taub employs imagery taken from the Spanish bullfighting tradition to dramatize his theme.

VIII

En el poniente de pardos vallados...

En el poniente de pardos vallados,
de sobaquillo y verónica de oro,
juegan el hombre y la parca: embrocados,
derivan: cuadran faena. El tesoro,

caliginoso cabestro, se oculta
de la destreza de tules solares:
risco de fauces de jade: sepulta
los quioscos gilvos. La parca ¡No pares!

hace ondular sobre los immolados
novillos. Cómplice de acantilados
cuernos, ¡No pares! se trasvina, sigue

y sigue... El hombre a las landas del cielo
ha escudriñado con garfio gemelo.
Ya no se sabe quién es quien persigue. (36)

In the sunset of brown fences,
of banderilla and golden verónica,
vie death and the man: horns locked,
they slide: they face each other, charge
and feint. The treasure,

an obscure lead ox, hides
from the skill of solar veils:
crag of jaws of jade: it buries
the golden pavilions. Death makes

the *Don't stop!* ripple over the
sacrificed
steers. An accomplice of spiked horns,
Don't stop! oozes, continues

and continues... Man has srutinized
the moors of the sky with a twin hook.
Nobody knows who is pursuing whom anymore.

In this poem, Rosenmann-Taub employs the language of the Spanish bullfighting tradition to construct what Riffaterre terms a descriptive system. The poem is more complicated than others, due to the underutilized and/or archaic words that constitute its lexicon. Following Riffaterre, we examine each signifier in the descriptive system that is the poem. Since we know

that they are related to each other, we hypothesize the referents of the metonyms to which they belong in order to unify the imagery and ultimately arrive at the poem's significance.¹⁸

Rosenmann-Taub employs signifiers from the Spanish bullfighting tradition such as "sobaquillo," "verónica" and "pardos vallados" to describe the sempiternal conflict between life and death, juxtaposing these two states of being in a dramatic manner reminiscent of a bullring. The speaker is in the "bullring" of life, and since it is man and his fate/death who are the contestants in this struggle, we can understand the "bullfight" as the confrontation of life and death. The "sunset of brown fences" that situates the moment of this scene at the end of the day metaphorically suggests that the scene takes place in the "sunset" of the speaker's life, his final moments. However, since the bullfight is also a metaphorical description of life itself, where the individual is always at risk, the poet also implicitly suggests here that this confrontation of life and death occurs constantly during one's life, not just at the moment of his death.

Both the individual and death are "embrocados:" caught, just as the toreador is caught between the horns of the bull and the bull is caught by the sword of the bullfighter. On the one hand, man's physiological death is inevitable; on the other, since for the poet life continues after death, man can determine his own fate through his actions as much as his fate can determine him. This is the "faena" into which they "cuadran:" to settle, once and for all, if man will determine his fate, or if fate will determine the man.

The poem's signifiers are metonyms whose referents are the hypograms that form the descriptive system that constitutes the poem. Hiding itself from "solar nets," the treasure of the poem's fourth line is a "caliginoso cabestro." The "cabestro" is a bell-ox: typically, a castrated bullock that guides the bulls either in the bullring or in the "running of the bulls" in urban Spanish celebrations, such as the well-known celebration in Pamplona. Since the poem centers

on the struggle between man and his fate, this treasure that is an “obscure bell-ox” may be understood as a guide to a life that is a treasure, one’s correct life. The guide hides itself from the light, so it cannot be a typical “leader” but is instead an “interior” guide: one’s true consciousness, hidden from the “destreza de tules solares.” In contrast to the obscurity of the “caliginoso cabestro,” the image of “solar veils” points to an intelligence with skill, but one that is nonetheless veiled. This ordinary daylight is the light of ordinary and quotidian consciousness, a veiled consciousness that with all its skill nevertheless can neither see nor activate the treasure hidden in the dark interior of the human being that is his real life.

This treasure makes its presence known only by means of the bell of that “caliginoso cabestro;” it can be heard but not seen. In “Con su sogá oportuna me ahorca...” the speaker cries “¡Permítame oír cómo cae esa gota de agua, Dios mío!” Also, in the poem “No es el cadáver de Dios lo que medito” discussed in the second chapter, the “campana” inside the “espadaña” signified the individual’s essence; and as we shall see in “La Traición” later on, the “campanas” in that poem signify aspects of the individual’s essence as well. All these references to sound and hearing in Rosenmann-Taub’s oeuvre suggest that for the poet, audition and not sight is the key to one’s true being. Thus, this obscure lead-ox represents the individual’s consciousness, and his bell, the individual’s essential self.

The colon that precedes the phrase “risco de fauces de jade” indicates that this phrase also further describes this treasure. The crag presents a challenge to the climber; but it is this very challenge that enables the climber to understand his abilities and limits. The “fauces” are cavities that can swallow the individual; he may lose himself in these cavities, but losing his false sense of self is the only way for him to find his true self. Jade is characterized by its extreme hardness and is considered in most cultures to be a treasure of great worth. Thus, this

phrase that is incomprehensible at the level of the signifier achieves great significance in our hermeneutic reading. Just as a trusted friend's words may be "golden," the challenges of life and the traps and pitfalls into which one falls are "of jade" in their value to the individual; these are all part of the treasure, that obscure guide which leads one to oneself.

Similar to the previous phrase, the semi-colon that precedes "sepulta los quioscos gilvos" is still another description of the "treasure." The "golden pavilions" are sites of vacation, relaxation and entertainment for the individual; however, the treasure of conscious life "buries," or does away with these sites, since they only lead the individual away from his real essence.

Death's weapon is time: the "¡No pares!" of the second and third stanzas represents the relentless march of time that gives him victory in this struggle. The "¡No pares!" oozes, moving ever so slowly, but is unstoppable. The poet's use of enjambment between the third and fourth lines reinforces the idea of the impossibility of stopping time: it is as if the poet tries to stop it, at the end of the second stanza, but it is too powerful: the enjambment carries over not just from one line to another, but from one stanza to the next. The "sacrificed steers" are in the bullfighting tradition those young bulls that don't have the physical or mental attributes to become worthy of the ring; in the poem they become metonyms for all those unfinished projects, failed ideals, unrealized talents, and lost dreams that are sacrificed to the exigencies of practicalities, time, the individual's inevitable physiological death and the superficial life that constitutes death in life for the individual as well. The spiked horns of death are the instruments of man's physiological death at the end of his life; but the "¡No pares!," this oozing passage of time, is their accomplice: the unseen killer that robs man of his essential self and his real existence during his life.

Man's ultimate fate is his death. The etymology of the word "parca" originally comes from the Greek myth in which the Parcae were the three Fates who determined the length of man's life by progressively spinning, measuring and cutting its thread. From its etymological roots, then, "parca" is not man's fate in the sense of what will become of him in life, but instead, the death that is his final destiny. As in "La Cita," the poem expresses that the individual is in constant confrontation with death and is another description of the juxtaposition of life and death. In both poems the two states of being are constantly present, and in the metaphor of the bullfight, their battleground is the consciousness of the individual. Which will he choose, life or death? Will he surrender to his fate or fight it?

In the last stanza, the speaker observes that man has scrutinized "las landas del cielo": the poet's use of the " 'a' personal" suggests that the "moors of the sky" is another representation of invisible and omnipresent death. Man's scrutiny here as he searches for his opponent, in conjunction with the poem's last line, suggests that that he is pursuing death; he wants to die as much as death wants to take him. His lack of consciousness prevails over life and consciousness, which are nowhere to be found. The "garfio gemelo" is necessary in order to "hook" both aspects of death described above: the physiological death that comes at the end of one's life and the unconscious life that is living death, due to the individual's lack of self-knowledge and self-awareness.

The fourth stanza presents the reader with a change of venue. The "landas del cielo" contrast with the "pardos vallados" of the first stanza; whereas before he was constrained, now he is free. The individual is now outside of the "bullring" of life of the first stanza, which seems to indicate that he is dead. Since the man has been searching, it seems that Death has disappeared as well, another indication that he is dead. Nevertheless, even though already dead,

the speaker continues to search for death; man's desire for death is seemingly so strong that it outlives even him.

The structural elements of the poem support this hermeneutic reading. The poet's use of enjambment to connect both lines and stanzas highlights the continuous nature of this juxtaposition and conflict of life and death. The poem's rhyme scheme clarifies the nature of this conflict even further, since the poet uses phonological isotopies to reinforce semantic meanings. The rhyming words "Vallados," "embrocados," "immolados" and "acantilados" all point to the nature of this struggle: limited to a certain area (man's mind), a battle at close quarters and to the death, where sacrifices are commonplace and the enemy's weapons are fearsome. In contrast, alternating with these rhymes are "(verónica de) oro," and "tesoro", where the word "oro" is an internal word, showing the glory and treasure of life. The final rhyme of the poem is the most prominent: extending over both the third and fourth stanzas, the "sigue" and "persigue" again emphasize the continuing nature of this conflict.

Like "La Cita," "En el poniente de pardos vallados..." expresses the idea that the forces of death and those of life are present throughout the moments of the individual's life as well as in death, and the individual has the choice to pursue one or the other at any moment. The juxtaposition of the two states of being and the conflict between the two are always present in the mind of the individual. Whereas in *El Mensajero's* "La Cita" the poet uses the concepts of courtship with its underlying aspect of erotic desire to convey the intensity of man's tendencies to life and death, in this poem, published fifty-five years earlier, the poet expresses similar ideas but instead utilizes the metaphor of bullfighting to convey the drama and intensity of this constant struggle.

In these poems that illustrate the juxtaposition of life and death throughout the life of the individual, a recurring theme is the fundamental conflict between two states of being. For example, “Dios se cambia de casa,” another poem from *El Zócalo*, describes all the inanities of an incompetent and distracted God in the process of moving from one dwelling place to another. In the last lines of the poem, this distracted God “...se olvida de la muerte / y la vida que riñen en un rincón vacío” (65). The bulk of the poem is a critique of traditional views of religion and an ironic description of the Almighty. However, totally apart from that critique appears this conflict between life and death at the poem’s end. The passage comes almost as an afterthought; however, placed at the end of the poem, it overshadows everything that came before.

Already presented in the second chapter as an example of the presence of death in life, “Jávele” again demonstrates this idea of the constant juxtaposition of death and life and the intensity of the conflict between them. Each image describes the interplay and conflict of life and death that takes place on the stage of the life of the human being. The lentisk fights to stay alive against the forces of nature and the petunia is at risk of dying due to the hail. Jávele opens her eyes to understand the world and in so doing betrays herself to that world; when she does appear, the dew blinds her with its brilliance. The difference between “Jávele” and the preceding poems is that whereas in the first two poems, the juxtaposition and battle of life and death takes place inside the human being, and whereas in “Dios se cambia de casa” the juxtaposition and conflict are between Life and Death as two abstract entities, here the human being’s fight with Death is on the battlefield of the external world.

The poems analyzed in this category of the juxtaposition of life and death during the life of the individual demonstrate common denominators. First, the juxtaposition of these two states of being takes place throughout the life of the individual and in all moments of his life. Second,

juxtaposition produces conflict, and the conflict is intense: these poems describe a battle to the death, as it were, between these two forces. Third, the battle generally takes place in the mind of the individual: the force of Death in life is always portrayed as the individual's lack of consciousness and awareness, either of himself or of his world. Finally, death is always portrayed as an entity with much vitality whether as an abstract entity, a suitor, the adversary in a bullfight, or the forces of nature,.

3. The Attitude of the Individual in his Confrontation with Life and Death

The last category of poems that we examine on this topic describes the individual's personal reaction as he confronts the forces of death, either during the course of his life or at its end. Rosenmann-Taub describes the human being's variety of responses at these critical moments. The first poem to be examined in this category is "Diálogo Sepulcral" from *El Zócalo*.

XIII

Diálogo sepulcral

Y me imprecaste en medio de la sala:	And you cursed me in the middle of the room:
"Te sacudí la vida y no morías;	"I shook your life and you wouldn't die;
te ceñí con mi absorta gangrena y no morías."	I encircled you with my concentrated gangrene and you wouldn't die."
 "Ven" – repliqué desde el usurpador candado -: "¡carcelero! ya mucho que acongojas, lenidad,	 "Come" –I replied from the usurper padlock -: "jailer! for a long time now you have overwhelmed, lenience,
mi innoble guarnición: el cendal aborigen trastocará en arteria de puntuales	my ignoble garrison: the aboriginal veil will transform itself into an artery of punctual
levaduras. Empújame a tu apremio:	decompositions. Push me towards your urgency:
me reconquistarás como cuando de bruces gusté el trance	you will reconquer me like when face down I tasted the trance

de los hielos. Palpítame.
Que, recordando, olvidas.”

Zodiaco de amen,
tu mirada bordó fénix guirnalda
que anudó las cortinas y trizó las ventanas.

Dentro de ti, por fin, agonice (41).

of ice. Palpitate me.
So that, remembering, you forget.”

Zodiac of amen,
your gaze embroidered a phoenix garland
that tied back the curtains and
smashed the windows.

Inside you, finally, I died.

As the title indicates, the poem is a dialogue and the speaker's interlocutor appears to be Death; his identity is first implied in the poem's title, then with the apostrophes that occur throughout the course of the dialogue itself, and finally, in the last line of the poem where the speaker says, “Dentro de ti, por fin, agonice.”

We can assume for a number of reasons that this is not a dialogue between two interlocutors, but rather an internal dialogue. First of all, Death is not a sentient being with whom one can dialogue. Nor does Rosenmann-Taub create fairy-tale characters; in his poetry death is never manifested as a concrete entity in the physical world, such as a skeleton carrying a scythe. Instead, his poems are most often internal monologues and this dialogue seems to fall into that category. Also, inside the tomb where this dialogue takes place (as the title indicates), resides only the speaker, so the dialogue can only be between the speaker and this other part of himself. Finally, as we have seen throughout this study, for Rosenmann-Taub death is present at every moment of one's life as well as at the end of one's life; similar to its counterparts of consciousness and life, it is always an internal state of being. Thus, the speaker's dialogue in the poem is an interior dialogue, one that takes place between those two aspects of himself.

The isotopy of desire appears throughout and unifies the poem: the speaker's desire for death manifested in his imperatives “Ven,” “Empújame,” and “Palpítame.” provide a key to its understanding. In the first stanza, Death expresses his desire and efforts to take the speaker and his disappointment at his inability to do so. Then in the second stanza, instead of resisting his

Death, the speaker himself displays his own desire to die, parallel to Death's desire to take him: he asks Death to come, to push him, and to palpitate him. The portrayal of the speaker's death agony in the final line of the poem marks the end for both speaker and interlocutor; here again, the adverbial phrase "por fin" indirectly expresses the speaker's desire for death. The isotopy of desire elucidated throughout the poem gives the poem its basic semantic unity and significance: Death's wish to take the individual's life coupled with the individual's own desire to die.

Two other key elements that orient the poem for the reader are its title and the choice of verb tenses. The use of preterite verb forms such as "imprecaste," "ceñí," "repliqué," "bordó," and "agonicé" throughout the poem indicates that this dialogue took place in the past, when the speaker was still alive. Since the poem's last line describes the speaker's final death agony, the fact that the verb "agonicé" is in the preterite form tells us that the speaker has already died. It thus reaffirms that the poem consists of a post-mortem dialogue between the speaker and his Death. Speaking from beyond the tomb, the speaker recounts this conversation with Death that took place immediately prior to his physiological death. The title "Diálogo sepulcral" confirms this conclusion: this is a dialogue that takes place between the speaker and his Death at the moment of his death and that the speaker recounts to the reader after his death. The knowledge of the interlocutors' identity, the poem's overall significance and the positioning of the dialogue and its participants in time will assist in understanding the poem's more complex imagery.

Similar to many of the poems analyzed in the second chapter of this study, in this poem that describes the juxtaposition of life and death, the speaker chooses death over life. Death is pictured as violent and deadly: shaking the individual, encircling him with his gangrene. Nevertheless, Death is not all-powerful. His desires and actions alone cannot make the

individual die, as the first stanza indicates; above and beyond them, the individual's assistance is necessary as well. That assistance is forthcoming: despite Death's fearsome appearance, the beginning of the second stanza demonstrates the willing cooperation of Death's victim, as the speaker invites Him with "Ven."

In this second stanza, the speaker characterizes Death in different ways. The ungrammaticality "usurpador candado" is the place from which the speaker addresses Death. The knowledge that Rosenmann-Taub's poetry emphasizes the presence of death in life allows us to understand that this ungrammaticality's hypogram is the living death of conventional life. The speaker addresses Death from his position as prisoner, imprisoned by the "usurper padlock" of a superficial life that steals his identity and usurps his real life. Apostrophized as "carcelero," Death is the jailer who guards and keeps the individual in this superficial life. However, given the desires of both Death and the speaker to die, He may also be conversely understood as the jailer who liberates the speaker from this "usurpador candado," when He finally does take the individual's life.

The ungrammaticalities continue: in the next sentence the speaker apostrophizes Death as "lenidad" and tells him that he has overwhelmed his "ignoble garrison." The understanding of life as consciousness, will and action portrayed in "No el cadáver de Dios lo que medito..." and other poems analyzed in the second chapter enables us to extract the hypograms from these ungrammaticalities as well. "Lenidad" is the lenience or lack of discipline that robs the speaker of his real life; and the speaker's "ignoble garrison" is a metonymic representation of his consciousness, ignoble because it doesn't do what it was born to do: embrace life to its fullest as portrayed in "Ah, ser la triste oveja que ante el perro temible..." ("ser...la nube más roja de todos los acasos!").

The word “guarnición” has multiple meanings: it may mean a garrison of troops, or it may be an adornment or accompaniment of some kind. As a garrison of troops, “guarnición” refers to the speaker’s “ignoble troops” of consciousness. However, with its meaning of “adornment” or “accompaniment,” the phrase becomes an even more profound characterization of the human condition. Although it has the capacity to enrich the life of the human being, consciousness in the human being is the exception rather than the rule, the adornment or accompaniment that may or may not be present in one’s life. If and when it does appear, its ignobility allows it to be overwhelmed by the forces of death.

The next ungrammaticality, “el cendal aborígen / trastocará en arteria de puntuales / levaduras” may be understood using clues from both inside and outside the text. The colon that precedes this phrase links it to the preceding phrase, so this phrase must be related to death as well. Also, the words “trastocará” and “levaduras” have to do with transformations and decomposition, the theme of “Arambeles.” Accordingly, we may consider the “aboriginal veil” to be the body, the corporeal matter which has covered the spirit “ab originem,” (in Latin) from the beginning. The word “levaduras” refers to yeast and the process of leavening, a constant process of transformation and decomposition and thus an apt metaphor for the transformations and decomposition of the human body. This process is “punctual” since it starts immediately at birth and continues without respite until the ultimate decomposition of the body after death. The transformations may be dramatically positive, as in, for example, the transformations of the human body during his formative years; they may be almost unnoticeable, as evidenced by the fact that the all of the cells of the body replace themselves every seven years without one’s awareness; or they may be dramatic and negative, for example, in the case of the gangrene of the first stanza that may be understood both literally and figuratively. Linking the idea of his body’s

continuous transformations and decomposition to his consciousness that is overwhelmed by lenience, the speaker says, in effect, “Death, at the same time that you overwhelm my life and consciousness with my habits of lenience, the transformations of the body continue, punctually and without respite, until my time is up. I may possibly control my spiritual life; but I have no control whatsoever over the movement of my physical being towards decomposition and death.”

The speaker demands that Death push him towards his urgency, another expression of his desire for death: the human being’s time on the planet is short, but the speaker wants to accelerate that process even more! The topos of “carpe diem” often appears indirectly in Rosenmann-Taub’s poetry. In “La zampoña serena” appears the phrase “La prisa se apresura” and, in “En el poniente de pardos vallados,” the phrase “¡No pares!” signifies the passage of time that is death’s weapon against life. In this poem, however, the phrase “Empújame a tu premio” inverts the topos’ central conception: instead of bemoaning the brevity of life, the speaker seeks to shorten his life even further.

The speaker expresses that Death will conquer him as he did before, when the speaker tasted the “trance of ice.” Rosenmann-Taub appears to point in the direction of a previous incarnation here, since Death only comes once to the individual. However, the specific moment to which the speaker refers is his “trance de los hielos,” the moment when the speaker “tasted” his death, that critical instant of death or the instant immediately preceding it.

In order to unravel this metaphor, we again search for an extratextual explanation. The third poem in *El Zócalo* reads as follows:

III

En las eras, ajeno,
he raído los mismos sabores
que aprendí en las escuelas del sueño.
¿Cuándo empieza la noche? (26)

In the threshing floors, strange,
I have grated the same flavors
that I learned in the schools of sleep.
When does the night begin?

In this poem, the speaker has graced the same flavors of death, i.e., unconsciousness, that he learned in the “schools of sleep.” Although it is not precisely the same, the unconsciousness of sleep has the same “flavor” as the unconsciousness of death. Similarly, the speaker in “Diálogo sepulcral” refers to a past when he also explored and tasted death when he says, “cuando, de bruces, gusté el trance de los hielos.” The individual confronted and tasted his death in a previous life; now he looks forward to the moment when Death will reconquer him in the present.

The speaker commands: “Palpitate me...,” again personifying Death as a living being and animating Him to remember His role. When Death palpitates him, the speaker will become present to Him: He will remember and assume His responsibility to take him, to make him His own. In so doing, He will forget, since as the individual dies, Death Himself dies; Death cannot exist without life.

The speaker addresses his interlocutor in the third stanza with the ungrammaticality “Zodiaco de amén,” the final apostrophe of the poem. Given the poet’s worldview, the zodiac must represent the multiverse and the “amen,” its inevitability. The speaker thus affirms that death is an integral part of the eternal and cyclical existence of the multiverse and points to the inevitability of his death. In the stanza’s second and third lines, the speaker now suggests that the key element of death is not non-existence but transformation. Just as the phoenix rises from the ashes, death is also the beginning of a new state of being: an end that is also a beginning. The “mirada” of death ties back the curtains and smashes the windows to permit an opening to this new form of being. In the stanza’s last line, it is the speaker’s turn to end his own life and begin anew: the agony of death may well be the prelude to the ecstasy of a new life.

As noted above, the isotopy of desire gives the poem its overall significance. However, other isotopies are present and inform the poem's meaning as well. The isotopy of physicality runs through the poem: the words "sacudí," "ceñí," "palpítame" and "gangrena" are attributed to Death, while "trance," "arteria" and "de bruces" are physical or physiological actions or attributes of the speaker. Even though the overall emphasis of the poem seems to be on the speaker's wish to lose his consciousness, the physical nature of death cannot be ignored.

Also, the isotopy of spatiality contrasts life and death, similar to "En los pardos vallados," where life is conflated with confinement ("los pardos vallados") and death with openness ("las landas del cielo"). In this poem, in life, the speaker is "encircled," he replies from a "usurper padlock," and he dies "inside death." Conversely, Death itself appears to be an opening: He is "in the middle of the room," and His gaze "tied back the curtains and smashed the windows." Initially perceived as his jailer, Death acts in the poem as the speaker's liberator: He frees the individual from the prison of unconscious life and opens him to a new state of being with new possibilities. This is evidenced most prominently in the third stanza, where Death's gaze embroiders a "phoenix garland" (thus fashioning a new life from the ashes of the old), and "ties back the curtains and smashes the windows" to again open the individual to a new life.

The isotopy of time is also present throughout the poem; the verb tenses are instrumental in portraying the theme of death. In a previous incarnation, the speaker "tasted" death. Now, in his own life, death in the form of lenience has overwhelmed his consciousness and the physical transformations of his body have "punctually" transformed him as well. As mentioned earlier, the preterite verb of the poem's last line indicates that the dialogue takes place after death. Finally, as noted in the poems of the first section of this chapter, the final instant before death is prolonged so that the poet may describe it more fully.

This poem illustrates many of the characteristics of the human being's movement towards death described previously. "Lenience" is the manner in which the poet describes the movement towards "death in life" of unconsciousness. The decomposition of the body both during life and after death that we saw in "Arambeles" is present here in the line "El cendal aborígen...." The speaker's "Ven..." demonstrates the desire for death seen in "Cómo me gustaría..." "Cuando de bruces..." implies the idea of previous incarnations and deaths, corresponding to the cycles of life and death in Nature seen in "De vuelta a los rosales...." Finally, the implication of the possibility of a future life after death is evoked in this poem, first with the image of the phoenix, then with the idea of "opening" of the windows and curtains in the fifth stanza that suggests the opening to a new life, in contrast with the "usurpador candado" that is the jail of the speaker's current life and, above all, with the realization that the poem itself is a dialogue which takes place after the physiological death of the speaker.

However, what stands out in this poem is the speaker's attitude: his desire to fully embrace death in these last moments of his life, just as he has done so throughout his life. As stated above, the title of the poem makes it clear that this dialogue is a "sepulchral dialogue," a dialogue that took place at the moment of interment, at the moment where life meets death, between the speaker and Death. The speaker understands how Death has ruled him during life. Now, the speaker recounts the final moments of his life in anticipation of the end. He invited Death to come to him; he noted that death has already overwhelmed him for a long time; he asked Death to push him towards his end; he recalled this identical moment in the past, and he even asked Death to palpitate him, so that He will finally remember to take him. The words "por fin" in the poem's last line demonstrate even more strongly that his long-awaited death agony is not just inevitable but desired.

The principal definition of the word “sepulchral” refers to the interment of the body after death. However, “sepulchral” also means “gloomy” or “dismal.” This alternative meaning is equally relevant in the poem. From beginning to end, the speaker and Death are jointly oriented only to one end: the death of the individual. Never during the poem is there any indication that the speaker has attached any value to his life; instead, his life has been overwhelmed by death from the beginning. The dialogue is a summary of his life at the end of his life, as gloomy and dismal as it is terminal: life is a prison, and death is liberation from that prison. The only ray of hope comes at the end: the image of the phoenix leaves open the possibility that another and more fulfilling life may lie ahead.

Poem XXX from *La Opción*, “El angosto pretil me delató...,” is another treatment of the theme of the juxtaposition of life and death in the individual’s life and his attitude in confronting both. In contrast to the preceding poem, the treatment of the theme here is objective and the speaker’s attitude is positive.

XXX

El angosto pretil me delató...
Equilibré las posibilidades
de sí como de no.

The narrow parapet revealed me...
I balanced the possibilities
of yes, like those of no.

Un tejaro de osada negligencia:
“Con rectilinear anuencia
domeñarás la impunidad del Hades....(40)”

An eave of cheeky negligence:
“With rectilinear compliance
you will dominate the impunity of Hades...”

The “angosto pretil” may be interpreted as a metaphor for the environment: the agent that can reveal the interior of the human being. The environment creates, conditions and reveals the speaker’s being and actions, and his character reveals itself as he faces the danger of this “angosto pretil.” In this environment, and with his own particular set of physical, emotional and mental characteristics, the speaker brings into equilibrium the possibilities of “sí como de no.” In

life one is constantly faced with choices, opportunities and decisions. To say “no” to all is to reduce one’s experience and not live one’s life, whereas to say “yes” to all is not only to take risks that may not only endanger oneself but also dilute one’s experience. One can easily fall, to one side or the other of this “parapet of life,” and equilibrium is essential. In this sense, “sí” and “no” again represent the forces of life and death that are always present in the individual’s life and must always be brought into balance. Unlike the great majority of the preceding poems, this poem shows the speaker able to deal successfully with his difficult environment.

The second stanza continues to develop this theme. Instead of the parapet, the poet now employs “Un tejaro de osada negligencia,” as a metaphor for the external environment, in which the individual again lives surrounded by uncertainty and negligence. As a metonymic representation of the environment, the eave’s primary attribute is its functioning as a protection for the individual against the elements. However, due to the “cheeky negligence” of its creator, this protection is faulty; in fact, the individual is not safe at all. For example, the individual thinks he is safe in the arms of his family...and then his parents divorce; or he loves his wife...and then finds her with another man; or he works faithfully for a company for many years to obtain his pension...and then the company goes bankrupt.

The colon that follows this phrase and the quotation marks of the following two lines both indicate that this “tejaroz” addresses the speaker, advising him to comply strictly, in order to dominate Death. How does this eave of negligence that is about to collapse communicate? It shows itself, visibly; that is its sole means of communication. However, in order for the communication to be received, the recipient has to understand both code and context: he has to first notice the physical condition of the eave and then understand that it is about to collapse. How do the family breakup, the unfaithful wife and the employer’s impending bankruptcy

“address” the speaker? All of them leave clues as well. However in all these examples, the individual needs to have the ability to “hear” what is being said in this nonverbal language, interpret what he receives correctly and act accordingly. These are all functions of consciousness.

When the “tejaroz” says, “Con rectilinear anuencia / domeñarás la impunidad de Hades...” the implicit question arises: in “rectilinear compliance” with what? From Rosenmann-Taub’s other poems and commentaries, the individual needs to be fully conscious, not only of the environment that surrounds him but also of the essential nature of his own being. With consciousness, he can be in strict compliance with his essence and will be able to dominate death. The poem’s last line, “domeñarás la impunidad del Hades,” may be summed up in one word: “vivirás (you will live).” Consciousness enables the individual to choose and attain life in the multitudinous confrontations between death and life that occur daily in one’s life (“to balance the possibilities of yes like those of no...”).

But also, the line “domeñarás la impunidad del Hades” implies that consciousness can even survive the individual’s death. We have already seen Rosenmann-Taub’s assertion that developed human beings such as Anna de Noailles and Jesus Christ may have the ability to conquer death. The speaker in many of Rosenmann-Taub’s poems retains full consciousness after death; and consciousness itself outlives the physiological death of the body in poems like “¿Posteridad?...,” “Asfódelo,” “En el naufrago día...” and “Diálogo Sepulcral.”

Although it is not immediately evident, the two stanzas parallel each other. In the first stanza, the “angosto pretil” demands consciousness from the speaker: to keep his balance, to remain alive and to navigate his life successfully in a difficult, dangerous and challenging external world. In the second stanza, life, now a “tejaroz de osada negligencia,” demands

“perfect compliance” from the speaker in order to for him to dominate Death. Whereas the first stanza indicates that the individual must successfully negotiate the pitfalls of the exterior world, the second stanza suggests that facing the uncertainty and danger of that world, the individual must remain fully conscious of not just the external world but also of his interior state of being and of the importance of remaining true to himself. The second stanza thus amplifies the meaning of the first, as it implies that the equilibrium that the outer world demands may not be allowed to compromise the individual’s true being.

The speaker again makes the choice between Death and Life throughout his existence. However, in contrast to “Diálogo sepulcral,” where life appears negative and the speaker desires death, here the speaker has a more objective and balanced attitude: consciousness is a path to a correct life despite the dangers of the external world. The possibility of a successful life appears, and even more, the possibility of a consciousness that can live eternally.

The next poem we examine in this section is “La Traición” from *La Opción*. The longest and most complex of all of the poems in this study, it bears on virtually all of the themes heretofore discussed: man’s conscious movement towards death, the possibility of life after death, and the juxtaposition of these two states of being. However, in this poem, the speaker goes even further: he observes his failure to live his essential life, despite his conscious attempts to do so, he tries to understand the nature of this destructive force within him, and he regrets this self-betrayal as he understands the full ramifications of his inability to overcome this innate movement towards death.

XIV

LA TRAICION

Me fui como no voy, como no iría...Yendo
desde el Noír al Ir, secuestré la Partida:

“¡Por fin, desliz, he vuelto!” Y era la despedida...
Me voy como no fui, como no iría... Yendo

desde el faro del Vuélvete al cráter del Nosigas,
tropecé con mi andanza – mi cosecha –:
gibándole las huellas, la impelí hacia la Brecha.
Desde el faro del Vuélvete al crater del Nosigas,

me fui como no voy, como no iría... Yendo
desde el Ser a la ráfaga, me omití, me desdije:
patíbulo de atuendo.

Desde el Noír al Ir,
mi espíritu se armó dese rencor que exige
raer – raer lo móvil -: ¡no pude resistir!

*
* *

¿Qué voz de retroceso? Su asiduidad se empina
por sobre las campanas del lento Campanario:
de campana en campana, diligente, elimina
mis vercundas hegiras – idus del Calendario

de las talegas íntimas que poseo – . Marmóreo,
fluvial y celestial, el temporal reseco
que entumezco me empuja, mudamente estentóreo,
a las grutas que usuran el eco de algún eco

del afable barranco. ¿Qué voz de retroceso
me amelga, me arremanga, me difiere, me zanja,
me coarta, me escupe, me preserva, me franja,

me sentencia al absceso
que me desextasía, vendiéndome, ladino,
a la sofocación del Problema divino?

*
* *

Corrí hacia mis perdidos padres: en el umbral
me esperaban: sollozos.
La casual
tarasca... ¡Me esperaban! ¡Mis cuitados ansiosos!

Ovillo burbujeante, se volcó, fue hacia ellos

la luz: se retorció: mi bestia de ternura.
Mi saliva, longincua, mojaba sus resuellos.
Le protesté al jolgorio: “¡Apura! ¡Apura! ¡Apura!”

Con mi salmo, a mis padres, vehemencia de Vida:
“¡Hijos míos, a vuestros meniscos me ataré:
no hondearé la Partida!”

Me tendieron sus pobres brazos fieles.
Sus pupilas: opacos cascabeles.
Les aullé:

“¡He vuelto! ¡He vuelto! ¡He vuelto!” Y era la despedida. (26-27)

The Betrayal

I left as I don't go, as I wouldn't go...Going
from the NotToGo to the ToGo, I seized the Departure:
“Finally, slip-up, I've returned!” And it was the good-bye...
I leave as I didn't go, as I wouldn't go...Going

From the lighthouse of Return to the crater of the Don'tfollow,
I tripped over my adventure – my harvest –:
curving its steps, I drove it towards the Breach.
From the lighthouse of Return to the crater of Don'tfollow,

I left as I don't go, as I wouldn't go...Going
from the Being to the Gust, I omitted myself, I retracted:
gallows of adornment.

From the NotToGo to the ToGo,
my spirit armed itself with that resentment which demands
to scrape – to scrape the motive –: I couldn't resist!

*

* *

Whose voice of retreat? Its constancy rises
above the bells of the slow Belltower:
from bell to bell, diligent, it eliminates
my timid flights – Ides of the Calendar

of the intimate goods that I possess – . Marblelike,
fluvial and celestial, the temporary dryness

that I numb pushes me, mutely booming,
to the grottos that lend the echo of some echo

of the good-natured ravine. What voice of retreat
declares ownership of me, rolls up my sleeves, delays me, resolves me,
restricts me, spits me, preserves me, limits me,

sentences me to the abscess
that disgusts me, selling me, a slave,
to the suffocation of the divine Problem?

*

* *

I ran toward my lost parents: they awaited
me on the threshold: sobs.
The random
monster... They awaited me! My worried anxious ones!

Bubbling ball, it overturned, the light went to them:
It twisted: my beast of tenderness.
My saliva, distant, moistened their breaths.
I protested to the party: Hurry! Hurry! Hurry!"

With my psalm, to my parents, vehemence of Life:
"My children, I will tie myself to your meniscuses:
I will not signal the Departure!"

They offered me their poor faithful arms.
Their pupils: opaque bells.
I howled to them:

"I have returned! I have returned! I have returned!" And that was the good-bye.

Like the poems analyzed in the second chapter, this poem illustrates the movement towards death in life. In addition, the poem describes the individual's attempts to find his real life, as well as his curiosity about the forces that prevent him from attaining it. We analyze the poem in this chapter insofar as it describes these two movements their juxtaposition, and their ultimate consequences.

The poem is comprised of three sonnets with irregular versification and a one-line epilogue.¹⁹ In the first sonnet Rosenmann-Taub describes the simultaneous movement towards both death and life in the human being. The second sonnet describes the individual's interrogation of the forces that maintain the individual in his state of a living death. The last sonnet treats the intersection of these two states at the moment of the individual's death. Thus, the poem is an excellent example of the juxtaposition of life and death both during life and also at the point of death, as well as of the themes of death in life and life in death treated in the second and third chapters.

The first sonnet details the journeys towards death and life within the human being. The speaker expresses his desire to move toward his real life, his attempts and failures to do so, as well as his rejection of his real life. Four journeys are attempted; nevertheless, the goal is never reached. Instead, an irresistible force holds the speaker back.

To understand this poem, it is necessary to understand the key words that metonymically represent the beginning and end of this proposed journey. The portmanteau words and capitalized words are semantic isotopies: "Ir," "Vuélvete" and "Ser" are all capitalized words that refer to the journey to the individual's essence and thus to a life lived in accord with that essence, while "Noír," "Nosigas" and "ráfaga" are words that refer to the individual's resistance to that journey towards his essential self.²⁰ The poet capitalizes these words to stress the uniqueness of this voyage. In addition, the repeated use of the definite article in conjunction with these words ("el Noír," "el Ir," "el Vuélvete," "el Nosigas") also indicates the uniqueness of these journeys, again suggesting that they are interior journeys, unique to each individual.

The sonnet's four stanzas describe four distinct events in the speaker's life. The first event takes place in the past, signified by the preterite verbs "Me fui," "secuestre," and "era."

The speaker recalls that in the past he had the idea to depart on this journey, but in the process of mentally preparing to leave (“yendo desde el NoIr al Ir”) he aborted his departure and returned—after all his psychological efforts to prepare himself for his trip—to his unconscious, accidental and negligent self. He calls this part of himself “desliz,” to describe his “accidental” unconsciousness; he has the honesty and awareness to recognize his weakness. This depiction of a journey that was attempted and failed is the first example of the speaker’s betrayal of himself, and the descriptive term “desliz” characterizes this part of himself that betrays his real being. His return coincides with the realization that although he had the idea to live a life in accord with himself, he never took even the first step on that journey.

The second event takes place in the present, beginning in the fourth line of the first stanza and evidenced by the verb “Me voy.” Here, the speaker leaves, but now on the opposite path of his prior journey: he turns away from the beacon of his essence to go to the crater of “Nosigas:” conventional life. As he did so, he encountered and stumbled over his own fortune, the harvest of all his life experience; distorting it, he used it to justify the emptiness of his superficial life. Rosenmann-Taub often employs the concept of spatial emptiness to signify spiritual emptiness; in this poem alone, the words “grutas,” “barranco,” “absceso,” “cráter” and “Brecha” all carry with them the suggestion of an empty life.

Beginning with the fourth line of the second stanza and employing virtually the same words as those of the description of the second event, this third event again takes place in the past. In this event, the speaker once again took the road to the superficial life. Again, he went from the beacon of his essence to the crater of conventional life; he also went from the permanence of true Being (his “Ser”) to the “ráfaga” that represents the temporality that of

unconscious living. In so doing, he “omitted himself” and “denied himself,” to instead live the life dictated to him by nature and culture.

The third stanza’s last line, “Patíbulo de atuendo” summarizes and highlights the deathlike nature of this superficial life: man’s “adornment” is his gallows, his death. “Adornment” may refer to man’s clothing; however, in a broader sense, man is “clothed” or “adorned” with virtually everything he holds dear: his position in life, his belief systems, his familial and social relations, his accomplishments and possessions. The priest is “clothed” in spirituality; the anti-Semite, in prejudice; the executive, in business acumen. However, none of these adornments have anything to do with one’s real being, which is unadorned. One may argue that it is impossible to conceive oneself as divorced from the social context in which he lives, and that, for the most part, is true. Nevertheless, the goal of psychological development is precisely to penetrate the layers of culture to find one’s essence, which is beyond and independent of culture and cultural activities. On the most profound level, the answers to the quest for self-knowledge have nothing to do with one’s material possessions, life successes, personal relations or accomplishments, nor even with one’s emotions, body, or beliefs, since all of these are changeable, una “ráfaga.” The individual who believes that these adornments are really his true self renounces his opportunity to discover his true being; instead, he sends that true being, whatever it might be, to the gallows. This condemnation is disguised: the temptation seems good, but is nevertheless a betrayal. Believing that he is nourishing himself, the individual is dying of hunger, poisoning himself, destroying his being. Rosenmann-Taub employs the isotopy of emptiness in this stanza to describe the life of the individual who yields to these temptations: he describes it as the emptiness of the crater, the extreme temporality of a gust of wind, the omission and denial of oneself.

Internal words in this line confirm this interpretation discussed above. As we have seen in previous poems, Rosenmann-Taub will use internal words—words within words—to amplify the poem’s semantic meaning, and the phrase “Patíbulo de atuendo” is significant for its use of this device. The “tu” in “atuendo” is one’s real being; the word is enclosed in the word “atuendo” just as one’s real being is enclosed in his physical and mental “adornments.” The “tí” in “Patíbulo,” is in this form of the word either a direct or indirect object. As object rather than subject, motivated and directed by the external world rather than himself, the “tí” is destined for the “Patíbulo” in the same way that the individual as object is destined for the death of unconscious life.

The fourth event again takes place in the past. As in the first stanza of this sonnet, the speaker had a desire to journey toward himself. However once again, his spirit, armed with anger, destroys his wish to leave (...rencor que exige / raer – raer lo movil”, where “raer” has the sense of “extirpar”) with an irresistible force. Once again, an overwhelming internal resistance has prevented the speaker from embarking on this all-important journey.

Thus, throughout all the stanzas of this first sonnet, the speaker, whether or not he desires to make the journey to his real Being, always returns to the same point, that of conventional life. The dynamism of the verbs in the first five stanzas that describe this movement toward death portrays the intensity of the speaker’s desire to resist conscious life: he “kidnapped” the Departure, “drove” his adventures to the Breach, and “gnawed” the will of his departure. This sonnet thus dynamically portrays “La Traición:” the human being’s betrayal of himself.

The second sonnet is an interrogation of the fundamental nature of this interior force of darkness that works to prevent the individual from his journey to himself and his real life, that force that time and again forces the individual to betray himself. The question “Whose voice of

retreat?” begins the sonnet that is the second section of the poem; however, the question is as much an interrogation of the force itself as of the identity of its owner. With a virtual torrent of images, the speaker attempts to understand its nature, by examining how it operates. This voice is constant, rising over and above “las campanas del lento Campanario....” As noted earlier in “No el cadáver de Dios lo que medito...,” “the “campana” is always found within the “espadaña,” so if the “espadaña” is human consciousness, then the “campana” is the individual’s essential self” (74). Remaining with the previous interpretation of “campana” and “Campanario” in this poem, we see that this constant and diligent force of darkness rises above one’s consciousness, dominates one’s real being, and eliminates the “timid flights” those occasional (“idus del calendario”) celebrations of the speaker’s essential self (his “talegas íntimas”). Rosenmann-Taub uses hyphens to relate these two phrases to each other: the “timid flights” are sporadic in nature, occurring as infrequently as the “Ides of the calendar.” The difference is that the first phrase highlights the timidity of these flights that are in reality only attempts, and the second, the infrequent nature of these flights. Representing human consciousness in all its weakness, these flights are eliminated by the “voz de retroceso.”

The sonnet’s second stanza continues its description of this negative force. The “voz de retroceso” is now a “temporal reseco,” existing everywhere and affecting all states of matter, whether solid, liquid, or gas (“Marmoreo, fluvial y celestial...”). Also, this negative force exists inside the individual, in his body, mind and spirit as well. As noted previously in “Desiertos” from *Quince*, Rosenmann-Taub equates humidity with life and aridity with death. Accordingly, this “temporary dryness” is another metonymic representation of a living death: a life that is both temporary and arid. The speaker struggles against this deathlike state of being in order to better remain unconscious. Nevertheless the “temporal reseco” pushes him, booming in its silence, to a

grotto like Plato's cave, where shadows substitute for reality, where it usuriously lends him the mere echo of a reality that is itself nothing more than an echo of reality, where the reality is only the "afable barranco" of a living death, and where the price of that echo is the individual's real life. This last image is more easily understood with an example. The individual's internal voice might suggest to him that he has done enough work for the day and deserves to watch a movie. He watches a movie that is only an echo of a false reality with its happy ending, where the "happy ending" is paradoxically yet another example of death in life. In the meantime, the individual has lost three hours that could have been used more productively: the "temporal reseco" has lent him the mere echo of a false life in exchange for three hours of his real life.

In the sonnet's third stanza, the speaker continues to characterize this voice of retreat by its actions. It owns, defines, limits, restricts and controls the speaker, sentencing him to the disgusting emptiness of a superficial life. It sentences him to the infected emptiness that robs him of his divine nature as it sells him, in his condition as a slave, to the "suffocation of the divine Problem": the termination of the individual's inquiry into his own meaning. The speaker is described as a "ladino;" given that the speaker is being sold, the poet suggests with this word that the human being is a slave to his own thoughts, feelings and impulses that lead him to the living death of an unconscious life.

In both the third and fourth stanzas, the accumulation of verbs taking the first person pronoun as their indirect object serves to precisely delineate the characteristics of this "voz de retroceso" in an objective manner at the same time that the series of verbs creates an emotional charge for the reader. In addition to the images of the first two stanzas, no less than eleven verbs in the last five lines of the sonnet demonstrate various aspects of this voice. The answer to the question "Whose (or what) voice of retroceso?" is that it is a voice inside the speaker himself; no

external voice would have the potency to direct and control the speaker in the way that these lines describe. Yet it is also obvious that the speaker is divided; the lines demonstrate that the speaker understands that whatever it may be, this voice is a negative voice working against him. Thus, this “voice of retreat” can only be the manifestation of the speaker’s subconscious mind as it controls the actions of his conscious mind, and the speaker wants to understand it as much as possible in order to free himself from that power. His method is simple: he wants to understand what this power is by examining and describing what it does.

Rosenmann-Taub constructs the poem to demonstrate the power of this “voice of retreat” as clearly as possible. He devotes the entire first sonnet to the speaker’s efforts to make the journey to his real being; but will he or no, time and again the speaker is foiled in his efforts, regardless of the intensity of his desire. The first sonnet’s last line ends with “¡No pude resistir!” Thus before the description of the “voice of retreat” even begins, the reader understands that the speaker is in the grip of a force that is more powerful than him, impossible to resist. Then, the interrogation of the nature of this force is accomplished through the description of the ways in which it acts on the speaker; the multiplicity of images, the structural repetition (verb followed by the first person pronoun as direct object) and the increasing intensity of the images as the sonnet progresses all collaborate to depict a power of superhuman force. By the end of the poem, the “voice of retreat” is characterized as having the power to own and sell the individual, control his emotions and actions, sentence him to a life of disgusting emptiness and, in the sonnet’s last image, control even his very thoughts.

In the third and last sonnet of the poem, the first two stanzas recount the emotional reunion of the speaker with his parents. The phrase “padres perdidos” suggests that his parents are dead and that the threshold on which they meet is the threshold of life and death: the

speaker's parents have returned from the grave to see what their son is doing with his life. The normal reaction of parents who have returned from the grave and are able to see their son would be that of overwhelming happiness; instead, their reaction is just the opposite: grief, demonstrated by their sobs. However, in the context of this poem, their reaction is totally normal. Their son has failed in his life: despite their hopes, wishes and efforts for him to lead his real life, he has betrayed them, and even worse, he has betrayed himself. The speaker's parents have returned from the grave to see that their son has wasted his life, their only possible reaction can be that of suffering, and they sob with grief to see his lack of self-realization.

The speaker exclaims that his parents, worried and anxious, were awaiting him. The mention of his anxieties reveals his accountability for his life, not only to himself but also to his parents, who spent so much time in raising him, educating him and preparing him for his real life. The poem's first sonnet is the story of the speaker's inability to make the journey to himself, to fulfill himself by living his real life; and the poem's second sonnet is his search for understanding as to why that happened. Now, when he meets his parents: their reaction is to sob, and his reaction is to be anxious and worried; both reactions are due to his failures detailed in the first sonnet. In his foreword to *El Mensajero*, Rosenmann-Taub writes,

Papá,
tres días antes de marcharte, me pediste que te prometiera que revisaría
El Mensajero hasta crear el más hermoso – real – libro.

Cumplir la promesa
me ha exigido cumplir tu edad (10).

This passage demonstrates both the poet's sense of responsibility to his parents as well as his belief in their continuing existence and the possibility of a reunion with them; in this sense, Rosenmann-Taub is the living embodiment of the individual who does not betray himself.

In the first two stanzas of this section, the speaker describes certain aspects of his parents that are keys to his concern over their expectations of him. Twice he declares “Me esperaban,” and he even exclaims the phrase the second time to further emphasize their expectations of him. The Spanish word “esperar” means “to wait,” but it also means “to hope,” so the poet is able to transmit both meanings simultaneously with this one word: his parents are not only waiting for him at the threshold, but they are hoping for him as well. The speaker’s exclamation over his anxieties shows that he is convinced of his parents’ existence and as concerned over his conduct as they are. With the phrase “Mi saliva, longincua, mojabá sus resuellos” the poet tells us that his parents are within him. If the speaker’s saliva can wet the breaths of his parents, then his parents live within him; it is only in that way that *his* saliva can wet *their* breaths. As we have seen in “Diálogo Sepulcral,” interlocutors and dialogues in Rosenmann-Taub’s poems may well be internal interlocutors and dialogues; since the dead don’t typically return from the grave, it makes more sense that his “perdidos padres” described here exist in his mind, not in flesh and blood, and function as a positive force in contrast with the negative force of the “casual tarasca” that also exists within him. Accordingly, the reunion with his parents seems to be a reunion in his interior world, not in the exterior world.

Simultaneously with the description of his parents, the poet describes a monster in these two stanzas: “la casual tarasca.” Just as in the poem “Endriago encabritado,” where the human being is portrayed as a monster, this “tarasca” seems to also be the portrayal of a human being, again, with the “monstrous” aspects of an unconscious human being. This is the third designation of this destructive interior force: whereas in the first sonnet it was a “desliz” and in the second a “voz de retroceso,” here it is a “tarasca.” In the sonnet’s first stanza it is “random,” acting without will or direction. In the next stanza, it is a bubbling heap, twisting, but also a beast of

tenderness. These ungrammaticalities are all metonyms for the speaker's irrational side of himself. "Ovillo" can refer to an individual in the fetal position, and also may signify confusion; thus, the "Ovillo burbujeante" may be considered a metonymic representation of the confusion and enthusiasm of a young child. This bubbling confusion overturns: "se volcó" is another portrayal of the instability of the speaker's irrational self. The phrase "Mi bestia de ternura" is an antithesis that reveals another aspect of this negative side of himself: here, it appears as tenderness and gentleness to the individual as it acts to subvert him. One's addictions, emotions and negative and unconscious behaviors are all "beastly;" nevertheless, the individual jealously guards them, because they are as comfortable and comforting to him as the tenderness of a loved one.

In the stanza's last line, the speaker's imperatives underscore the lack of time and the importance of making haste. The party is again an "interior" party, now with the beast and himself as participants. The word "jolgorio" connotes a party where lazy, drunk and noisy participants waste their lives. However, now the speaker has awakened; the appearance (or memory) of his parents has enabled him to focus on the vital aspects of his life. The speaker addresses the "¡Apura! ¡Apura! ¡Apura!" of this line to himself. His parents have apparently reminded him what his real life is, but little time remains, and he needs to act as quickly as possible in order to accomplish everything that he should be doing and should have done.

In the third stanza, the speaker addresses his parents, now his children, now himself, in prayer: he doesn't want to let them go because they represent the best part of himself, but will tie himself to them to remain with them forever. He wants "Vida," for both them and him, the Life that he denied himself in his previous superficial mode of existence, and the Life that is denied to them in their current state of non-being. The poet capitalizes the word "Vida" to

suggest that here he is referring to real instead of superficial life. He has returned to both his parents and himself and in so doing has found himself: he no longer needs to leave, and he will not signal the Departure, which is the departure from himself.

Nevertheless, the sonnet's fourth stanza and the epilogue indicate that the speaker is asking for the impossible, since the line "Sus pupilas: opacos cascabeles" that describes his parents' eyes indicate that truly his parents have gone forever. The last line shows that the speaker is aware of his "return" to the state of being that is his essence. Similar to the first sonnet however, it is in this moment that the speaker becomes aware also of his death. He now realizes that he can no longer live his real life; his inability to overcome the "voz de retroceso" either through his own conscious actions or through faithfulness to his parents has resulted in that he has allowed the years to pass and has not lived his real life. The curiosity that he had about himself and the efforts that he made throughout his life to find himself have all been to no avail, always ending in failure; he has betrayed both his parents and himself.

The poem summarizes many of the poet's concepts previously outlined. The first sonnet depicts the desire for death and the movement towards death examined in the second chapter. The second sonnet vividly describes the "voz de retroceso" which keeps the speaker in his condition of death in life. The third sonnet of the poem juxtaposes life and death at their threshold: the moment of the speaker's death. Running to his dead parents who have returned to him in this moment, the speaker wants to reunite with them, figuratively speaking, as he lives his real life, the life for which they have prepared him. He is finally able to detail his understanding of the monstrous part of himself which has been holding him back from his real life, and he finally understands the importance of making haste, in a life which is altogether too finite. Yet the moment of these realizations is also the moment of his death, and his final realization is that

his lack of consciousness, procrastination and weaknesses have allowed his monstrous side of himself to prevent him from living his real life. He has betrayed himself, and the entire poem is the tale of this betrayal.

The speaker's attitude in this poem is laden with emotion. In the first sonnet of the poem, he seeks self-realization, but is held back by forces that he doesn't understand. In the second sonnet, since the speaker is situated as the object of the actions, acted on by the "voz de retroceso," he appears devoid of emotion, again except for the curiosity which leads him to describe and question the nature of this "voz." In the last sonnet, the speaker's emotions overtake him completely. Along with the passion for life, the speaker's emotions of anxiety, hope and despair all predominate in this liminal moment between two states of being; his howl in the last line manifests his state of panic as he realizes that no time remains for him.

The last poem to be examined in this category comes from *Quince*: "En el náufrago día." This poem was already analyzed in the previous chapter, and will only be considered here in the context of the human being's attitude in that moment of the encounter of life and death.

LVII

En el náufrago día de mi nave más bella
me encaramé sobre su mastelero
para mirar el mar.

No había mar: no había ni su huella:
no había ni el vacío de ese día postrero.
Sólo había mirar.

Miré el mirar del navegar que espero.

In the shipwreck day of my most beautiful ship
I climbed its highest mast
to look at the sea.

There was no sea: not even its trace:
nor even the void of that last day.
There was only the looking.

I looked at the looking of the sailing that I await.

My commentary on this poem in the third chapter allows for the possibility that the “shipwreck” may not necessarily be his death, but perhaps the death of the best part of him. In his commentary on this poem in *Quince*, the poet concurs, saying, “...lo mejor *mío* – lo *más* venerado y fiel – : *lo más bello* *mío* fue escoger *lo más bello* *mío*: acto *que me* definió: *mi nave más bella*: el máximo ‘yo’ (83).” “...the best of me – the most venerated and faithful -: the most beautiful of me was to choose the most beautiful of me: act which defined me: my most beautiful ship: the maximum ‘I.’”

The poet’s description of this “náufrago día de mi nave más bella” thus declares that this day may metaphorically represent the day of the individual’s death, and, in addition, the end of the individual’s greatest life achievement: perhaps a life well lived, a meaningful career or relationship, a family, or a social, financial or personal success that is particularly significant to the individual.

Nevertheless, regardless of the loss of the most important part of his life, or of his life itself—“lo más venerado y fiel -: lo más bello *mío*,”—the speaker’s tone is not affected, but remains calm, rational, and objective throughout the poem. The verbs that describe the speaker’s actions are objective rather than emotive, and the speaker’s tone as he describes his reaction to the “shipwreck” day of his “most beautiful ship” is detached and restrained. This objective style communicates serenity, and the use of the infinitive and verbal noun forms of “mirar” instead of active verb forms in the second stanza contributes to this feeling as well. In the last stanza, the poet represents the speaker as conscious of (or looking at) his own consciousness from an external point of view as well as an internal one; this representation of the speaker confirms this attitude of serenity, since one becomes calm as one examines a situation objectively and from different angles.

In this poem, the speaker lives in time, since the opening line delineates the end of a period in his life. Nevertheless, his words and actions demonstrate that neither his past life nor his prior ways of thinking control his future, whether in this world or the next. The alternating portrayals of action and reflection that take place throughout the poem suggest that both are essential to conscious life. The poem expresses the concept that consciousness resides both inside and outside of the human being as it describes the conscious evaluation of reality and the orientation of oneself towards the future that the individual might experience at any turning point of his life. Calmness and serenity may enter the reader's psyche as well, if he chooses to inhabit the poem personally and views his own past from both objective and subjective perspectives. Finally, it appears that the speaker acts with a sense of ethics towards himself since, in the face of disaster or death, he acts in accord with the highest part of himself: his consciousness and his intelligence.

The speaker's attitude mirrors the poem's substance. In the tragic moment that the poem describes, the speaker desires only to become conscious of his situation; and as he does so he realizes that the only thing that really exists is consciousness. In that case, emotions are useless, since their only effect is to reduce one's consciousness. Then, in the poem's last line, the speaker's consciousness examines his own consciousness; the attitude is calm and objective because the tragic circumstances that the poem depicts ("El naufrago día de mi nave más bella") require nothing less.

The poems in this last category have shown the wide range of attitudes that the individual facing death in life or the moment of his physical death may adopt. The individual may be gloomy and resigned, looking forward only to the "trance of ice" that he experienced in a previous state of death, or he may be more positive, as evidenced by "El angosto pretil me

delató....” He may demonstrate the emotions of angst and despair immediately prior to the change from one state of being to another, either having or lacking the ability to materially effect that change of state, as shown in “La Traición.” Conversely, as demonstrated in “El náufrago día de mi nave más bella...,” regardless of what happens to the speaker in life or what may happen at the point of his death, he may calmly and objectively confront the meaninglessness of all that has gone before as he embarks on his new journey. These poems again appear to span the entire gamut of human behavior as they describe the attitude of the human being in his most critical moment.

Why do these poems focus on the individual’s attitude? In fact, it is the individual’s attitude that is all-important in this almost impossible struggle for being. The poems studied through the course of these chapters reveal a hierarchy in the human being’s journey to self-knowledge. At the bottom of the pyramid are the masses of individuals who live their lives unconsciously, never thinking that there is anything more to life than the social and cultural norms to which they have adhered since childhood. These are the “Endriagos encabritados,” the “tumbas errantes” whose souls occupy the Asphodel Meadows, both before and after death. Then there are the individuals who, even with consciousness, refuse to follow their path, regardless of the consequences. The heroin addict reaches for the needle and the obese individual for his fourth piece of cake with the same attitude as the speaker who says “Señor, no tiemblo” in “Dominio,” who courts Death instead of Life in “La Cita,” and who chooses the “asiento blando” in “El ligero carruaje de la noche.”

Other attitudes are also present within this hierarchy of consciousness and attitude. The speaker of “Cómo me gustaría” is conscious as well. Unfortunately, his consciousness leads him in the wrong direction: he is so aware of the horrific nature of the world that he pleads for

nonexistence. In “La Traición” the conscious speaker wants to take the journey to his essence. However, he is unsuccessful: internal and external forces prevent him from completing that journey. He wants to understand that “voice of retreat,” but all of his questioning doesn’t bring him any closer to himself, and at the end of the poem, distraught over his failure, he has to face his self-betrayal at the moment of his death.

At the top of the hierarchy are those individuals who are conscious of their real life, who have the will to undertake the journey, and also have the correct attitude: to persevere despite the failures that they may encounter along the way. “Jávele” reveals herself, despite the hail that wants to surround and kill her. The speaker in “No el cadáver de Dios lo que medito” creates himself with his actions as he struggles, wins and loses. The speaker in “El angosto pretil me delató” attempts to keep his equilibrium in his confrontation with the external world at the same time that he remains absolutely true to his essential self. The most eloquent example of all is that of the speaker in “En el naufrago día de mi nave más bella”; having lost the best part of himself, perhaps having lost his life itself, he wastes no time in recriminations or emotion, but instead calmly looks forward to his new life, whatever it might be. Rosenmann-Taub’s poems express the concept that consciousness, the correct orientation of consciousness, and above all, the correct attitude are all necessary if the individual is ever to find the obscure treasure, that “caliginoso cabestro” that “se oculta de la destreza de tules solares,” that is his authentic self.

The poems discussed throughout this last chapter demonstrate Rosenmann-Taub’s different visions of death in its continuous encounter with life. As the poems reveal, the encounter may take many forms and generate differing reactions. However, certain common threads weave their way throughout all the poems, regardless of their specific differences.

First, the poems that describe the encounter of life with death at the moment of death almost always prolong that moment to describe it more fully. “Olvidamos los ojos...” and “Posteridad” portray this encounter as a gradual disintegration and transformation of the body that is a continuation of the disintegration and transformation of the body that also occurs regularly in life.

The poet also suggests a potential evolution in human consciousness to another state of being at the moment of death as well. In “De camarada a camarada, cuerpo” it seems that the speaker is moving to another and higher level of consciousness; in a dialogue with this other level of consciousness at the end of his life, the speaker suggests that “sus hálitos empiezan a habitarme.” “Diálogo Sepulcral” seems to suggest a similar transformation and/or evolution of consciousness after death, due to the poet’s use of the image of the phoenix at the end of the poem. This is also suggested in poems analyzed in the third chapter of the dissertation such as “Preludio,” “Stellae” and “Donde tientan mámparas...” where consciousness after death is portrayed as “luz” or “Stellae,” stars.

The second section of this chapter explored the idea of the juxtaposition of life and death that occurs during the life of the individual. The poems that this chapter studies are closely connected with the poems of the second chapter that speak of the presence of death in life and the conscious movement towards death of the individual. However, these poems were chosen to illustrate the actual confrontation between these two states of being. “Calostro” manifests the battle between life and death for the individual starting from the very beginning of life: foremilk is the initial sustenance for the newborn, but also, like the coffin, it is the beginning of the individual’s journey to his burial. “La Cita” and “En el poniente de pardos vallados...” convey that same confrontation with life and death that the individual faces in every moment of his life,

the former using the language of courtship and the latter the language of the bullfighting tradition.

Finally, the last section of this chapter analyzed poems that demonstrate the importance of the individual's attitude when faced with the choice between life and death, or when faced with death itself. The poems show that the individual's attitude can be positive or negative, objective or emotional. The poems examined demonstrate that the personal and emotional reaction of the individual to the confrontation with death, be it during or at the end of life, may be as varied and unique as the individual himself. However, they also show the importance of the individual's attitude facing the choice between life and death: the person's state of mind is all-important, and must be put at the same level of criticality as that of consciousness itself in the individual's quest for self-knowledge.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The analysis of over forty poems from the poet's tetralogy *Cortejo y Epinicio* and from *Quince* has taken us in several directions in the exploration of the universal theme of death. Although the poems' thematic elements that pertain to death have multiple levels and contradictory meanings, the breadth and depth of this study enable us to offer various conclusions about the poet's worldview with reference to that theme.

The common thread that runs throughout all the chapters and virtually every poem discussed is Rosenmann-Taub's insistence on the simultaneity of being and non-being in the multiverse, ranging from the cosmic to the microcosmic levels, and including the human being in the period before birth, during his life and after his death. This paradoxical worldview is presented in terms of consciousness; the poet equates consciousness with being and unconsciousness with non-being. In the first poem analyzed in the second chapter of this study, the speaker apostrophizes the multiverse with the words "Orco / multiverso" to dramatically portray the idea that all that can be seen or even imagined simultaneously contains the elements of life and death. Using this conception of the simultaneity of being and non-being throughout the multiverse as his point of departure, Rosenmann-Taub develops the theme in a number of directions. The chapter presents different forms of both non-being and the movement of being towards non-being. Poems such as "Orco...", "Arambeles...", "De vuelta a los rosales..." and "La zampoña, serena..." describe the presence of death and the movement towards death in all

animate and inanimate objects and even posit that this movement of being to non-being is so all-encompassing that it includes space, time, and even death itself. In this Orcus multiverse in which we live, death, like life, is not static, but a process. Death constantly permeates and penetrates life and being constantly transforms itself into non-being in the poet's Heraclitean conception of the multiverse with its cycles of procreation and death.

Rosenmann-Taub also treats the presence and functioning of this simultaneity of being and non-being as it manifests itself in the life of the human being. Poems such as "Endriago encabritado...", "Físico" and "Dominio" from this chapter show the simultaneity of these two states of being in mankind as well. In the poet's understanding of the simultaneity of life and death as shown in these poems, "life" does not refer to biological life, but instead to the conscious life that leads to the realization of one's essential self. Likewise, "death" does not refer to the cessation of biological life, but instead to a spiritual death, a life that is not in accord with one's real being. The individual has within him at all times this simultaneous presence of life and death: the life that wants the individual to manifest himself with all his talents and capabilities, and the death that wants to destroy him. Poems from this chapter portray not only man's transformation and decay at the physiological and biological levels, but also his lack of consciousness, his denial of the passage of time, the avoidance of his real life in favor of "busyness," the surrender to the will of others, irrationality or emotion, the laziness and/or lenience that he has with himself, and his attention to the superficial aspects of life that lead to his death at the level of consciousness. It is obvious that from the moment of birth the physical body undergoes a series of transformations that lead it through growth and maturity to death. It is not so obvious to understand that the consciousness of the human being is also conditioned by internal and external forces to calcify and die starting from the moment of birth as well.

Having described the multiversal movement towards death in general and that same movement towards death in the human being in particular, the poems from the second chapter examine the conscious human being and find that, contrary to all rational logic, the human being himself desires death and acts to accelerate the process of dying. “Cómo me gustaría...” is the plaint of a conscious individual who resents being brought into this world and prefers death to the horror of life. “Dominio” tells the story of the individual who actively turns away from life and, when confronted with his preference for death and the consequences of that decision, does not hesitate to reaffirm his preference, regardless of those consequences. The individual’s conscious movement towards death is part of the movement to death of the species, in a multiverse where death is multiversal and omnipresent, where every animate and inanimate object is moving towards death, and where death is, by and large, the goal that is most desired. The individual seeks death; he prefers unconscious life to conscious life; and in general, even if and when he desires to live his real life, it is beyond his power to do so. The speakers of Rosenmann-Taub’s poems are human beings as weak as Everyman; their only difference is their consciousness of their frailties and failings, their honesty, their curiosity and their wish to explore this aspect of their humanity.

Finally, the poems of this chapter express the idea of a countervailing force that operates against this relentless cycle of procreation and death with its concomitant movement from being to non-being. Poems such as “Con la sogá oportuna me ahorca....,” “No el cadáver de Dios lo que medito,” “Jávele” and “Ah, ser la triste oveja que ante el perro temible” evince an opposite movement, towards the full experience of life rather than to deterioration and death. Although the preponderance of Rosenmann-Taub’s poems in this area emphasize the movement from being to non-being, the poet also wants to communicate the idea that it is not impossible to fight

these forces of entropy. Poems such as the above convey the idea that one actively fights these entropic force through awareness and the development of consciousness, will and action, and that one's objective is to experience life and all that it has to offer to the fullest, in accordance with one's own essence, despite the forces of nature that wish to negate it. The poet thus extends the possibility to the reader that a conscious life and the realization of one's essence are achievable.

The third chapter of this study examined several of Rosenmann-Taub's poems that explore the possibility that the simultaneity of being and non-being that exists in life may also exist after death as well. The poet's essentialist worldview precludes the possibility of absolute nothingness following the death of the individual. Poems analyzed in this chapter include those that approach and at times seem to embrace the existentialist viewpoint. "¿Posteridad?," "Tú-rumor-atisbas...," "Rapsodia," and "Cómo me gustaría..." express and imply possibilities of being in non-being that are as intangible as a memory or a shadow. Nonetheless, the memory remains, the shadow speaks.

Other, more tangible visions of being within non-being appear as well. Rosenmann-Taub imagines a continuation of human consciousness in a disembodied state, now found in a swamp, now an illuminated cadaver, a gleaming gob of spit, a dark swamp, or even in a star. The relationship of the material body of the human being with that of the earth as another possibility for being: in poems like "Conjuro," "Canción de Cuna," "Tajrijim" and "Pasión" the body lives on in intimate relationship with the earth after the death of the human being. These poems seem to suggest that while the atoms of the physical body may merge with the atoms of the multiverse, some vestige of the individual's consciousness remains in this state of non-being that is the individual's death.

The most tangible visions of life after death appear in the analyses of poems taken from *Quince*. “El Desahucio,” “Noailles” and “En el náufrago día...” are poems in which the speaker, having just died, either relates his thoughts and actions in the poem as if he were still alive, or addresses his dead interlocutor as if she were still alive and had full powers of consciousness. In these poems, the speaker’s (or, presumably, his interlocutor’s) consciousness in this state of non-being is as lucid as it was during the course of his life.

Rosenmann-Taub’s vision of death thus rejects both the traditional religious viewpoint as well as the modern existentialist viewpoint. Instead, there exists a multitude of possibilities for the existence of the individual after the physiological death of the body, ranging from a shadow or memory all the way to a fully developed consciousness as vital as the consciousness of a living human being. Furthermore, the poems of the third chapter continue to reinforce the poet’s argument of essence over existence in his portrayal of the Orcus multiverse in which we live. This concept pervades the poems of the other chapters as well: poems from the second and fourth chapters also allude to the presence of life or consciousness after the death of the body. “En las eras, ajeno,” and “La Traición” from the fourth chapter refer to past lives, the speaker in “Cómo me gustaría” from the second chapter is conscious of the moment of his birth, and the structure of “El carruaje ligero de la noche,” also from the second chapter, implies an infinite succession of lives.

This vision of an afterlife has profound implications. First, it creates a sense of responsibility in the individual, both for others and himself. Now, the living are responsible to the dead; if the individual knows that the essence of his friends or family members lives beyond death, his responsibility to them extends past their demise. As noted in the fourth chapter, the book *El Mensajero* emanates from a promise that Rosenmann-Taub made to his dead father; and

in “Schabat” the speaker’s mother summons and laments her dead ancestors.

Also, the belief in a life after death provides the motivation to live a conscious life in accord with one’s essential being. In “La Traición,” the speaker’s dead parents meet him at the threshold of life and death, and lament that he has not lived his “real” life. In “Noailles,” Anna de Noailles appears as youthful and versatile in death as she was in life. In this poem, the poet appears to suggest that the presence of consciousness in life leads to the presence of a consciousness after death. In contrast, in the tragedy of “El ligero carruaje de la noche,” the speaker remains unconscious throughout his repeated existences, never having lived his real life.

Thus, Rosenmann-Taub’s concept of a life that exists after the physiological death of the body forms a counterpoint to his concept of the death that is omnipresent in life. Physical death is just one more transformation in the myriad of transformations that constantly take place in the multiverse. Instead, consciousness is the defining feature of life, at least for the human being, and the death that is lack of consciousness is to be fought “a dentelladas.” If one wins this battle, if one is able to live a conscious life, then physiological death loses its importance, since the poems of both this and the fourth chapter suggest the possibility of life after death for the conscious individual.

The fourth chapter of this study further examines this juxtaposition of being and non-being, not only at the moment of death but also during life. “Olvidamos los ojos,” “Posteridad” and “Arambeles,” describe the moment of death as the continuation of the gradual disintegration and transformation of the body that also occurs regularly in life. “De camarada a camarada, cuerpo...” and “Diálogo Sepulcral” describe an evolution of consciousness that may occur at this moment as well. Rosenmann-Taub uses his poetic lens to explore the moment where life and death meet in an original way. The poems mentioned above detail both the physical and spiritual

transformations of the body at and immediately after this liminal moment; the poet wants to understand this moment as much as possible, and “stops time” in order to examine the phenomenon in detail.

However, for Rosenmann-Taub, the juxtaposition of death and life is not solely limited to the moment of the physiological death of the body. In poems such as “La Cita” and “En el poniente de pardos vallados,” the interaction between these two states of being is described less as an evolution and more as a confrontation. The poems suggest that at any and every moment in the life of the human being, the state of being and the state of non-being reside within him. As a result, the individual continually confronts the decision whether to be or not to be in every moment of his life.

Finally, the fourth chapter analyzed poems that demonstrate the individual’s attitude when facing these choices. Whereas with few exceptions the poems of the second chapter portrayed man’s attitude in his conscious movement towards death as consistent and steadfast in his determination, the poems of this fourth chapter illustrate the different options available to the human being, ranging from near-hysteria to anxiety to enthusiasm to objectivity. Whereas the emotional speaker in “La Traición” explores the many aspects of the “voz de retroceso” that holds him back from living his real life, the objective speaker of “En el naufrago día” accepts the shipwreck of his previous life, understanding that all that happened before is now meaningless, and awaits his next adventure. Rosenmann-Taub implicitly suggests that calmness and tranquility are the keys to a conscious life, to the conquest of the forces of death that surround one, and to the realization of one’s true being.

Thus, Rosenmann-Taub’s poetry on death ultimately describes and informs life. Using the concept of the simultaneity of being and non-being as his point of departure, the poet

describes and questions both the conscious and unconscious movement towards death as he holds open the possibility that the individual can consciously choose life instead. Rosenmann-Taub conceives of a wide range of possibilities of life after death, using consciousness as the medium and measure of that state of being. His poems employ the imagery of courtship and bullfighting to express the confrontation between these two states of being, so that the reader may better understand the intensity of the conflict between them. This description of these two states of being in nature and throughout the macrocosmos and microcosmos puts this confrontation between these states of being within the individual in its proper perspective: this is a titanic confrontation, one that takes place everywhere, with everything, in every moment of the multiverse.

The Heraclitean multiverse that the poet envisions, with its mechanical processes and programs that follow Newton's Second Law, is stark to contemplate. Rosenmann-Taub illustrates these processes and programs and how they control the life of the human being. Escape is difficult: even the poems such as "Con la soga oportuna me ahorca...", "No el cadáver de Dios lo que medito," and "Ah ser la triste oveja que ante el perro temible," which recognize the possibility that one may live one's own life, express the possibility only in terms of wishes or imperatives.

Still, the possibility of a conscious life does exist. "Jávele" confronts the forces of nature without fear. In "PRELUDIO" appears the "himno entre dos víboras," and in "En el naufrago día," despite the loss of the best part of himself, the speaker calmly watches "el mirar del navegar que espero." Repeatedly, Rosenmann-Taub links consciousness with the state of being and unconsciousness with the state of non-being. In an interview, the poet states the following:

... está el peligro de no vivir la vida personal, de vivir una vida de acuerdo a las circunstancias, como una especie de moda trascendente. Nacer en China en el siglo

pasado o hace dos mil años, o nacer dentro de dos mil años en Sudamérica o en África, no debe alterar lo que soy. Una cosa es la circunstancia, y otra, el individuo. Esa frase famosa de Ortega y Gasset, "el hombre y su circunstancia", puede ser una maravillosa justificación para decir que nadie vive su vida, sino que vive la vida del contorno. Quizá eso le ocurrió a Ortega y Gasset. No a mí. Aunque sea muy grave la circunstancia, uno tiene que ser uno (Berger 2).

...[there] is the danger of not living one's personal life, of living a life according to circumstances, in thrall to a kind of a preeminent fashion. To be born in China in the past century or two thousand years ago, or to be born two thousand years from now in South America or in Africa ought not to alter what I am. The circumstance is one thing, and the individual is something else. That famous phrase of Ortega y Gasset's, "man and his circumstance," can be a marvelous justification for saying that nobody lives his own life but rather lives the life of his milieu. Perhaps that is what happened to Ortega y Gasset. Not to me. However grave the circumstance, one has to be oneself.

Death is omnipresent in the "Orcus multiverse" that we inhabit and, of course, in the life of every human being as well. However, in poems such as those discussed here, the poet indicates that the individual does indeed have consciousness and will; if he chooses to employ them, if he does not allow himself to be held back by the "voz de retroceso... que *le* desextasía, / vendiéndose, ladino, a la sofocación del Problema divino" (from "La Traición"), he has the ability to escape the danger of "his circumstance" and live his own life: a *real* life.

ENDNOTES

¹ Biographical information on the poet comes primarily from the website of the Corda Foundation, an organization founded in 2001 to assemble, preserve and promote the work of the poet.

² In Italy, *E poi, il vento*, Collezione Andrea Lippolis Editore, a bilingual anthology by Sabrina Costanzo, Universidad de Catania (2010); in Spain, *Me incitó el espejo*, DVD Ediciones, an anthology by Álvaro Salvador and Erika Martínez (2010); in India, *Quince*, Karaub editions, Kolkata, a translation in Bengali by Subrahnsu Banerjee, (2010); in Mexico, *El horizonte cruza la casa*, Colección “La Abeja De Perséfone,” an anthology by Víctor Toledo, Universidad de Puebla (2011); in France, *Cortège et Épinicie*, Éditions Bruno Doucey, a bilingual edition of *Cortejo y Epinicio I*, translated by Luc Brébion (2011); and in Argentina, *Multiverso*, Editorial Mansalva, an anthology by Jorge Monteleone (2012).

³ The term “laric” refers to Rilke’s “poetry of the lar”; where the lar is the ancestral home. Laric poetry celebrates the ancestral hearth and embraces the idea of connection to the earth.

⁴ Translation mine.

⁵ In the original, “Ces deux livres sont d'une qualité et d'un accent tout à fait exceptionnels, et je ne vois personne, même chez nous, qui ose aborder l'expression poétique avec une aussi déchirante violence.”

⁶ Citation taken from the poet’s website.

⁷ Riffaterre terms the inconsistencies at the mimetic level “ungrammaticalities,” even though the inconsistencies may not be solely grammatical inconsistencies. The theorist labels the underlying meaning of the figurative language that constitutes the mimetic level of the poem a “hypogram.” Most often, this is the tenor of a metaphor or metonym, but it can also be the reconciliation of a paradox or oxymoron, meaning produced through symmetry and/or rhyme, or a concept derived from specific lexical combinations.

⁸ The multiverse may be defined as the entirety of space, time, matter, and energy as well as the physical laws and constants that describe them.

⁹ All translations of Rosenman-Taub's poems are my own. I offer these literal English translations in case they are helpful to the reader, as the poet's vocabulary is often daunting even to the educated native Spanish speaker.

¹⁰ Jonathan Mayhew approaches this fundamental question of language and reality in poetry by classifying poetic language into two categories. Poetic language is either hermetic, where the work is a self-contained linguistic structure, or Orphic, based on a mythical unity of word and being. In the former instance, the fact that language is arbitrary doesn’t impede its functions, since linguistic conventions make communication possible. However, for the poet, the arbitrariness of Orphic poetic language severs it from the world, “making it a radically autonomous, “hermetic” form of discourse. In the latter instance, the sound corresponds to the word’s meaning, such as in onomatopoeic words, contrary to the Saussurean concept of the arbitrariness and conventionality of the sign; this is the basis for the notion that literary language is richer in meaning than ordinary discourse. (17-19). Rosenmann-Taub’s lexicón takes full advantage of linguistic conventions; at the same time, phonological examples such as those shown above demonstrate his ability to enter into the realm of Orphic language as well.

¹¹ This literary beast appears in *Amadis de Gaula*, the most famous of the books of chivalry of medieval Spain. It is portrayed as a cross between man, hydra, multi-headed serpent and dragon, with the most fearsome appearance and conduct imaginable.

¹² Although the acts of this animal will could also be interpreted as acts of “unbridled free will,” reflection reveals that the opposite is true. To control one’s temper in an argument, to be calm under stress, to act intelligently when one is “in love,” or to avoid hysteria and/or depression at the sudden death of a close friend or family member are all extremely difficult; instead, the individual’s habitual reactions, governed by emotions, usually prove stronger than his intelligence. To say that our free will is shaped primarily by irrational forces is to negate the entire concept of free will, since free will implies that the individual has control over his actions.

¹³ Lakoff and Johnson describe and develop this metaphor in *Metaphors We Live By* (43-45).

¹⁴ As Michael Riffaterre declares, “To put it simply, a poem says one thing and means another (*Semiotics* 1).” The reader’s objective in semiotic analysis is to move from the complex and variable nature of the text as a mimetic and prosaic representation of reality, to the formal and semantic unity of the text as a poem. The poem’s unified semantic meaning, which Riffaterre calls its significance, may be created through displacement (when one word stands for another, as in metaphor or metonymy), distortion (ambiguity or contradiction) and/or creation, which the poet accomplishes through the use of “...symmetry, rhyme, or semantic equivalences between positional homologues in a stanza (*Semiotics* 2).” Riffaterre observes that all of these forms of indirection threaten the literary representation of reality: “Representation may simply be altered visibly and persistently in a manner inconsistent with verisimilitude or with what the context leads the reader to expect. Or it may be distorted by a deviant grammar or lexicon (for instance, contradictory details), which I shall call *ungrammaticality*. Or else it may be cancelled altogether (for instance, nonsense) (*Semiotics* 2).”

¹⁵ In the poem, the speaker kills the albatross that saved the ship and its crew from the Antarctic ice: “At length did cross an Albatross, / Thorough the fog it came; / As if it had been a Christian soul, / We hailed it in God's name.”

¹⁶ Abductive reasoning is the process of deriving a cause from its effect, or, in the case of literary analysis, of inferring the tenor of a metonym from its vehicle. This line of reasoning is not capable of proof, as in deductive reasoning which derives the effect from the cause; however, in the case of Rosenmann-Taub’s poetry, where the vehicles from many metonyms share the same tenor, the inference ultimately becomes a valid interpretation.

¹⁷ This view is diametrically opposed to contemporary views of death, and may yield a more positive outcome than those views. For example, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross notes that the denial of death in contemporary society has led to loss of hope and purpose and increased anxiety in life, recognizing that religion, which formerly was able to promise an afterlife, no longer has the capacity to address these issues with any degree of meaning or relevance (13-14).

¹⁸ In Riffaterre’s semiotic methodology,
...descriptive systems are in no way coextensive with the realities they are supposed to represent. ...words and clichés are valorized by their function in the system. The system thus acts as a code and as a variant of the thematic structures.... A system’s signifiers are not synonyms... Subordinate to one another, they are metonyms. ...every component in the system can be substituted for that system and can represent it in its entirety, in all the complexity of its associations and, in particular, of its symbolism.... Second, the system’s

signifiers play the same role in relation to one another that referents and signifieds play in relation to signifiers in ordinary communication.... (*Text Production* 40-42).

¹⁹ These sonnets follow the general sonnet form of two quatrains followed by two tercets. However, the versification is irregular – not all of the lines are heptasyllabic in length – and although the rhymes are consonant, they do not follow traditional sonnet rhyme schemes.

²⁰ Another example of Lakoff's development of the metaphor "life as a journey."

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