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Cabinet of the Muses: Rosenmeyer Festschrift

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Biography and Bibliography of T. G. Rosenmeyer (1920-2007)

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**TOM ROSENMEYER
IN MEMORIAM**



Saturday, April 7, 2007, 1 p.m.
Heyns Room
The Faculty Club
University of California, Berkeley

PROGRAM

MUSICAL SELECTIONS

OPENING REMARKS: Tony Long

REMEMBRANCES

Robert Alter
Erich Gruen
John Prausnitz
Michelle Zerba
Kathy Fabunan

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

REMEMBRANCES

Patricia Rosenmeyer
Benjamin Acosta-Hughes
Donald Mastronarde
Mark Griffith

CLOSING REMARKS: Tony Long

RECEPTION

THOMAS GUSTAV ROSENMEYER

APRIL 3, 1920–FEBRUARY 6, 2007

Tom Rosenmeyer, Professor Emeritus of Greek and Comparative Literature at the University of California at Berkeley, died at his home in Oakland on Tuesday, February 6, 2007. He was 86.

Born in Hamburg, Germany, on April 3, 1920, and educated at the humanistic Johanneum Gymnasium in that city from 1930 to 1938, Tom fled to England in 1939 to avoid Nazi persecution. He enrolled at the London School of Oriental Studies, intending to learn Sanskrit, but in 1940 the British, expecting a German invasion, interned all “enemy” aliens. He was sent on to an internment camp in Canada, where the residents formed their own impromptu “university,” studying Hebrew, Sanskrit, and Arabic as well as the classical languages together behind barbed wire. Among his colleagues in the camp were future classicist Martin Ostwald and Emil Fackenheim, who taught Tom Arabic and later became a prominent philosopher of the Shoah. Released from internment in 1942, Tom completed an undergraduate degree in Classics at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, in 1944 and took an MA in Classics at the University of Toronto in 1945 before proceeding to Harvard for his doctoral studies. He took up his first teaching job in 1947 at the University of Iowa, where he worked on completing his dissertation and began translating Bruno Snell’s *Die Entdeckung des Geistes*, which appeared in 1948. He received his PhD in 1949 with a dissertation on Plato entitled “The Isle of Critias.” After three years at Smith College (1952–55), he moved to the University of Washington, where he rose through the ranks to Full Professor (1955–66). Inspired by conversations with fellow expatriate classicists Paul Friedländer (UCLA) and Hermann Fränkel (Stanford), Tom decided to expand his horizons and soon developed a strong commitment to the new discipline of Comparative Literature. When he arrived at Berkeley in 1966 to a joint position in Greek and Comparative Literature, Tom immediately became one of the main shaping forces of that new, and soon preeminent, program.

At Berkeley, Tom was admired and loved as a deeply learned, wide-ranging and loyal colleague, a warm friend and mentor, and a stalwart servant of his two departments and of the humanities. He served terms as chair of each department (Classics in 1973–1975 and Comparative Literature in 1979–1981) and held high positions in the College of Letters and Science, as Dean of Instruction in 1969–1971 and as Dean of Humanities in 1971–1972. Tom helped to organize what is now the Townsend Center for the Humanities, and was selected by the Academic Senate to be Faculty Research Lecturer in 1990. Upon his retirement later that year he received the Berkeley Citation, the highest award available to faculty for a distinguished career of teaching, service, and scholarship. To mark his 70th birthday in that same spring, he was presented with a Festschrift with contributions from his friends, colleagues and former students entitled *Cabinet of the Muses*.

Tom Rosenmeyer became one of the leading expositors in his generation of classical Greek literature, with his distinctive combination of traditional philology and flexible, finely-nuanced literary analysis. He was able to draw skillfully both on philosophically-based aesthetic theory (German as well as Anglo-American) as well as an impressive range of literary-critical models—the fruit of his formidably wide and deep reading. In his early career he published numerous articles on Plato, and translated into English one of the most influential books of that time, Bruno Snell’s *Die Entdeckung des Geistes* (*The Discovery of the Mind*, 1953). His first monograph, *The Masks of Tragedy* (1963), collected several provocative essays on Greek plays. *The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European Pastoral Tradition* (1969) is an excellent example of his comparative approach, as it brings a wide-ranging chronological and cultural perspective to the study of Greek and Latin poetry, points up interconnections between literature and philosophy, and shows the continuing relevance of the classics for the understanding of later literature. *The Art of Aeschylus* (1982) is likewise a remarkable tour de force, erudite, sophisticated, and pithily

written. Partly as the result of a sabbatical in Paris in 1972–1973, which introduced him to such intellectual luminaries as Lacan and Derrida, as well as the classicists J.–P. Vernant and P. Vidal-Naquet, he next focused on reading widely in literary theory and considering how contemporary approaches might work, or not work, for classical texts in his 1988 monograph *Deina Ta Polla*. In a late turn to Latin literature, Tom’s final book *Senecan Drama and Stoic Cosmology* (1989) is an excitingly original study of how Seneca weaves the Stoic science of nature into his tragedies.

In these books and in numerous shorter contributions, such as his brilliant chapter on drama in M. I. Finley’s *The Legacy of Greece* (1981), as well as in his work as an editor, the important characteristics of Tom’s scholarship were these: sensitive and provocative attention to the ancient texts in the light of an immense range of ancient and modern literature; facility in pinpointing those aspects and techniques of Renaissance and modern texts which significantly borrow from, continue, or consciously modify ancient models; interest in the connections between literature and the contemporary currents of philosophical thought; scrutiny of the interplay and tension between literary theory and literary practice; openness to the ambiguities and imprecisions of both literary expression itself and the interpretative strategies of scholars.

Beyond Berkeley, the distinction of Tom Rosenmeyer was acknowledged by the award of two Guggenheim Fellowships, an NEH Fellowship, his election to both the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the American Philosophical Society, and his service as President of the American Philological Association in 1989. He lectured both in this country and abroad. Before and after his retirement in 1990 he held visiting appointments at the American School of Classical Studies, Athens (1961–62), the University of Michigan (Summer 1966), Princeton University (Fall 1975), Harvard University (Fall 1984), the Ohio State University (Fall 1990), the University of Washington (Spring 1991), and Stanford University (Fall 1993). Although hampered in his last years by deafness, which made it difficult for him to attend social gatherings and lectures, he maintained his one-on-one connections with his friends and colleagues, communicated far and wide by email, and pursued a full life of reading, research, and writing. He was physically and mentally active right up to the end.

His wife of 56 years, Lilo, died last year. He is survived by two daughters, Patricia Rosenmeyer of Madison, Wisconsin, and Katharine Fabunan of Fresno, California, and by three grandchildren.

A bibliography of Tom Rosenmeyer’s work is on display at this event, and a digital copy is available on the Classics Department’s eScholarship Repository site, along with the digital edition of the 1990 Festschrift, *Cabinet of the Muses*, created in 2005 to honor Tom’s 85th birthday (<http://repositories.cdlib.org/ucbclassics/>).

THE THOMAS G. ROSENMEYER MEMORIAL FELLOWSHIP FUND
FOR COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

Because of Tom’s life-long commitment to the study of literature in both the historical specificity of its own context and the broad sweep of literary traditions, his daughters have established an endowment to provide fellowship funds in Comparative Literature to support, by preference, future students of Comparative Literature who pursue significant work in Classics.

Contributions to this fund are welcome from all and may be made in several ways, as described on the gift form available today.

Credit: Portrait photograph by Genevieve Shiffar.

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