

## Ruy Pérez Tamayo

### Writer

*Ruy Pérez Tamayo*  
*Escritor*

Alberto Lifshitz Guinzberg\*

### Speech delivered by Dr. Alberto Lifshitz Guinzberg, during the tribute of the Mexican Academy of Medical Writers to Dr. Ruy Perez-Tamayo at the Faculty of Medicine, UNAM, on February 6, 2019

Many tributes have been paid to Ruy Pérez-Tamayo. The character deserves them all. He has been recognized as an academic (*professor emeritus* of this faculty, *honoris causa* of many universities), researcher (National Award for Sciences), professor, philosopher, historian, promoter of science, popularizer, among others. But on this occasion, he has accepted to be honored as a writer: Ruy Pérez-Tamayo, writer. His written work is not only generous, abundant, but transcendent, entertaining, fun, academic, fascinating. I am not going to list all of his texts, but they mainly cover essays and some stories.

He himself acknowledges that novel and poetry are difficult for him. One of his friends, Alvaro Gomez-Leal, diagnosed him with an incurable disease designated in Latin as *insanabile scribendis cacoethes* (incurable writing disease). I don't think I have read all of his work, but I have read most of it (and of course I have it all in my library as a treasure). I recognize his influence on my way of thinking and writing. Many people have been seduced by the Pérez-Tamayo lecturer. Me too, but more for the Pérez-Tamayo writer. In addition to his writings, the interviews he has given are truly

delightful and illustrative. If not, read the one that appeared in the Journal of the Faculty of Medicine a few years ago.

This tribute is co-organized by the Mexican Academy of Medical Writers. This Academy was created four years ago by Federico Ortiz Quezada and some other writers. I have recently assumed the presidency, and my first official act is to signify who best represents the profession of medical writer in our country. Ruy Pérez-Tamayo says he is not sure he wants to be remembered, but he will have no choice, largely due to his texts, also, of course, for having created a school, having defended science, contributing to bioethics and spread the history and philosophy of our profession.

Medicine and literature have close ties. Many famous authors have been doctors and many doctors have shown the ability to write. "The pen who writes and the one who prescribes coexist harmoniously in the same hand," said Basilio Sanchez, a Spanish medical writer. Medicine offers the opportunity to penetrate deeply into human souls, to live with science and the humanities (its two pillars), to reflect on misery and greatness, to recognize the historical importance of disease, to measure suffering, to

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Received: 20/02/2019  
Accepted: 25/02/2019



**How to cite:** Lifshitz GA. Ruy Pérez Tamayo. Writer. Cir Gen. 2019; 41(1): 61-62.

comfort, to understand the context. William Somerset Maugham, another medical writer, reported: "I know of no better training for a writer than spending a few years in the medical profession." Anton Chekhov, a Russian medical writer, said that between literature and the medical profession, one was his wife and the other his lover; when he got tired of one he would throw himself into the arms of the other.

Literature undoubtedly has a pedagogical function in medicine. Reading is an invaluable experience in medical education; and I am not referring to reading technical books (which are of course indispensable), but to literary texts. It can be viewed from an ethical approach (reading, students learn to behave), an aesthetic one (reading, students learn to read and, above all, to enjoy reading), a clinical one (reading,

students learn how diseases express themselves) and a contextual one (reading, students learn the framework in which the health-disease process occurs).

Reading Pérez-Tamayo is not only a recreational activity (although in large part it is), but an opportunity to learn about the thinking of one of the contemporary philosophers of medicine, one of the protagonists of 20<sup>th</sup> century science, a leading teacher of generations, an explorer of the history of medicine, an affectionate critic of current medicine and a model of a medical writer.

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