

ROBERTO SOSA
JIM LINDSEY

The Difficult Days



PRINCETON LEGACY LIBRARY

THE DIFFICULT DAYS

THE LOCKERT LIBRARY
OF POETRY IN TRANSLATION

Advisory Editor: John Frederick Nims

For other titles in the Lockert Library
see p. 81

THE DIFFICULT DAYS

Roberto Sosa

TRANSLATED BY
Jim Lindsey

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS

Copyright © 1983 by Princeton University Press
Published by Princeton University Press, 41 William Street,
Princeton, New Jersey 08540
In the United Kingdom: Princeton University Press,
Guildford, Surrey

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data will be
found on the last printed page of this book*

ISBN cloth 0-691-06583-7
paper 0-691-01407-8

*The Lockert Library of Poetry in Translation is supported by a
bequest from Charles Lacy Lockert (1888-1974)*

*This book has been composed in Linotron Sabon
Clothbound editions of Princeton University Press books are
printed on acid-free paper, and binding materials are chosen for
strength and durability. Paperbacks, although satisfactory for
personal collections, are not usually suitable for library rebinding.*

*Printed in the United States of America by
Princeton University Press
Princeton, New Jersey*

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	vii
Esta Luz Que Subscribo	2
This Light I Subscribe To	3
Los Pobres	4
The Poor	5
Transparencia	6
Transparency	7
Los Peldaños Que Faltan	8
The Missing Stairs	9
Los Indios	10
The Indians	11
La Realidad	14
Reality	15
La Yerba Cortada por los Campesinos	16
The Grass the Peasants Cut	17
Los Elegidos de la Violencia	20
Those the Violence Selects	21
Las Voces No Escuchadas de los Ricos	22
Unheard Voices of the Rich	23
La Muerte Otra	24
The Other Death	25
Los Claustros	26
The Sanctuary	27
La Hora Baja	28
Low Hour	29
Malignos Bailarines sin Cabeza	32
Wicked Headless Dancers	33
Las Sales Enigmáticas	34
The Mysterious Sallies	35

Piano Vacío	36
Empty Piano	37
La Batalla Oscura	38
The Dark War	39
Mi Padre	40
My Father	41
Arte Espacial	54
Spatial Art	55
Canción para un Gato Muerto	56
Song for a Dead Cat	57
Testimonios	58
Testimonies	59
Los Días Difíciles	60
The Difficult Days	61
Después de los Encuentros	64
After the Encounters	65
Un Anormal Volumen de Lluvia (Crónica de un Juicio Final)	66
An Unusual Amount of Rain (A Doomsday Report)	67
Descripción de una Ciudad en Peligro	70
Description of an Endangered City	71
El Aire Que Nos Queda	74
The Air We Have Left	75
El Invierno Puede Ser un Inválido	76
Winter Can Be an Invalid	77
La Arena del Desierto Que Comparto con Otros	78
The Desert Sand I Share with Others	79

INTRODUCTION

"A poem or a story could help civilize those who govern;
that's why we need governors who read"

Two Interviews with Robert Sosa

From the magazine *Plural* (Mexico City), May, 1982:

Roberto Sosa was born in 1930 in the village of Yoro (where, in his own words, "it rains fish and airplanes"), in Honduras ("that enormous cultural pothole in Central America"). He is one of the most serious and prolific living Honduran authors and his work has received awards in his own country and abroad.

Among his works are *Caligrams* (1959), *Walls* (1966), *The Sea Inside* (Juan Ramón Molinas Award, Honduras, 1967), *The Poor* (Adonais Award, Spain, 1967), *A Brief Study of Poetry and Its Creation* (1969), and *A World For All Divided* (Casa de las Américas Award, Cuba, 1971). His poetry has been translated into French, German, Russian, and, most recently, English.

Sosa has served as juror in the literary competitions *Miró* (Panama, 1976), *Casa de las Américas* (Cuba, 1979), *Ruben Darío* (Nicaragua, 1980) and others. For eight years now he has edited the magazine *Presente* (a review of Central American arts and letters), he was director of the University of Honduras Press, he is a member of the Honduran Academy of Language, and he currently is president of the Honduran Journalists' Union.

Plural conducted the following interview with the Honduran poet during a visit of his to Mexico. The interviewer is Roberto Bardini, an Argentine journalist specializing in Central American themes. He spent several years in Honduras as preparation for his recent book, *Connection in Tegucigalpa*.

BARDINI: To warm to the subject, why don't you tell us a little about your early education; your infancy, adolescence, and youth; how you earned a living non-literarily; who your friends and enemies are; where you have been and what you have won; and anything else that occurs to you.

SOSA: I completed my early education in the little village of Yoro, that has been made famous by the rain of fish that falls in its environs (this phenomenon still has not been investigated scientifically; most people who hear about it for the first time smile slightly and make gestures of incredulity . . . justifiably, of course).

I've worked at several occupations to earn honorably my frijoles, tortillas, books, and music. From puberty to my second childhood I've sold bread, measured heights, wrote a poem or an editorial for a magazine or newspaper, or directed some journalistic endeavor.

Some of my awards have been non-literary. Two stand out. A primary school in Tegucigalpa, that before boasted the name of John F. Kennedy, was renamed for me. It has to do with a cultural recuperation. And a little street in Yoro now goes by my name. These two things have led me to feel a greater responsibility to the society that has honored me in this manner in my lifetime.

Friendship has a special meaning for me. A friend is someone one chooses as a brother. To travel and to think, and to know a friend is waiting for us, produces a feeling of security and confidence and happiness.

I know some countries of this continent and some of the Old World. It's true that "to travel is to reform oneself." Strange, brutal, and marvelous people get together and get to know each other. The first big city I became acquainted with was Mexico City, in 1963. I was impressed by the noise and the lights of six in the afternoon, and the Aztec multitude kicked and spit upon by the most lucid bourgeoisie of the continent, a bourgeoisie defended by a certain intellectuality

(anti-?) situated "far from God and near the United States." That was eighteen years ago. Have things changed?

I have no enemies of quality and at times I think that's a pity. Most of my enemies, those I know, are intranscendentalists. To tell the truth, I have seen seven or eight intermediate enemies, full of hate (literary hate, which is no less corrosive than political hate, nor less refined) from the bottom of their glances to the tips of their gray hairs. I've never answered attacks except obliquely. It's a good practice. The attack exhausts itself and disappears, attacker and all. The poisoner drinks his own poison.

BARDINI: What can you tell us about Central America as a place for poetry? Does a Honduran literature exist?

SOSA: For whatever reason, Central America is definitely a place for poetry. Miguel Angel Asturias affirmed that the origin of this condition is in the light. The anthologists (read "fadologists") of poetry have taken a long time to represent the Honduran chapter and have confined it to modernism: Juan Ramón Molina and Froylan Turcios. The confectioners of almanacs have gone even further, have altered names, birthdates, biographies, bibliographies, and the rest.

BARDINI: What poets have most influenced the Hondurans? What weight, for example, have Pablo Neruda, César Vallejo, and Ruben Darío had?

SOSA: Darío, as you know, created a zone of influence in Honduras, wide enough that he still has imitators, including imitators of his decadent style. Neruda and Vallejo are key names in the poetic affairs of my country, although to tell the truth, the Chilean (Neruda) wove and unraveled in material of influence. On the other hand, at a continental level and in unclear circumstances, a whole army of poets disappeared along the Nerudan Way.

BARDINI: Does an official cultural policy exist in Honduras?

SOSA: There exists no definite cultural policy on the part of the Honduran State. There never has. From the looks of it, that sector of the life of the country does not now nor has it ever interested them. Not too long ago a Ministry of Culture was created, but its work in that sense is remote and serves only to sustain the most anticultural bureaucracy that ever existed.

Honduras is maybe the only country in Latin America that has no Faculty of Humanities. And this absence in the Honduran educational system signals an enormous shortcoming in the formative process of its intellectuals—a term to be understood here in its widest sense—who, naturally, have been condemned to solitary study, without discipline. It has created a critical shortage in the supply of analytical, critical, and organized intellectuals. This doesn't mean there are only uncritical intellectuals. No. There are serious and honest intellectuals, but not in the measure and proportion that ought to exist in a country like ours, that needs responsible leaders.

BARDINI: What are the relations between the government and the intellectuals then, since there is no official cultural policy? Are there writers assimilated by the military regimes?

SOSA: The writers and the military governments have never maintained in Honduras—in any country, I think—very good relations to speak of. There are, of course, some intellectuals who have been—and will be again at a moment's notice—at the service of every military dictatorship. They are employed in the diplomatic services, as “ideological bodyguards” in the mass media, or as speechwriters. These last we call “Walt Disneys” because they make animals talk. They are gentlemen who live very well, dress very well, dispense drawing room ironies and laugh like hyenas, all full of grease, from overseas.

The intellectuals who assume denunciatory positions, on the other hand, are labeled “communists,” “useless idiots,” expressions that on the lips of the representatives of repression and of the “men of letters” of the Right have a bitter, slighting flavor.