

ROBERTO SOSA
JIM LINDSEY

The Difficult Days



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THE DIFFICULT DAYS

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THE
DIFFICULT
DAYS

Roberto Sosa

TRANSLATED BY
Jim Lindsey

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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, birth-dates, 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.