



The Beggar's Knife

Rodrigo Rey Rosa

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From one of Guatemala's finest young writers, these twenty-six stories—at once brutal and intensely lyrical—are peopled with sorcerers, ghosts, and assassins.

Springing from myth and beliefs indigenous to Central America and North America, where their action occurs, Rey Rosa's tales give the sense of being dreamed. At the same time they can be read as metaphors for the terror and oppression of years of warfare.

"*The Beggar's Knife* was originally subtitled '24 strange tales' in the English translation by Paul Bowles, published by City Lights Books in 1985. This collection of short stories was originally written in Spanish and was published a year later in their original language in a Guatemala that was returning to democracy.

In its Spanish version, *The Beggar's Knife* was composed of 25 intense and enigmatic short stories. It included 'The Path Doubles Back' which, at seven pages, was the longest. Rarely in Guatemala's literary history (probably since Asturias' *Legends of Guatemala*) has a writer's debut entailed such a promise. Rey Rosa's first book was evidence of a mature and new style of writing.

The fantastic tendency and the precise and macabre style in *The Beggar's Knife* immediately distanced Rey Rosa from the rest of Guatemalan writers, who persevered with a literal realism to address the armed conflict and social disparities. Rey Rosa's tales seemed eager to capture 'the possible activity of the unconscious,' in the author's own words, uncanny events that occurred on the boundary between dreams and reality. However, given Guatemala's sociopolitical reality at the time, the tales were plagued by acts of vengeance, threats of parricide, nightmares and violent deaths. The narratives, 'like the tricks of a magician,' were a mixture of the magical and the perverse."—Ronald Flores, *The Latin American Review of Books*

Rodrigo Rey Rosa has based many of his writings and stories on legends and myths that are indigenous to Latin American as well as North Africa. A number of Rey Rosa's works have been translated into English, including; *The Path Doubles Back* (by Paul Bowles), *Dust on her Tongue*, "The Pelcari Project", *The Beggar's Knife*, *The African Shore*, and *Severina*. Along with his longer writings, he has also written a number of short stories that have been printed in college-level text books, such as "Worlds of Fiction, Second Edition" by Roberta Rubenstein and Charles R. Larson. A few of these short stories include *The Proof*, and *The Good Cripple*. Many of Rey Rosa's works have been translated into seven languages. In the early 1980s, Rey Rosa went to Morocco and became a literary protege of American expatriate writer Paul Bowles, who later translated several of Rey Rosa's works into English. When Bowles died in 1999, Rey Rosa became an executor of his literary estate.

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