

5 Poems

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Vanessa Ovalle is a Latina poet of Mexican descent. She grew up in Southern California speaking Spanglish, a combination of English and Spanish. This linguistic and cultural mixing would lead her to explore questions of language, translation and cultural authenticity in her poetry and academic study. As a senior at Cornell University Vanessa completed an undergraduate senior thesis entitled 'C- in Spanish for Bilinguals,' which included both poetry composition and critical analysis. Currently she is a PhD student in Comparative Studies in Literature and Culture at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles.

1 Ideologue

so easy to write
yourself in a corner
she did that my roommate
on Jackie upstairs' birthday,
her letters condensing
like carnation of ink
feathers in the corner
of a hallmark card
"I can't write anymore!"
—"stuck in a corner."

roommate room / mate
two o's / two m's
mirroring handclap
Manhattan and Puerto Rico
California and Mexico
words writing us in corners
palomas strung out on
the tips of hallways,
and what if you / your

ideologue are / is a contrafactual?
doubt it could fly if it wasn't "real"
if I was / if I were you: an idea.

lets live in this subjunctive,
roommates, you the if that
will surely be true

2

Murrieta

Portrait of a suburban town in Southern California

Wachale, you're in Joaquin's land.
His etch-a-sketch retrato hangs
lost, so admire the dolly shot
of our sim world: the Applebees
Fridays, Macaroni Grill with Maltese
pooches in purses licking the soft-rot
from sugar town brows beneath blondie bangs.
Hot Springs brewed tupperware ladies
are riding sails on Mercedes
to Westfield malls. It's burning May;
food scraps fluxing in radioactive decay
are mixed in car-seats and cat sand.
The cradle of mierda in Joaquin's fangs
cakes murmurs on a Teflon pot.

3

DÉCALAGE

the process of absence
 a “gap” “delay” “time/jet/leg-lag”
 the attempt try rinse repeat
 to kiss a diaspora
 that scatters guasóna
 rogoná across burnt lips, nose, and eyes like rain drops
 count the spiders in a field of yerbas lost besos
 that seek to master mist falling from a tumbling
 sky hold your *décalage* and nurture
 the untranslatable loneliness in identity
 that becomes soledad identidad when you
 hold it

 she asked me if I wanted
 habichuelas so I went hungry waiting for my frijoles
 she offered me a colcha
 so I went cold hoping for a spare cobija
 bad impressions
 and we're not so the same. but not so different, right?
 I don't know anyone else who mows zacate anyway,
 at least not in nueba yol.

I don't recognize your laugh, your dancing
 exotic seductive but untranslatable
 curly hair that coils like christmas wrapping
 while mine bounces wild, irregular
 I suppose it won't matter after
 we've finished straightening for each other,
 sharing the iron,
 articulation that feeds our hambre
 for unidad and individuality, comunidad but
 unicos rinsing, repeating
 diaspora laughing
 rogoná guasóna ¡ !

4

Bardem's Equilibrium

after the film "Calle Mayor"

One over zero, that's how alone the blanco
of the broma burns when it gets to nothing
and you flick the cigarette to Palencia cobblestones,
twist leather sole until ashes to ashes. There is
no shot of the novia wallowing down Calle Mayor, but
this close-up is where everything happens. The cathedral
bells ring ritual into breakfast plates of obstructed
takes behind chandeliers. What happens when we
all suffer the aburrimiento colectivo? Are we prone
to play nuclear pranks for fun or does national security
will it to be so? Enough said. Betsy Blair didn't have a say
in the matter, she was the butt. Dubbed to perfection
without a moan of protest to her resume. Not even a
risa, ni siquiera a Spanish one. A clay pigeon stares out
into the rain along Calle Mayor, her wedding gown
hangs flaccid on the hanger behind her. Fin.

But it's not over, because Juan is still missing
and Isabel and that whore Toña, Dora Doll, will be
waiting two over zero forever. *Señora Dónde Vas*
makes nothing but a desperate cameo in the train
station, and I'm sure you're all wondering
—who is this woman and where can I meet her?

I'm pretty sure we're family so maybe for some big
milestone type thing, the piano tuner will be
adjusting and everything will seem too good to
be you. The pitch undulates another right from
wrong. Later, Frederico will burst through the
stage right double doors [take # three over zero]
the shine on your ballroom floor turns to glare,
hands positioned on the small of your back, he
will dip you. *Enter: equilibrio. Enter: ¿Sra. Dónde
Vas?*

5

native on canvas

physically outside and of
 the place serpents of gold
 charm us
 scaly belts tempt lips to
 breasts the primitivism
 en vogue where a woman finds
 herself, coal sparks
 at attention, swallowing her
 eyes. that fringe

*I was born near a weeping willow is no
 reason to devote my
 art to this rather limited liaison*

exoticism of gender of place
 legs with stubble and six fingered
 dreams that beg me to forget
 my guts
 my burnt skin.
 write something in spanish: *natural*
 and kick kick trip at the curb
 until you fall
 bust your lip and
 bleed spanish,english,french,color the
 local curses and prayers
 ladders for flutes
 the rehearsals that life imposes
 native dreams, naturally
 a delusion to move
 culture with nature
 desire
 for culture
 and symmetry forgetting

their wild and earth breathing
 wombs: the presence of her black
 body, invisible