5 Poems

Vanessa Ovalle, University of Southern California in Los Angeles

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.

let’s 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 tupperwared 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
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 nueva 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
rogona 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