

A Body Across Two Hemispheres

Victoria Buitron

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Victoria Buitron's memoir *A Body Across Two Hemispheres* works across two languages and cultures to confront bureaucratic and sexist assumptions that were designed to punish immigrants and women.

Born in Ecuador, Buitron moved to Connecticut when she was five. She lived in the US until she was fifteen, when her grandfather's illness drew the family home. Somewhere between the nations, she grew into a woman.

Buitron was slow to assimilate back into Ecuadorian culture, trading potato chips for mangoes, and English for Spanish. Alongside the family illness, she dealt with first love, but also the noise of wolf whistles blared at women from the street. Still, she came to value events like crab feasts, where forty family members celebrated life with food and each other. Buitron covers challenges like being questioned about her hair, her legitimacy as a citizen, her beliefs in Ecuadorian religious practices, and US borders. Covering those experiences, her essays are vulnerable, angry, and authentic, showing how people are expatriated from their countries, families, and selves.

A translator by profession, Buitron plays with language's nuances, too: there are multiple meanings to words to grapple with, and cultural connotations too, with slang and dictionary definitions competing. And the book's concerns grow in concert with Buitron's own development. She discusses her family's status and the challenges that her fiancé faced to attain a green card. She discusses watching as one of her nations imprisoned children at its border. The personal and the political intertwine in powerful, painful ways throughout: here, women's bodies are viewed by men, are subject to mercurial legislatures and medical establishment dismissiveness, and have their strengths tested by their owners, too.

A Body Across Two Hemispheres is a collection of embodied essays about the changing meanings of home; it is wrenching, joyous, and compelling.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (March / April 2022)

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