

## Wilderness House Literary Review 6/1

### **The Voting Booth After Dark**

Vanessa Libertad Garcia

Fiat Libertad CO., Huntington Park, CA

\$10.95 list price

*review by Rene Schwiesow*

Vanessa Garcia is a Cuban-American writer and filmmaker living in LA who is committed to relating the Latina culture and its subcultures to a cross-cultural audience. She focuses on people that may not typically be represented in film or print and has no fear of utilizing language that will drive her point home. Beware; this collection of narratives in prose and poetics is not PG-13.

"The Voting Booth After Dark," is subtitled: "Despicable, Embarrassing, Repulsive." The subtitle aptly describes the way her characters may label themselves. Some readers may also feel that the subtitle is an appropriate label for the actions and words of the characters. This can be a disturbing read. Garcia's work tells the tale of young, California Latina gay and lesbian individuals struggling to pull their lives together during the 2008 elections. Habitually drunk, on the prowl for sexual exploit and seeking highs that allow repression, Garcia's characters have their political moments.

The book opens around July of 2008 and ends in November with the election of Barack Obama and the passing of California's Proposition 8. Considering Garcia's characters are gay and lesbian, there is little discussion in the narratives about Proposition 8. Her characters, drowning in their own traumas, seem to be more interested in evening hook-ups and one night stands than marriage.

In "Lament," a suicidal young person connects with a homeless Viet Nam vet suffering from PTSD. Just having finished a second forty of malt liquor, Garcia's character calls the homeless man over and conversation ensues:

"We're both liberal. Eugene is a lot more hopeful than I. I ask him why he's homeless, of course. He responds and then I reply with a monologue about why I want to die."

The piece poignantly addresses the longing for relationship yet the inability to sustain relationship. "Suicidal drunks, even if they aren't homeless, don't make for very good or stable friends."

You can watch a trailer for "The Voting Booth After Dark" on YouTube. In the trailer Garcia intro's the book with a short explanation of the parallel to the 2008 election. Those who buy the book off the shelf without the video introduction or the benefit of having read a review, may find themselves confused for a few pages as even the back of the book is an excerpt and not an intro or overview.

The language is candid, the characters developed to show their need for love, understanding and, perhaps, intervention or counseling, but through the compilation of narratives there appears to be a sliver of

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growth, maybe.

“Try your best at peace.  
Try your best at truth.

Forgive your crumbling selves  
and try  
just try  
if you can  
not to take the world down

with you.”

Rene Schwiesow is a South Shore writer. She is co-host of the popular monthly venue in Plymouth – The Mike Amado Memorial Series: Poetry the Art of Words.