

*M. Carmen Àbrego*

ENTERING AN AMERICAN CLASSROOM

entering the beige  
latex classroom  
looking  
at glossy white  
faces.

never  
seeing one of my own  
faces.  
¿donde estamos?

looking to my left  
and to my right  
and now and then  
looking behind me  
and what i see each  
second is something  
I've seen before,  
¿where are we?

when i was six i  
pee in my panties.  
i cried out  
for el baño!  
squirming like a worm  
putting my hands  
between my legs.  
my mexican  
pee-pee is warm.  
making  
my mouth  
taste like copper.  
¡por favor!

I heard a  
burst of laughter,  
cracking the shell of  
innocence.

the teacher,  
pointing her index  
finger in my face.  
I followed the direction,  
up and down.  
becoming dizzy and  
i was under her spell.  
she says bathroom

repeat after me . . .  
ba-th-ro-om.  
i say baño . . .  
baño . . .  
ba . . . room.  
looking down to the  
milky floor  
seeing the yellow orange  
urine.  
feeling its warm  
stream on my legs,  
leaving a chill  
over my body.  
from the corner where i  
was made to stand.  
i repeat  
the new word.

at six i learned my first  
american word.  
bathroom, bathroom.

at forty  
i speak  
english too well.  
yet the memory remains  
a stain  
in my life  
when entering an  
american classroom.

ni modo,  
i am still the only  
person of color in  
the classroom.

*this poem is dedicated to the  
children of color in "Las Americas"*