Yanko González

Upper Volta

Translated from the Spanish by Stephen Rosenshein

Like an anthropologist doing fieldwork, in Upper Volta Yanko González collects language from street corners, grocery store aisles, cocktail hours, and historical sources, laying data bare with a poet’s meticulous hand. In his findings, González gives voice to the voiceless, and exposes the underbelly of our own biases—the ways in which they manifest in everyday language and collective consciousness. Originally published in Chile in 2007, Upper Volta transcends borders and boundaries in its exploration of topics all too relevant in our current political climate. Like a mirror, it forces us to look head-on at the language of globalization and ethnocentrism and the changing tide of thought and culture within our own society.

“González is here to show us that we don’t speak a language; a language, or many languages, speak for us.

— Cristián Gómez Olivares

“Upper Volta warns: words might suddenly shift in meaning... with no warning [...] Slips of the tongue [reveal] the class of the speaker, the caste, the catastrophé of a daily precarious living.

— JD Pluecker

Yanko González is a poet and professor of social and cultural anthropology at the Universidad Austral de Chile. In 2007, González received the Chilean Critics Award for the best poetry book for Alto Volta. His work has been translated into French, English, German, and Dutch.

Stephen Rosenshein is a writer, translator, and visual artist. His debut collection of street photography and poetry, Sincerely, Before, was published by Clarity Editions and was nominated for the Fine Art Photo Awards in Conceptual Photography. He resides in Oakland, CA.