

LEGAL ALIEN

by Pat Mora

BACKGROUND

Pat Mora was born on the border of El Paso, Texas and Mexico. Raised in a Mexican American household, she grew up speaking and reading both English and Spanish. Her poetry blends Hispanic culture into American society. This poem is from her first book of poetry. A legal alien is an immigrant who enters a country legally.

A LANGUAGE COACH

The prefix *bi-* means “two.” Mora hyphenates bi-lingual and bi-cultural to emphasize the feeling of living in two worlds. As you read, circle the other prefixes that Mora hyphenates.

B LITERARY FOCUS

What do you know about the speaker so far?

“Legal Alien” and “Extranjera legal” from *Chants* by Pat Mora. Copyright © 1984 by Pat Mora. Published by Arte Público Press—University of Houston, Houston, TX, 1985, 2000. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.

Bi-lingual, Bi-cultural, **A**
able to slip from “How’s life?”
to “*Me’stan volviendo loca*,”¹ **B**
able to sit in a paneled office
5 drafting memos in smooth English,

1. *Me’stan . . . loca* (MEH STAHN VOHL VEE EHN DOH LOH KAH): Spanish for “They’re driving me crazy.”



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EXTRANJERA LEGAL

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A LITERARY ANALYSIS

Compare the Spanish version of this poem to the English version. What English words are also in the Spanish version? Underline them. Then, circle any Spanish words that are very similar to English words.

Bi-lingüe, bi-cultural,
capaz de deslizarse de “*How’s life?*”
a “*Me’stan volviendo loca,*”
capaz de ocupar un despacho bien apuntado,
5 redactando memorandums en inglés liso,
capaz de ordenar la cena en español fluido
en restaurante mexicano,
americana pero con guión,
vista por los anglos como exótica,
10 quizás inferior, obviamente distinta,
vista por mexicanos como extranjera
(sus ojos dicen “*Hablas español*
pero no eres como yo”),
americana para mexicanos
15 mexicana para americanos
una ficha servible
pasando de un lado al otro
de los márgenes de dos mundos
sonriéndome
20 disfrazando la incomodidad
del pre-juicio
bi-lateralmente. A