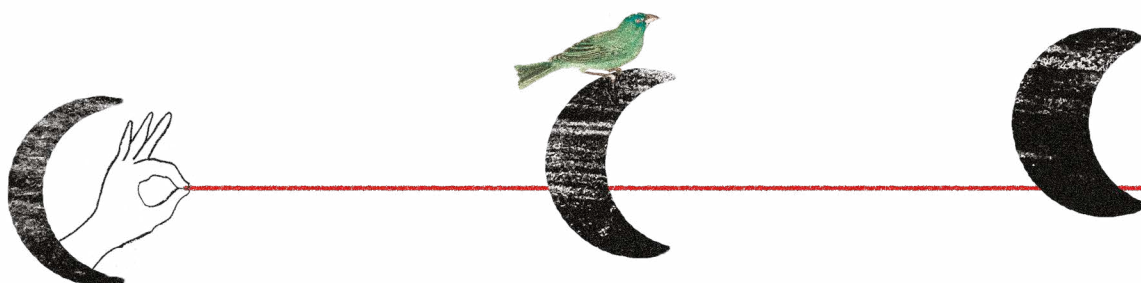


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The 105th Meridian Project: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow¹

Illustrations by Xanic Galván***



As this year marks the 80th anniversary of Mexico-Canada relations, we would like to join the commemoration program by briefly outlining and reflecting upon the three stages of 105th Meridian (*Meridiano 105°*), a project with closely ties to the Margaret Atwood, Alanis Obomsawin, and Gabrielle Roy Extraordinary Lectureship on Canadian Studies, which is celebrating its twentieth anniversary this 2024.

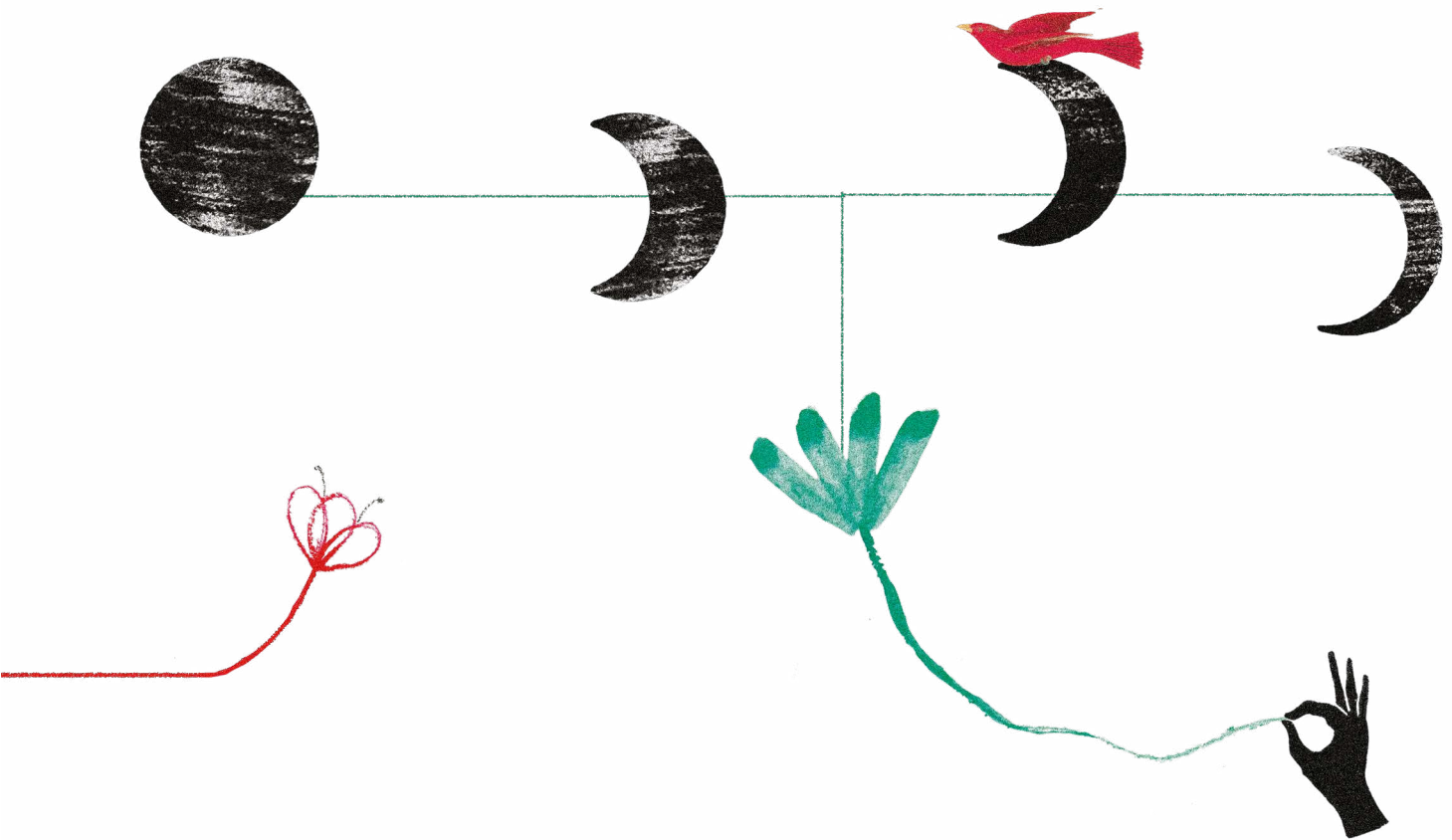
Above all, 105th Meridian seeks to study, translate, and share the work of Indigenous women from Mexico and Canada—including, for instance, the work of Zapotec poet Irma Pineda and of Cree writer Louise Halfe—using various paths of

communications and dialogue in which we UNAM academics also participate. This initiative was born in 2004, when the lectureship organized a small gathering of Indigenous writers from both countries. Given how productive the activity turned out, as well as the sheer amount of ideas and proposals that emerged, we decided to continue along our path together and publish a multilingual anthology of texts by all of the participating poets and by a few other women we invited, so as to broadly share a world that has remained little recognized in our respective environments. Yet, the feature that proved the most novel and full of potential was the Moon Symphony (*Sinfonía de Lunas*), by which any poem submitted in an Indigenous language would be accompanied by a translation to the Spanish, French, or English, depending on the case. Then, these translations would newly circulate among all the participants so that each of the poems would be translated to all of the other Indigenous languages featured in the project in turn, thus weaving together and sharing a vast fabric of voices, with a clear emphasis on the Indigenous languages

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of our continent—the European languages merely served as bridges in the backdrop. We should clarify that while the texts of Indigenous poets in Canada are generally written in English or French, given the eradication of Indigenous languages in said country—a central goal of the nefarious residential schools that the government created to “reeducate” Indigenous children—their texts do encapsulate a unique world vision, in their contents as much as in their forms.

After months of telephone calls, mail, and then-incipient e-mails, we managed to put together a corpus of eleven poems, translated to thirteen languages (ten Indigenous languages and three European ones), in which some twenty women participated. This was when we ran into our first major hurdle, in short, our unfruitful search for a format that matched the spirit of the project and for a publishing house interested in supporting our plan and publishing our unusual product.

It was with the emergence of the electronic universe that we finally found a solution with the unconditional support of

colleagues and students who had already learned to navigate this new dimension. Thanks to these women, all the material we had compiled for this first stage was fed into an interactive table that we deemed “An e-anthology of women’s poetry in Indigenous languages” on a website that we called 105th Meridian, given that the meridian crosses both of our countries. This anthology, which remains online, displays all of the poems in all of the languages that we managed to translate to, using a very interesting mechanism of presentation: each visitor can choose how to circulate through these poems’ multiple iterations through a path that prioritizes processes, establishing a permanent dialogue between languages rather than a display of finished products.¹

This success marked another significant and joyful milestone in the history of 105th Meridian. Yet, after some time, we began to realize that even though we had managed to make our original dream come true, there was still plenty to do. Most pressing was the absence of a log of our conversations, which not only dealt with poetry and translations but

also—as closely related to the latter—with our lives, contexts, thoughts, and reflections around all the work we had done.

Our second phase sought to address this. At this point, the decision was made to reduce the number of authors in order to put forward a far more interactive dialogue between those who participated, allowing us to establish an exchange not only between their works but also around their writing processes. The weight of the poets' places of enunciation and their life stories were the heart of this second stage, in which we continued amplifying ties between authors, languages, and translation. For this phase, we had the support of two poets, Rosa Maqueda (Ñāhñu) and Joanne Arnett (Métis), who exchanged poems, letters, and e-mails for several months. To establish a dialogue, we used European languages as bridges, translating letters, e-mails, and poems to English or Spanish, depending on who was receiving the message. This fruitful exchange between poets presented us with the difficult task of rounding out the mechanisms we had used for the first phase. Indeed, the wealth that we found in the reflections, images, and histories led us to think of other ways of presenting the material in order to account for the connections that emerged when we included the geographically situated life experi-

ences of each poet in the exchange between poems and their translations.

Thus, 105th Meridian took on a new shape. We created an interactive "storymap." With the click of a button, visitors could hop from place to place, visiting the poets' spaces of enunciation: the Valley of Mezquital in Hidalgo, Mexico, in Rosa Maqueda's case, or Manitoba, Canada, in Joanne Arnett's case. On the map, we may see how streets are organized to guide the reader, who may zoom in or out to see where a place is located in the world. We sought for this dialogue to lead to a rethinking of the borders between territories: while borders might be hard to entirely eliminate, they could certainly be far more porous.

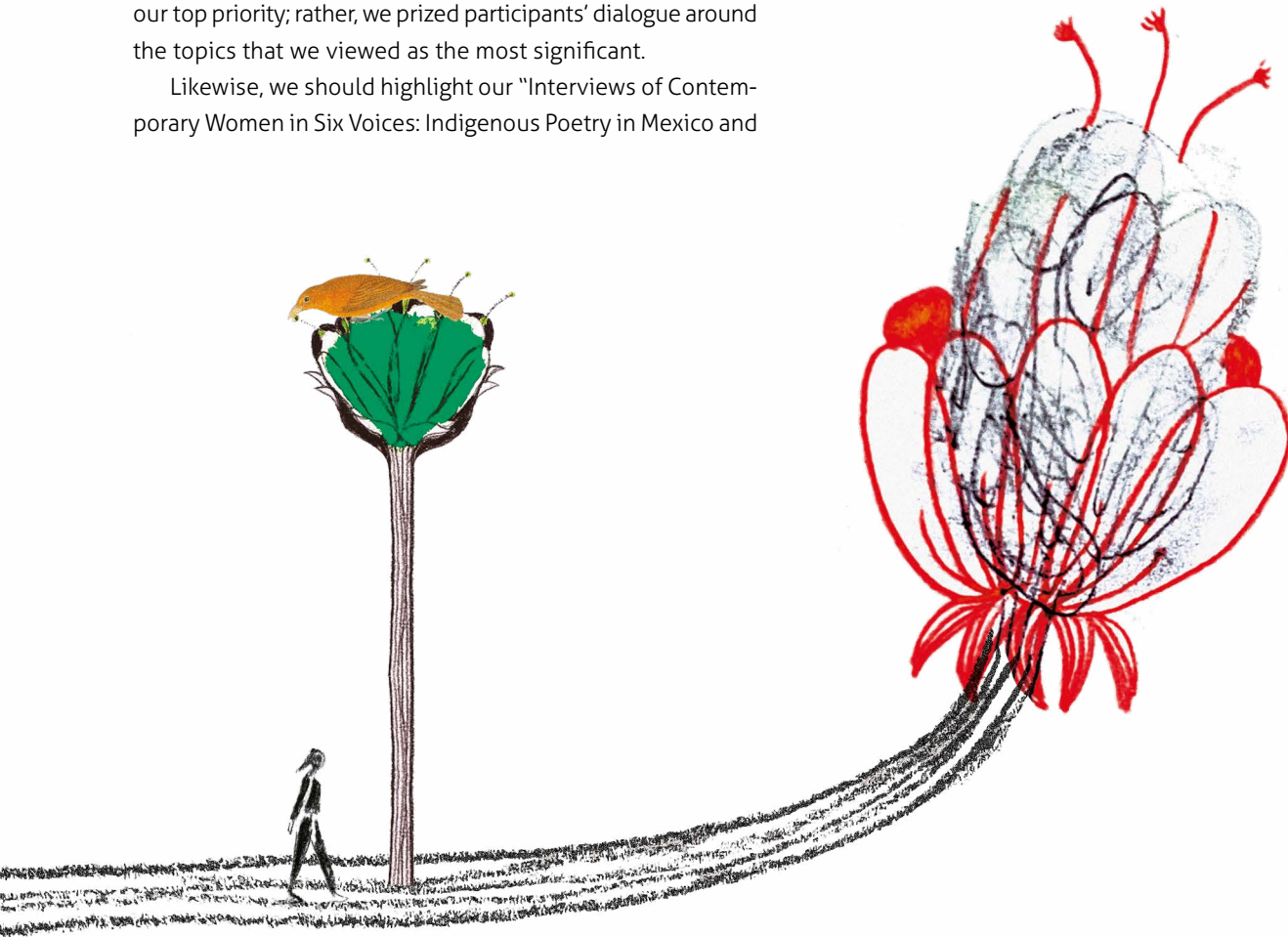
Each panel shows a specific place on the map that is important to the poets—the Valley of Mezquital, or the prairies—as well as a brief fragment of the letters that the poets sent to each other over the span of several months to share their trajectories as writers. When possible, we have included a linked video to a poetry reading or interview that best represent the poets' work. Given the limits of the program we used to create the map, we read the letters and selected those fragments that best captured both poets' worlds.



In creating the map, we realized that, while the poets write from two very distinct perspectives on the world, their writing and their lives share significant ties to nature and its cycles as well as ties to their communities, with these communities impacting their poetry in turn. This is why we wanted to highlight the interweaving between poetry and the poet, who does not exist in a vacuum, but rather is indebted to the place from which she writes.

As to the projects we are planning for the third phase, we believe it important to consider several very promising activities that recently unfolded within the Lectureship, such as the literary translation *tequio*—a traditional Indigenous form of giving back to the community practiced in Mexico—led by Dr. Carolina Bloem of the Center for Latin American Studies at Salt Lake University College. At the *tequio*, we analyzed and dialogically and collectively translated a poem by Rosa Maqueda, keeping close contact with her all the while. It is important to note that the poem's ultimate translation was not our top priority; rather, we prized participants' dialogue around the topics that we viewed as the most significant.

Likewise, we should highlight our "Interviews of Contemporary Women in Six Voices: Indigenous Poetry in Mexico and



Canada. “These interviews took place over Zoom and were recorded and subtitled in English and French so that they could be shared with ease. For these interviews, professors and students of Modern Letters at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters spoke with four Canadian poets—two Anglophone Indigenous poets and two Francophone poets—as well as two Mexican poets who write in Indigenous languages. They talked about their lives and works, the role of publishing houses in the dissemination of their texts, and the challenges of translating to Spanish.

Grounded in this experience, we decided that the next phase of 105th Meridian will consist of organizing a series of virtual and in-person sessions that will revisit the most successful features of the literary-translation *tequio* and of the interviews. Each session will be dedicated to translating a poem by an author who will be present at the session, with at least one person there who is experienced in translation and knows the target language well. Furthermore, we shall invite other colleagues with key knowledge of different aspects of the poem, context, language, and culture, or of the receiving public, thus enriching our dialogue. Needless to say, we are more interested in the interactions between all those who share in the process than in the final product. As a result, the session could in fact lead to a number of products, which, in our experience, might take up different shapes beyond the printed or even electronic book. At every stage, we have strived for 105th Meridian to flow through a variety of formats that adjust to the content, and not the other way around, such that we frequently find ourselves at a distance from more traditional forms of dissemination. To amplify our dissemination channels and to leave the door open to further activities and contributions, we believe it is important to record every session and ideally include subtitles so as to reach a broader public and share our sessions time and again.

To conclude, we would like to underscore the impact that our Indigenous colleagues have had on the project from the onset. In clear synchrony with a much more community-driven, contextualized, and relational view of the construction and dissemination of knowledge, our Indigenous colleagues have set the foundations for this different kind of work. Thanks to them, 105th Meridian has stretched the borders of what we traditionally understand as the academic space, interweaving objective research with testimony and creation, hard data with multiple voices and contextualized life stories, and concepts along with seemingly universal terms and the specific questions that arise from translation. At every turn, all of this

has been driven by the belief that, even at a moment like today’s, we can and should strive to build a more dignified and just future for all.

Poem by Rosa Maqueda

Murmullos del Mezquital

Mi raíz, hñähñu. Soy un ente sensible que describe y plasma mi entorno a través de la prosa, provengo del Valle del Mezquital, soy de esa tierra donde brota el cardón, el tzik’iä, a través de mi prosa, quisiera poder compartirles mi raíz, mi cultura, contagiarnos de esta alegría de percibir a la naturaleza, la vida, a través de la mirada de un ñähñu. Soy Ûrosha.

Whispers of the Mezquital

My root, hñähñu. I’m a sensitive being that describes and depicts my surroundings through prose, i come from the Valley of Mezquital, i am from that land where the cardon sprouts, the tzik’iä, through my prose, i wish to share my root, my culture, and spread this joy of perceiving nature, life, through the eyes of a ñähñu. I’m Ûrosha.





Poem by Joanne Arnott

Constance

for Connie Fife

when i was pregnant, she told me
reaching back more than twenty years
for the memory
put sunflower seeds on my belly
i used to read aloud to my son
so he could hear our bones
i love our voices, she said
chickadee & sparrow flutter down
lured by the seeds and undisturbed
by our voices
i put your hand on my belly
i invite you to read this aloud
i want to listen to our bones
& to love our voices, for a little while

Constanza

Para Connie Fife

cuando estaba embarazada, ella me dijo,
remontándose más de veinte años
en la memoria

pon semillas de girasol sobre mi vientre
solía leerle en voz alta a mi hijo
para que pudiera escuchar nuestros huesos
amo nuestras voces, dijo ella
carbonero y gorrión aletean descendiendo
atraídos por las semillas, indiferentes
a nuestras voces
pongo tu mano sobre mi vientre
te invito a leer en voz alta
quiero escuchar nuestros huesos
y amar nuestras voces, por un momento **MM**

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Notes

¹ See "Meridian 105: Voices (Found) in Translation," *Voices of Mexico*, no. 109, Autumn-Winter 2019, pp. 51-55.