

ENGLISH CANADIAN LITERATURE IN MEXICO:
BUILDING BRIDGES IN THE CASE OF DIONNE BRAND'S
WHAT WE ALL LONG FOR

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ABSTRACT

The translation of English Canadian literature has been essential towards the construction of an image of English Canadian culture for Mexican readers. This translated literature becomes part of the general literary system in Mexico, affecting both readership and how translation and its publication are practiced in the country. This thesis is a twofold project: In the first part I will examine the place of the subsystem of Canadian literature in translation as part of the Mexican literary polysystem. Second, I translate five chapters of the novel *What We All Long for* by Canadian writer Dionne Brand, after an analysis of her work. Finally I present a translation commentary of the translation process. This thesis looks to offer a new view of English Canada to Mexican audiences through its literature and expand the image that they have and construct of English Canadian literature.

Key words: Translation Studies, literary translation, Canadian literature, Dionne Brand, translation in Mexico, polysystems, translation commentary.

**To the city of Toronto,
to its people, its streets,
its voices and neighbourhoods.
For the inspiration it gives me
and all of the artists out there.**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	ii
Dedication.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	vi
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: Theoretical Framework.....	7
Translation, Manipulation and Rewriting of Literature.....	7
The Level of Language.....	10
The Levels of Ideology, Poetics and the Universe of Discourse.....	14
Translation and Its Function beyond the Text.....	16
After the Process: Translations and Their Place in the World.....	18
Translated Literature and Polysystem Theory.....	22
Translators' Testimonies.....	30
Chapter Two: English Canadian Literature in Translation in Mexico.....	36
Overview of Political and Economic Relations between Canada and Mexico.....	36
Literary, Cultural and Artistic Endeavours between the Two Countries: Presence of Canadian Culture in Mexico.....	41
English Canadian Literature in Translation in the Mexican Literary Polysystem.....	44
Chapter Three: Longing for a Language to Land on: About Dionne Brand.....	58
The Poetry of Dionne Brand.....	58
The Fiction of Dionne Brand.....	64
The Novel <i>What We All Long For</i>	68
The Non-Fiction of Dionne Brand.....	75
Chapter Four: “Lo que todos anhelamos”. A translation of <i>What We All Long For</i> by Dionne Brand.....	79
Capítulo uno.....	79
Quy.....	84
Capítulo dos.....	88
Capítulo tres.....	104
Capítulo cuatro.....	120
Chapter Five: The Translation Process: Translating Dionne Brand's <i>What We All Long For</i>.....	131
Extratextual Factors.....	132
Textual Factors.....	134
Ideology.....	134
Poetics.....	137
Discourse.....	141
Language.....	144

Register.....	144
Mexican Variety.....	147
Language in Dialogues.....	149
Allusions.....	150
Foreign Words.....	152
Slang and Idioms.....	154
New Words.....	155
Pronouns.....	156
Considering Publication and Reception.....	156
Conclusions.....	160
Bibliography.....	165
Appendix A: List of Works by Dionne Brand.....	171
Appendix B: <i>What We All Long For</i> (excerpt) by Dionne Brand.....	173

INTRODUCTION

The relations between Mexico and Canada are commonly overshadowed by the physical presence of the United States between both countries. Although the situation has changed in recent times, Mexicans used to consider everything north of their border as part of United States' culture, burying the existence of a unique Canadian culture behind it. The separation between these two North American countries, Canada and the US, proves to be even more challenging considering the economic significance they represent in the minds of many Mexicans. Immigration policies and politics are a main concern when talking about Mexico-Canada relations. But beyond these political topics, cultural efforts are also carried out in order to breach gaps between both countries; efforts of this kind include literary fairs, academic events, and cultural exchanges.

Inspired by these attempts to connect Mexican and Canadian audiences, the objective of this research project comprises an analysis and discussion of an image that Mexican audiences have of English Canada, its cultures and communities, through the English Canadian literature in translation published in Mexico. Along with the research project around the translation of English Canada for Mexican audiences, this thesis project also includes a translation of a fragment of the novel *What We All Long For*, by Canadian author Dionne Brand. In order to help me with the translation, I present an overview of her work; by working with a Caribbean-Canadian author, I wish to present a new perspective of English Canadian literature in Mexico in relation to the prevailing one. Dionne Brand's voice is one of many that, although featured in anthologies, are not frequently heard by Mexican audiences but which might be of interest in their construction of an English Canadian image from a contemporary perspective. After doing

the translation, I will also reflect about how this novel, representative of specific experiences of life and culture in English Canada, might present challenges when it comes to conveying cultural, social, poetic, and ideological issues in the target text. This meditation will also touch on the significance of the translator's agency as I discuss, among other points, the decision-making process and the importance of active participation in choosing translation projects. An important goal of this project, and something to keep in mind when reading it, is the focus given to the intertwining of theory and practice, crucial for a self-reflective awareness of the exercise of translation.

The introduction of new Canadian literary referents is necessary in order for Mexican audiences to continue building a link between their lives and how life can be experienced in Canada. I believe that a constant reflection on identity is what constantly characterizes Canadian literature, whether stories are set in or outside of the country. The experience of life in English Canada as narrated through authors such as Margaret Atwood and Michael Ondaatje can be considered an already established referent in reader's minds. But there are many aspects that they do not deal with, and so the translation of a novel like Brand's *What We All Long For* could prove to be an interesting point of contact for readers to expand the image that they have and construct of English Canada. Although It is important to stress that this project focuses on the literature of English Canada as the literature produced in French Canada is the product of a different political and social context, although the question and search of identity is shared by both. The case of Brand is an interesting one as she belongs to a multitude of communities that are often not heard: immigrants, women, black and homosexuals. The novel introduces engaging characters in constant change to which audiences can relate both intellectually and emotionally, while at the same time learn about a new culture and ways of life. Brand's perspective on

migration and city life as seen through her young characters, the ones that are not from here or there, is uplifting and yet in touch with the dreariness of life. Brand's and her characters' is a second generation perspective that offers a new glimpse of what migration can represent. Adding new perspectives to how Mexico-Canada relations are built through literature will help, not only to present different images of Canada to Mexican readers, but also hopefully to encourage Mexican audiences and writers to explore how Canadians see Mexico, adding more points of contact between these two countries.

Chapter one of this thesis will introduce the theoretical framework that will inform the research regarding the literary relations between Mexico and Canada. The notion of literary translation will be discussed, not only as a linguistic activity but also as a cultural one that takes place "not in a vacuum in which two languages meet, but rather in the context of all the traditions of the two literatures" (Lefevere, *Translating Literature* 6). Given that this project is focused on the Mexican audience of English Canadian literature, as part of the analysis I will include an investigation of the literary polysystem in the country based on Even-Zohar's theory, specifically of English Canadian translated literature as a sub-system, which will give a background to the reception of Canadian literature in Mexico. Scholars like Andre Lefevere and Carol Maier are concerned with readership reception, exploring through the study of book reviews, publishing activities, and academic responses the reaction of readers towards a foreign literature. Finally, meditations of individuals on their literary translation process have become an important resource to understand how the translator approaches the different cultures represented in the text. An example of this is the work of Suzanne Jill Levine, an essential study of the process through which she became aware of the challenges she had to confront, and it opened the possibility to think about translation as a subversive work and not a passive, invisible activity.

Lately, more recent meditations on the subject have surfaced, as is the case of H  l  ne Buzelin's reflexive analysis of her translation of Samuel Selvon, an endeavour she refers to as an ethnographic approach.

Chapter two will use these insights to explore the cultural, academic, and publishing activities involving Canadian literature and culture in general. The international literary success of authors such as Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, and Alice Munro, as representatives of English-Canada, and Robert Lalonde and Monique Proulx, as representatives of French-Canada in the late 1980s, have made it possible for Mexican audiences to be introduced to Canadian literature. Cultural exchange projects and initiatives, inspired by political agendas, have become more frequent in Mexico either in commercial or academic settings. In the year 2002, the C  tedra Margaret Atwood-Gabrielle Roy was established by the Universidad Nacional Aut  noma de M  xico (UNAM), and continues to be held every year; it involves literature, film, and other cultural productions. The main goals of the C  tedra are to encourage interdisciplinary exchange between academics in both countries, either in teaching or research, as well as in the diffusion of Canadian culture, including the publication of a number of anthologies of Canadian writers, both from English and French. Publishing activities are also an important factor since the selection of the books to be translated will be guided by the objectives and needs of the different publishing houses.

Chapter three will focus on Trinidadian Canadian author Dionne Brand. It will include a detailed introduction to her work, as well as an analysis of her book *What We All Long For*. Dionne Brand was born in 1953 in Trinidad and immigrated to Canada in 1970 to continue her education. She has been part of many social and community projects involving black and immigrant communities as well as projects dealing with women's issues. This participation has

informed the thematic lines she addresses in her poetry and fiction, some of which are gender, race, feminism, and immigration. Her artistic career also comprises other outlets such as non-fiction and film. Poetry is Brand's "first language" (Abbas 19), as Brand herself calls it, and it has been through her poetry that she first won recognition. Brand is interested in how language questions, challenges, imagines, and constructs identity, but maybe more importantly, how it creates a place of belonging. These thematic lines are present throughout her writing, mainly in how they connect with the experiences of black and immigrant communities in Toronto. Her passion for poetry is even present in her short stories and novels.

Chapter four is the translation of Brand's 2005 novel, *What We All Long For*, more specifically of the five first chapters and it's based on the 2005 Vintage Canada edition. There's an interest on my part to translate this novel due to the fact that it represents a change from Brand's usual set of characters and presents as well a broader image of the city of Toronto in contrast to her previous works; she touches upon a new theme to tell the story of four young people who inhabit modern Toronto. They are daughters and sons of immigrants who, having grown up in Canada, find themselves between the past lives of their parents and their immigrant background, and the opportunities that the city offers them to create an identity. Their lives are marked by the pressure of past expectations and the future in a multi-cultural city. Through their experiences in the city, interacting with a wide number of individuals and cultures, they are trying to create their own stories, form their own bonds, and find their own place away from their parents' past. Her perspectives on identity "as a mobile, thus discursive, construct" (Sturgess 51), which are reflected on the importance that she concedes to language and how she uses it, along with the migrant condition that in one way or another defines Brand's characters, is a concept to

which not only Canadian citizens can relate to, but that is also a concern for others, among them the Mexican audiences to which her literary work will be offered.

Chapter five is a self-reflective work of the translation process. This approach is inspired by the theories that consider the translator as an active agent in the construction of meaning in the process of translation and the importance for readers to be aware of it. The structure of the chapter will be based on concepts introduced in chapter two, bringing together the analysis of the English Canadian literature in translation in the Mexican polysystem as well as the different elements at play in literary translation such as language and ideological considerations. Some of the considerations in mind during the translation process had to do with the nature I wanted to achieve for the target text, and that is mainly reflected in my decision to use a Mexican variant of Spanish for my translation; a macrotextual decision that is influenced by aspects of Lefevere's theory such as ideology and language.

This project, which comprises the examination of the system of Canadian literature in translation as part of the polysystem of literature in Mexico, and the translation of Dionne Brands's novel, is intended to provide a space to analyze how Canadian literature is received in Mexico and to offer a work in translation, "Lo que todos anhelamos", to audiences. Mexican readers might be used to a certain image of Canada, which leads to some works not being translated while others are considered to fit better into that pattern. Following this project I hope new Canadian authors, such as Brand, and new genres can be introduced to the Mexican audiences and be well-received, opening new lines of communication between both cultures.

CHAPTER ONE

Theoretical Framework

Translation, Manipulation and Rewriting of Literature

Literary texts are the reflection of a series of factors that influence their creation. Throughout the history of literary criticism we can see a variety of approaches that give preference to the writer, the historical context, the cultural context or the role of the reader when it comes to determining the meanings that can be read in literary texts. When we are translating a literary work, culture becomes a strong presence to take into account. Both ST and TT will be a reflection of the specific contexts that have shaped them. Translating literature becomes then a necessity to bridge the linguistic gaps that exist, making of translation an important act of communication where author, translator, and reader all have central functions. Translation is a meaning-making act which takes the meanings of a ST, the reflection of a culture, and creates a TT with the “ultimate objective of breaking the linguistic/cultural barriers which prevent people from communicating” (Sánchez 49). This TT is also the reflection of a culture and a context, but beyond considering translation as just a product, it is important to also see it as a process and a discursive and hermeneutic act where the translator plays an essential role in what the readers will understand from the text.

The turn of translation studies from mainly linguistics to a new perspective of the activity as a cultural process and product, has opened the possibility of analyzing in depth the texts to be translated, an approach which provides different tools to literary translators. The recognition of translation as a culturally embedded activity has given new perspectives to the profession. It is through this lens that André Lefevere proposed the notion of translation as “rewriting” and

provided practical examples that could help the translator in the critical process and to make conscious decisions. Literary translation is characterized by a myriad of choices that are presented to the translator who has to deal with the many possible options; and, as Clifford Landers states, the final decision will then depend on the context of the actions and the text (Landers 9).

In *Translating Literature: Practice and Theory in a Comparative Literature Context*, André Lefevre addresses the importance of culture and context when one is dealing with literary translation. Just as with the creation of the original text, the literary translation process does not take place in a vacuum but “in the context of all the traditions of the two literatures” (Lefevre 6) that are confronted in the act of translation. The introduction of the important role that literary traditions have in the translation of a literary text can help the translator in the project of mediation between these literary traditions, as opposed to just considering the general cultural background in which the texts are created.

Through an examination of literary translation, Lefevre suggests a new way of viewing both the product and the process involved. In order to broaden the study of translation, Lefevre proposes translation as an act of rewriting, a “discursive activity embedded within a system of literary conventions and a network of institutions and social agents that condition textual production” (Baker 241) where “[translators] are image makers, exerting the power of subversion under the guise of objectivity” (Lefevre 6). This is a concept he continues to explore in his book *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*. As Lefevre states, along with the literary traditions at play, this subversion is also defined by the times in which the translators live and the features of the languages in which they work; all three are important features for the compromises that translators have to reach in their process of translation

(*Translating Literature* 6). The importance of conceiving translation under the more encompassing term of rewriting lies in the possibility of considering it a “hidden motor behind literary evolution and the creation of canons and paradigms” (Lefevere 14).

In his analysis of the process of literary translation, Lefevere points to the inextricable nature of the relation between language and culture and, as the former is an expression of the latter, the task of transferring a word to another language with all of its possible meanings becomes a difficult one (Lefevere 16). This relation shows that words cannot be the first object for translation but they have to be considered in sections, which at the same time need to be evaluated against the text as a whole. The final product will become part of the target culture and so the assumptions that the target audience has of the world and literature need to be taken into consideration as well (Lefevere 18).

This process is a chain of decision-making steps and translators are one of the main agents—other agents will be discussed later—and so they always have to be conscious that “their first task is to make the original accessible to the audience” (Lefevere 19) through a mediation between them and the text. An ideal situation would mean that both the semantic content and the illocutionary force of the source text could be conveyed in the target text; for Lefevere the first one is easier to achieve while the second one presents more difficulty. The concept of illocutionary force belongs to pragmatics oriented models that are concerned with the “study of the purposes for which sentences are used” (Baker 234), the intention that a speaker has when producing an utterance. When in doubt, Lefevere recommends foremost to take the target audience’s expectation into account to inform the decision-making project, setting aside the circumstances in which the source texts was produced (Lefevere 19).

The Level of Language

Given the difficulties of conveying illocutionary acts and their force in the act of translation, Lefevere suggests an approach where translators have to be alerted to these problems so that, by being aware, they can meditate about the tools they can use to find equivalents (Lefevere 19). He lists several of the problems that arise on the illocutionary level and which can prove difficult for translators. Lefevere starts with alliteration, “the repetition of the same sound at the beginning of consecutive words” (Lefevere 20), a device mostly recognized in poetry but also found in texts in prose. By using this rhetorical device the author gives emphasis to certain words as well as a particular rhythm to the sentence, two features that are not always possible to convey when trying to translate alliteration. Therefore, translators have to ask themselves which one of these two features will represent and convey better the meaning in the texts and if it is necessary, desirable, or vital to reproduce them both (Lefevere 20). Whether the translator chooses to give preference to the sound or the meaning of the alliteration depends of the overall strategy under which the text is being translated.

Since the original text is part of a literary system, it is common for authors to make allusions to other texts as well as allusions to other kinds of cultural media to “give a sharper edge to the point they are making” (Lefevere 22), also known as intertextuality. The main challenge for translators is to recognize those allusions and once they have been recognized to evaluate if they need to be maintained; when the languages at play share features of the same culture, then the task becomes easier. The four types of allusions Lefevere establishes help translators to categorize and help with research. Three of them are maybe the most common in any kind of literary tradition (classical, cultural and literary); and while the fourth one (biblical) is mainly related to one religion, all literary traditions have their own religious allusions.

Classical allusions refer to the Greek and Roman texts, considered classics for many Western cultures and easier to recognize by translators familiar with them; however, as Lefevere points out, many of these allusions are being lost by younger generations (24).

Cultural allusions require from the translators a familiarity with the source culture through reading about it and an immersion in it, although encyclopedias and native speakers can also be a source of knowledge to understand them, as Lefevere suggests (25). It is through literary traditions, either those to which they belong or from other literatures, that writers create links to make readers aware of similarities or differences between what they have read before and what they are reading at the moment. All these types of allusions heighten the effect desired by the writer through “the clash between the word on the page and the allusion evoked” (Lefevere 27). Every time translators are faced with an allusion, they have to evaluate how important this allusion is for the meaning of the text, if it is possible to keep the same allusion or if it is possible to create a new one that will enrich the text and the audience’s experience of reading.

Nowadays languages have more venues to be in contact, something that can be seen in the process of literary creation as authors introduce foreign words to their texts. Foreign words in the body of a text have a specific reason, as Lefevere explains, they help to enhance the illocutionary purpose that the writer is trying to convey (29), either adding local colour or inspiring curiosity in the reader. It is the job of the translator to decide if the foreign word indeed creates the intended effect on the target audience, as their relation with that other language might be different from that of the source audience, and find a strategy to suit the effect. Translators can fall into the risk of “regularizing” the word, diminishing the complexity of the original, but

the introduction of the word translated in other parts of the texts is a common strategy suggested by Lefevere (29).

Metaphors are common rhetorical devices not only in poetry but also in prose, and a recurrent problem in literary translation. The connection of unlikely concepts helps the writer improve on the illocutionary power of the text, and they depend on the audience and how far that contrast can be stretched before the readers find it unthinkable. Metaphors demand of the reader a flexibility of mind and Lefevere recommends for translators to give their target audience the opportunity to expand their ability of thought before trying to adapt or substitute (37). But in case translators have to resort to this strategy, they will be confronted to their audience's sense of propriety, meaning what collocations of concepts are acceptable, in order to know how far they can adapt or substitute the concepts at play in the original metaphor.

There has been a long standing idea that poetic diction, meaning a specific linguistic style and use of vocabulary, is only possible in the genre of poetry, however it is a device also employed in prose when the concentration of the illocutionary power is concentrated in a reduced amount of words, stanzas, or paragraphs. The success achieved by translators when dealing with poetic diction will depend on the poetic traditions that dominate the target literary system and how open it is to the several devices used by the source text. For Lefevere, translators will have to decide if the poetic diction of the source text might be of interest to the target audience, even if it is not the norm in their literary system, if it can be toned down, or find an equivalent present in the target literary system (50).

When involved in a creative process with language, it is unavoidable to play with the different meanings one word can have. Puns in literary texts are a common feature, where the two different meanings of one word are activated, challenging the readers to make an effort and

figure out which of the two is the meaning intended by the author: the obvious, the “norm”, or the less usual, the “deviation” (Lefevere 52). The need of finding a same word with two different meanings working on the same level as that on the source is clearly a challenge for the translation of puns. Lefevere suggests taking into consideration the number of puns in a text in order to try and keep the same number, not exactly retrieving each one, but creating a process of loss and gain where new puns are created while others are gone (52).

Register is an important element in literary texts, especially in how writers play with it to suit their purposes regarding plot and characters in their writing. Certain situations require a specific language, a specific register that is seen as appropriate for that context. However, as Lefevere points out, it is also in the discrepancies between utterances and contexts that the illocutionary power of a text can reside (58). Translators have to be aware of how language is used, if in an appropriate manner or not depending on the context, trying to find those that are similar in the target language. As with puns, register can also be compensated; if the translation of one is not possible, translators can balance the text by adding appropriate utterances in other moments of the text.

Other examples of register are also found in jargon, the register that corresponds to certain professions, sociolects, and idiolects. In order to identify characters with specific social groups, writers take advantage of the sociolects for the reader to create those links. On many occasions, the writer relies on the tension between sociolects to emphasize a certain illocutionary purpose and move the plot forward or relate characters. Lefevere suggests a strategy where translators can find a sociolect in the target culture that plays a similar role to replace that in the source text (66), although always keeping in mind that sociolects evolve, and what was once related to a social group might change. Idiolect “refers to the personal register, the individualized

use each speaker makes of a language” (Lefevere 67); however, it can be hard to differentiate between them and sociolects as each speaker belongs to a certain social group. Both registers represent a difficulty for translation and translators should be able to recognize these challenges without spending time in trying to differentiate them. Translators’ familiarity with their text will give them clues as to what can be considered a sociolect and what is an idiolect.

The Levels of Ideology, Poetics and the Universe of Discourse

Just like the translation, the source text is not written in a vacuum, since writers are born into a certain culture and time, inheriting its language and literary traditions, as well as its material and conceptual characteristics, all of them constituting the “universe of discourse” (Lefevere 86). This does not mean that writers are always guided by these elements; they can also create outside of these parameters in an attempt to bend them or question them. The tensions derived from this questioning are evidence of the existence of dominant and peripheral ideologies and poetics inside a given culture. Under this concept of translation, Lefevere describes three more different levels of translation, besides that of language: universe of discourse, poetics, and ideology (86).

Lefevere advocates for a hierarchy of levels showing which problems should have more weight for translators and, just as the strategies suggested with the problems of translation at the level of language, translators also need to develop strategies to deal with these three extra levels (87). As opposed to traditional thought regarding translation, he places ideology as the main element to take into consideration, followed by poetics, universe of discourse, and finally language. In order to defend his proposed hierarchy, Lefevere explains how, in order for translations to be published, they need to fit into the acceptable standards of the target culture, the culture’s ideology, as well as into their dominant concept of what is literature, their poetics

(87). Finally, given that the universe of discourse is dictated by the times in which the author writes, these features will have to be substituted or explained as well in order to attract audiences.

On the level of poetics, the translator is faced with issues of genre and the expectation that readers have of a certain genre depending on their literary traditions. On the level of universe of discourse, there might be concepts or customs not intelligible for target audiences. Lefevere refers to a certain “level of human experience, emotion, and material and philosophical civilization” (88) which can help translators to draw links between what is expressed on the original and an analogous concept on the target culture.

The experiences and emotions writers describe in their texts are then filtered through the ideological, poetic and discourse level which vary according to the culture, the time, and the place. This will mean that while certain experiences and emotions might be acceptable in the source culture, they might no longer be in the target culture or probably never were, and so translators are then faced with the challenge of dealing with this gap. It is clear that these aspects will affect which texts get chosen for translation, either by the translators themselves or by the publishing houses; and, as Lefevere notes, they have to be considered even before thinking about the problems at the level of language (94). How the translated text will fit into the target culture, or how to make it fit, is a question that has to be in the translator’s mind. For Lefevere there are two reasons why the text can fit the target culture, either because the text might represent what that literature is missing or because it follows the same guidelines of the other texts circulating in the target literature (95).

Where to position their text in accordance to the target culture and literature will be the first challenge for translators when starting their translation process, meaning the consideration

of the ideology, poetic and universe of discourse levels. Once translators have determined the overall strategies to work with, these strategies will guide their decisions when facing the challenges at the level of language. As well, Lefevere reminds translators to also take into consideration how that author has been translated before, if he/she has been translated, since the audience will already have expectations for the next text (97). Or in case the author hasn't been translated before, take into account to what literary traditions he/she belongs to or is related to in the mind of the audience.

Translation and Its Function beyond the Text

Lefevere is also interested in exploring how “translation functions within the wider context of a literature and, by extension, a culture” (Lefevere 114). Through an analysis of the famous translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, Lefevere establishes the categories needed to analyze how translation works in a culture: expertise, authority, and trust, other agents involved in the process. The experts are people with the appropriate knowledge to check the translated texts and guarantee their suitability, such as scholars, and just like the translator, they have to be aware of all the problems raised by Lefevere, including those of language, ideology, poetics, and universe of discourse, in order to inform their review of the text.

Commissioners of translations have the authority to order what gets translated, influencing the selection of texts for translation and how the process will be undertaken, always under acceptable ideological parameters. Lefevere explains how when publishing houses became the main patrons, the importance of selling changed the acceptable ideological parameters and translators felt the need to change or delete those situations or concepts in the source text that might not be accepted by the intended audience (117). This strategy can also work as a

protection for the target audiences by omitting or adapting images and concepts that might prove too different from what is the tradition.

However, not only commissioners have authority. Cultures seen as more “prestigious” can gain a central role within other cultures, endowing them with more “authoritative” power, suggesting they offer things to learn. This type of authority can influence the decision-making process where translators might feel the need to fit their text to their culture, if it is a translation into a central culture, or to the source culture, if the original comes from a central culture. Texts can also acquire a status of “prestige”, especially those texts considered as a basis for the formation of an institution, such as the Bible. The translation of these texts, or lack of it, serves as a strategy to reinforce their authority. Translations not only gain authority, they can also grant it. “Translation forces a language to expand” (Lefevere 123) and as less known writers, new poetic figures, different writing strategies, etc, are introduced to other cultures through translation, they acquire, according to Lefevere, an authority they did not have before on the target culture (124).

Finally, readers have to trust that the “translation is a fair representation of that original” (Lefevere 114) they do not know, trusting both experts and commissioners. This intended audience, which works as an organism in itself, is another important factor that will affect the process of translation since translators should take into account the “horizon of expectation” (Jauss 24) that readers have about the text and culture, how readers are confronted with the literature from another country, and the “interpretive communities” (Fish 14) that comprise it. How readers experience the literary work is significant to how meaning will be produced, making each reader an active agent involved in the interpretation of the literary work.

Examining Lefevere's concepts, we can see that he gives more importance to the process as opposed to many previous theories that only focused on the product. For him, the product has to be analyzed under "its total cultural context" along with "the objectives with which is made, and [...] the role the product plays in a culture and literature", without forgetting the "extremely topical questions of power and manipulation" (Lefevere 134).

After the Process: Translations and Their Place in the World

While Lefevere deals with literary translation in practice, including the various factors that influence it and the strategies used by translators to translate literature, scholars such as Carol Maier deal with the aftermath of those translations, especially when it comes to their place in the academic world and readership in general, a field in translation studies that can also help in the analysis of the place of literature in translation. In the introduction to the anthology *Literature in Translation: Teaching Issues and Reading Practices*, Maier and Françoise Massardier-Kenney give an overview of the positive outcomes of the use of translation in schools curricula since "through translation, [students] are at least becoming acquainted with the multilingual world in which they live [...] worlds that are beyond their own time and space" (1). Given that the teaching of what is known as world literature is increasing in many academic institutions, there is a necessity for a new "mode of reading" (Damrosch 281) where the readers are aware of the fact that the texts they are reading might not correspond to their historical or geographical situations. While in previous year Western European literature was considered as the central literature, this expansion towards a world literature can lead readers to an appreciation of "linguistic diversity and alterity" (Pizer qtd in Maier and Massardier-Kenney 1).

However, the correct use of world literature can be hindered by the strategies that instructors use when introducing a work written originally in a foreign language, mainly when they are conceived as English originals and not translations. If students, or the audience in general for that matter, are not familiar with the context of its production and therefore with the “cultural, linguistic, and literary effects that translation involves” (Maier and Massardier-Kenney 1), then they are at risk of framing the literary work into their own cultural norms, missing the benefits of an intercultural encounter. For Maier and Massardier-Kenney, the problem starts when books in translation do not present information introducing the process itself and the mediation involved in it, as well as the risks of transferring another culture into English, (Maier and Massardier-Kenney 2), or into any other language for that matter.

Readers have to be introduced and presented to the literary work with the necessary tools for them to understand and read the text under the cultural, historical, and literary light that frames it, and that determine its place in the literary system to which it belongs, otherwise, as Maier and Massardier-Kenney claim, the chance exists of being rejected by the target readers or possibly being misunderstood (2). For Maier, Massardier-Kenney, and Garayta, this becomes even more crucial when it comes to texts that belong to a culture which the readers believe they know. They need to identify those unfamiliar cultural contexts and their characteristics and compare them to what they think they are familiar with in order to be aware of those expectations in their reading process (Maier and Massardier-Kenney 3; Garayta 41).

In her essay “Choosing and Introducing a Translation”, Maier continues to expand on the strategies to present a literary text in translation by providing a set of recommendations to help select an appropriate translation for a course and how to introduce it; for Maier “the task of choosing a translation [...] offers the opportunity to think about both literature and language

from an altered perspective” (11). These recommendations can prove to be helpful when thinking about the process that a translator undergoes when choosing a text and translating it. Following the introduction, Maier draws awareness to reader expectations when it comes to translation and how they evaluate a work in translation, keeping in mind that if they only guide their choices by expectations, they take the chance of missing “the risky readings that can put one unexpectedly in touch with language used in unanticipated ways” (Maier 12).

Just like readers are aware that a literary work does not occur in a vacuum, so they should know that translations are as well framed by human activity. To make an informed decision, Maier recommends that the readers should know about the circumstances in which the translation took place and the role of the translator in the process (14). Although she recognizes that the information related to the production of translation and the work of the translators can be hard to find, as opposed to information about the original works, translators’ comments are always a good source.

The reception of the literary text can also influence the final decision when choosing a translation, which is why Maier suggests that it is important to be aware of reviews, essays, and criticism that talk about the translation (15), in order to know what place this specific literary text can take in the target system. They can be especially helpful for the information they provide on the author and past works already translated and published in the target system as well as its reception. However, finding reviews that acknowledge the fact that the text was not written in the target language can be a difficult task, and even more difficult to find reviews that take the time to describe the translation or the translator. Maier mainly promotes reviews that “tend to place the work in a cultural and historical context” (16), especially those written by translation scholars.

Finally, Maier states the importance for the translation to be presented as such, to recognize the process of translation that has created such a product, considering all previous recommendations, including the expectations of the translated text and the knowledge one has of the author, the language, culture, and period (17). Knowing that the text is a translation can also give a new chance for readers to pay attention to certain features such as use of foreign words, names and references, and consider if they contribute to or impair the reader's understanding of the text.

Even though Maier's recommendations are mainly targeted for instructors that are faced with the task of choosing a translation for their curriculum, her process can also be used by translators trying to decide on a translation project. Translators also have to be aware of the expectations the readership might have, both of the original and of what translation is; the research of reviews and criticism can help to learn about these expectations as well as the kind of information about the author and his/her context that readers already have. This research can also help the translator theorize the position of the text, or of the context to which it belongs, in the target system, or the place that could take, as well as the situation of translated literature within the larger target polysystem, which I will develop later on. Why certain texts are chosen for translation, it also depends on the purpose or goal sought by the translator and what he/she thinks the readers will be engaged with or maybe to fill a void in the target system.

As mentioned before, most readers have to be reminded that they are reading translations and of the context in which they are produced, not in a vacuum but as a human activity. Translators have this knowledge and are aware of its importance; however information about their process of translation continues to be scarce. Although this is due mainly to publishing and marketing policies, translators should always try to make their readers be aware of their process,

preferably through Maier's preferred tool, the translators' commentary. Based on these elements, just like the instructor, the translator can present his/her work in a provocative manner (Maier 17), giving readers information about the context of the original, the reasons why it was chosen and the process itself, recognizing their own labour and presenting the translation.

Translated Literature and Polysystem Theory

In his book *Polysystem Studies*, Israeli academic Itamar Even-Zohar, based on ideas from Russian formalism, established a way to conceptualize the complexity of the concept of culture within one community and between communities. He focuses on the importance of relations in order to analyze and detect the laws that govern the diversity of this phenomenon, as opposed to just classifying laws (Even-Zohar 9). It is because the possibility for systems from different communities to intersect exists that the polysystem theory proposes a way to investigate "the particular conditions under which a certain literature may be interfered with by another literature" (Even-Zohar 25) which can result in the transfer of elements. Systems are the basis of his theory, a "network of relations that can be hypothesized for a certain set of assumed observables" (Even-Zohar 27); these are open structures and as such they intersect with each other, creating polysystems. Even-Zohar stresses the importance of studying polysystems in both their diachronic and synchronic dimensions if we wish to detect the rules governing the elements of a system as well as the changes or variations that occur among them. By adding the concept of "diachronic" to his polysystem theory, Even-Zohar drew away from the structuralist and static notions attached to the linguistic system, introducing a dynamism to systems theory and emphasizing the "multiplicity of intersections and hence the greater complexity" (Even-Zohar 12) which is part of all cultural activities.

Although Even-Zohar's theory is meant to deal with all cultural activities, he makes a point of using literature as his example to develop the theory reducing his definition of system to those activities called "literary" which can, at the same time, be examined through the lens of that literary system (Even-Zohar 28). The polysystem theory takes into account the importance of communities and the possibility of the existence of more than one system within that community, a possibility in the case of literature, especially in those communities where multilingualism is a characteristic. By considering more than just one literary system as part of a community, Even-Zohar's theory looks to open the possibility of bringing to the forefront previously ignored objects or phenomena (13). It is important to notice that these systems exist in a hierarchized manner, and it is the struggle between those levels that broadens the polysystem. This hierarchical constitution of the polysystem means the existence of peripheral and central positions within the system, that do not represent necessarily a static and unique centre and a static and unique periphery, for Even-Zohar it is the motion between these that gives the polysystem its dynamic structure (14).

Along with these existent positions in the system, the literary stratification can also be conceptualized in terms of canonized texts, those accepted as legitimate by the community, and non-canonized texts, those rejected or not recognized. This acceptance or rejection will have consequences on the legacy of the literary system as the canonized texts become part of the historical heritage of the community while the rejected texts will eventually be forgotten (Even-Zohar 15). The constant competition between the canonized and non-canonized texts, where the former are threatened by the latter, gives balance to the system, preventing its collapse and guarantying its evolution (Even-Zohar 16). Both the tension between the central and peripheral

positions and the competition between canonized and non-canonized texts guarantees the introduction of new voices to the literature of the community, helping the literary system evolve.

Even-Zohar establishes two opposite types of systems, the “primary” and “secondary”, or also related to either conservatism and innovativeness respectively (21). A conservative repertoire is characteristic of the “primary” type, where the transfers will be guided by a high predictability since the new products are not expected to deviate from the established models. On the other hand, the restructuring of the repertoire introduced by new elements is considered an innovative or “secondary” type, which leads to suspending the established models. Just as with the hierarchical strata, there is a struggle between these types which helps the system to evolve through a constant transfer of a “primary” model into a “secondary” one when it becomes dominant in the system, and a new “primary” model rises.

The assumption that a polysystem consists of a number of systems which in turn consist of a number of sub-systems, allows for the existence of intra- and inter- relations between them. Being that the literary system is under the umbrella of the larger, dominant system of “culture”, it has to co-exist with a number of other systems such as the political, economic, ideological, etc. Polysystem theory considers all of these socio-cultural systems as simultaneously autonomous and heteronomous in relation to the rest within the same community (Even-Zohar 23). Inter-relations arise when we examine how one of these systems relates to those of other communities, and Even-Zohar explains how two kinds of systems are involved: “a larger whole belonging to the same community, and a whole, or its parts, which belong to other communities” (22).

Most of these interferences between systems occur in the peripheries where the individual products are not under such a constant examination, as can be the case of translated literature. However, if a system is going to operate without the help of systems from other communities, it

has to fulfill a condition of heterogeneity. Even-Zohar stresses how the system is in need of a wide number of alternative options since no literature can survive with a small repertoire (26).

Even-Zohar developed his polysystem theory based on concepts proposed by Russian scholar Boris Eijxenbaum, who was looking into the possibility of creating a systemic approach with more dynamic characteristics. For him, it was important to consider literature as both independent and dependent, “self-regulated [but also] conditioned by other systems” (Even-Zohar, 30), paying more attention to this last factor which had not been explicit in previous system theories, and which he believed would provide more information on the regularities of literature. Based on this notion of *dependent*, “the literary product is discussed, analyzed and described in terms of the intricate network of relations that condition it” (Even-Zohar 30). The concept of “literary life” is used to denominate the relations between “the laws which govern the production of literary texts” (Even-Zohar 30) and the forces behind these laws, generating them as well as promoting them and even making them disappear.

In Even-Zohar’s model, the text-centered perspective is no longer considered the most important product of the system. The loss of the “the text” as the top of the system pyramid erases all hierarchical approaches to the system, creating an interdependency between all the factors, working together as opposed to in isolation. The interdependent factors that play a role in this literary scheme are Producers, Consumers, Institutions, Markets, Repertoire, and Product, which remind of Lefevere’s categories about translation outside the text. The notion of “producer”, as opposed to “writer”, maintains a non-text central stance, expanding the possibilities for the role of producer. The literary producer, “both a conditioning and a conditioned force” (Even-Zohar 35), is not confined to the text-making activity but also takes part in the performance of the text and in an engagement with power discourses based on

acceptable repertoires (Even-Zohar 35). The producer is not necessarily one individual, groups such as social communities are also engaged in the production of literary institutions and markets.

Just as the producer, the consumer cannot be confined to the acts of “reading” or “listening” and “hearing”, in the case of oral traditions, since they can be participants in a variety of levels of the literary activities. Most consumers are involved in an “indirect” level of literary consumption, through text fragments made part of daily life by cultural institutions. Even those involved in a “direct” relation to the literary activity, with a deliberate and willing interest, are, for Even-Zohar, mainly also consumers of the socio-cultural functions of the literary product than of the product itself (36). It is also important to consider the groups or communities of consumers since their “existence and patterns of behaviors may or may not determine the behavior of the other factors involved” (Even-Zohar 37), a correlation that, according to Even-Zohar, is still not agreed upon by other theories.

Institutions are in charge of maintaining “literature as a socio-cultural activity” (Even-Zohar 37) through a series of factors. They govern, sanction, and reject norms according to what prevails and is needed in the literary activity, including production and consumption; important for Even-Zohar since this will determine which products will be remembered by the community (37). However, given the variety of institutions involved, such as critics, publishing houses, government bodies, educational institutions, mass media, etc, there are always challenges when it comes to how each institution enforces its preferences. Even-Zohar does point that, given the magnitude and variety of the literary system, these institutions can co-exist, each one taking the lead in different sectors of the system (37).

Just as the name implies, the factors involved in the market are those dealing with the selling and buying of literary products along with promotion. This includes big selling institutions such as bookstores but also exchange facilities such as libraries. Given that they share common goals, institutions and market might intersect, but it is in the agents that represent each one that they differ. According to Even-Zohar, while classrooms might be identified as part of an institution, professors act as agents of the market, promoting a certain text to a consumer audience (39). The nature of the market would also be a key factor for the evolution of the literary system as a restricted market will as well restrict the possibilities for the production and acceptance of new literature.

The repertoire is indispensable for literary activity given that it constitutes the “rules and materials which govern both the making and use [or understanding] of any given product” (Even-Zohar 39) that is part of the literary system, not only texts but also of any other activity framed by literature. Since literary activities are part of a community setting, this repertoire requires an agreement on the part of the individuals of the community. This agreement is only achieved by a shared knowledge, although not necessarily identical for all members. Each activity that makes up the literary system has its own repertoire, and so we can find a repertoire for being a reader, a writer, a literary agent, etc. The nature of the repertoire will be determined also by the age of the system, as the limitations of a young literary system might force it to have specific strategies of elaboration, adaptation, and borrowing from other systems; while old literary systems with established repertoires might prefer a recycling technique (Even-Zohar 40). Following along the same lines of previous categories, products are not restricted to just texts, but any “performed (or performable) set of signs” (Even-Zohar 43), including the activities performed around the literary system.

After establishing the components of his literary model, Even-Zohar continues by asking if there is a place for translated literature in the polysystem of a given literature, and even further if translated literature can be a literary system in itself. Just as original literature, translated works also exist in a “cultural and verbal network of relations” (Even-Zohar 45). This leads Even-Zohar to establish two hypotheses to defend the notion of translated literature as an independent system. The first one relates to how the source texts are selected by the target literature following similar principles used with texts from the local system. The second hypothesis deals with how these translated texts will adopt norms and behaviours that are the result of their relation with other systems, adopting then a repertoire exclusive for translated literature (Even-Zohar 46). For Even-Zohar translated literature is “not only an integral system within any literary polysystem, but a most active system within it” (46), the position of this system, central or peripheral, and how it is connected with the repertoire, innovative or conservative, will depend on the nature of the polysystem.

Although the peripheral situation of translated literature within the study of literature might lead us to believe that it has the same place in the polysystem, it is also possible for translated literature to have a central position. If this is the case, Even-Zohar notes that the system is an active participant in determining the polysystem and an integral part of the innovative forces that shape major events in literary history (46). As well, in the elaboration of a new repertoire, the translated system will also become a tool since it will introduce nonexistent features in the home polysystem such as new models of reality, new poetic language, patterns, etc. The texts chosen to be translated will depend on their “compatibility with new approaches and the supposedly innovatory role they may assume within the target literature” (Even-Zohar 47).

Certain conditions are necessary in order for the system of translated literature to be a central part of the polysystem and Even-Zohar establishes three different cases (48). The first case, when the literary system is young and still not yet established, will benefit from the examples and types of the foreign literature. In the second case, when the literature is considered “weak” because of its limited resources, it can take inspiration out of the translated literature in the organization of literary activities and the development of a repertoire. Given the dynamics of a polysystem, turning points or literary vacuums are possible, creating the third condition for translated literature to be a central part of the system; when established models are no longer acceptable for new generations, foreign models are able to permeate the system.

If translated literature remains peripheral, it will have no influence on major processes and it will be determined by the norms already established by the dominant type in the target culture. This position places translated literature in a conservative side, following norms that might be rejected by the literature in the source language. Even-Zohar points to the paradox of this situation as translated works, commonly vehicles for new ideas, become the means to preserve traditional texts (49).

The translated literature system does not have to be fully one or the other, central or peripheral. It is a stratified system and “while one section of translated literature may assume a central position, another may remain quite peripheral” (Even-Zohar 49). If the interference of translated literature derives from a major source of literary works, then it is more likely for this to assume a central position in the polysystem. Even-Zohar’s historical research, along with that of other scholars, hints to the fact that translated literature usually takes a peripheral position. Although this will depend on the rigidity of the literary polysystem which depends on the culture it is grounded in and the importance of this culture within larger systems (Even-Zohar 50).

When translation and all the activities that surround it hold a central position in the polysystem, Even-Zohar emphasizes that borderlines between original and translated works are diffused (50). The influence of translation in the creation of new models drives the translator to violate conventions already established for certain models familiar to the target audience. For Even-Zohar, this is the only way the translator can achieve a translation closer to the original by “[reproducing] the dominant textual relations of the original” (50); leading the translator to introduce new norms that might be considered too foreign by the target audience. The new norms will be part of the literary struggle, either by being rejected or by being accepted, which will cause for the repertoire of translated literature to be enriched. However, this will only be possible if the polysystem is in an unstable state, allowing for innovations to enter the system and helping it open.

On the contrary, when the translation system’s place is a peripheral one, the translator is more interested in finding in which established and accepted models in the target system the text to be translated will fit better (Even-Zohar 51). The position of the translated literature system within the larger polysystem will then govern the socio-literary status of translation, as well as its practice. Even-Zohar concludes remarking the importance of thinking about the phenomenon of translation as “an activity dependent on the relations within a certain cultural system” (51) as opposed to an activity with limits established once and for all.

Translators’ Testimonies

The research in translation studies under the light of a post-colonial perspective has for the past ten years inspired a questioning of the traditional models, demanding translators to “take a position” regarding the “foundations of their own discourse and practices” (Buzelin 40). In her

article “Translation studies, ethnography and the production of knowledge”, H  l  ne Buzelin makes a comparison between the reflections made by anthropology and the new stance that is being taken in the field of translation studies. Although both areas of research find points in common, Buzelin deals with the issue of scientificity lacking in the field of translation studies, the consequence of considering the theory and the practice of translation as two separate activities. For Antoine Berman, the importance of the *experience* of translation becomes a main tool to try and bridge this gap and, accordingly, the *reflection* on translation should be the major focus of translation studies. The introduction of the translator as an agent involved in a reflexive practice of translation becomes more relevant nowadays and it is what many theorists, including Buzelin, call for translators to be conscious of.

In most cases the translated text is the final product, the only thing readers see of the translation process through which they will “have access, in a partial and mediated way, to the original text and to a portion of the culture(s) in which it originates” (Buzelin 44). This is a concern that Carol Maier is aware of and that she addresses in her article “Towards a Theoretical Practice for Cross-Cultural Translation”, where she explores the disadvantages of considering the final text as absolute as opposed to an exploration of available possibilities (21). The traditional expectation of readers and publishers, where the final static product is favoured over the record of the process, has led translators to keep apart the theory and the practice of the field, limiting the evolution of translation studies. This is why frequently, although not always, we find translators’ notes written in an apologetic tone in a variety of secondary texts as opposed to original “communications from the space between” (22).

As Buzelin explains, based on her research on the field of anthropology, the process of transformation, the exploration of available possibilities, needs to be considered an essential

element in the construction and understanding of the final product (46). In order for this to happen, the anthropologists had to reconsider their notions of participation and involvement in their projects as they influence “the comprehension and construction of...cultures” (47), they are not only partial observers but actors and, as Buzelin explains, opening a dialogue with their informants should be their main task (47). Research and production are key components of this task as they will reinforce the importance of the process; however they have lost ground as the influence of literary theory in translation studies makes of the process of translation a more personal experience as opposed to a social one. Buzelin proposes then to adopt Bruno Latour’s principles to examine not only the products but also the procedures for a truly dialogical nature to occur in translation (51), an approach that would address the concern exposed by Carol Maier.

Buzelin presents in her article a number of translators’ commentaries that adopt this reflexive approach to literary translation and that revealed “the negotiations and tensions which occur during the process of translation” (51), the involvement of the agents, the reception of the texts, and the complexity of the process. It is important to have in mind that all of these testimonies are helpful under a particular social and historical context, and Buzelin stresses how they are mainly of help to the readers of the specific text in their understanding of it and not to generalize what is translation (51). Even though the commentaries are framed by a specific cultural context, their existence can be considered a sign that the process of translation, and not only a final static product, begins to be recognized as increasingly important.

Buzelin herself has undertaken this task in her article “*The Lonely Londoners* en français: l’épreuve du métissage”, and later on more deeply in her book *Sur le terrain de la traduction: parcours traductologique au coeur du roman de Samuel Selvon, The Lonely Londoners* in which she examines the challenges of the text and her own process of translation. In her article Buzelin

also mentions other significant translators' testimonies such as scholar and translator Suzanne Jill Levine's book *The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction* in which Levine explores her process of collaborative translation as she worked and consulted the authors she translated. Her work is an essential study of the challenges of translation and, by writing about the process, Levine became aware of the challenges she had to confront, offering the possibility to think about translation as a subversive occupation and not a passive, invisible activity. The main object of her analysis is her work in the translation of texts by Latin American novelists such as Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Manuel Puig and others, and she touches on a variety of subjects such as names, word play, allusions, dialects, etc. The importance of these reflection exercises resides in the fact that the theoretical suggestions made by theorists such as André Lefevere, as seen previously, are put to the test in specific examples, bringing together theory and practice. Levine addresses the importance of these exercises in that they provide to the reader "a more intimate knowledge of the literary work, and of the languages and cultures involved in the dialogue between original and translation" (xiii).

In her analysis of translation, scholar Maria Sánchez discusses that, beyond questions of "perfect" or "impossibility", translation is a "meaningful act" where semantic contents are transferred. She focuses on translation not only as a product, but as well as a process. Based on Basil Hatim and Ian Mason's theories, which propose that analyzing the process facilitates the possibility of seeing the wide range of situations which the translation goes through, Sánchez stresses the importance of considering both pragmatics and sociolinguistics as important tools which can raise questions for the translator to consider before and during the process (67). Some of these include the strategies used in the writing of the ST, as well as the circumstances that framed it, the readership to which it is aimed, how language varieties affect the product, etc. She

makes clear that the methods chosen and how they are used will depend on the TL as well as the projects and goals that the translator has set forth for the translation. Sánchez constantly reminds us that translation is, for her, as well as for many other scholars, an act to facilitate “a closer understanding of the ‘foreign’ original” (70), where cultural contact is inevitable.

Sánchez makes a clear distinction of the differences involved in seeing translation as a *product*, a “known quantity...for everybody to see and to judge” (233), and as a *process*, “an unknown factor [where] we see the result but we do not [see] what has produced it” (233). In order to demystify the process of translation, Sánchez takes the reader through her own process of translation, a detailed analysis described by her as “translation seen in slow motion” (233). Through her step by step description of what goes through her head, we can see a constant stress on the importance of decision-making, but on a conscious level where the translator takes full responsibility that these are her choices. As a conclusion she reminds us that translation, just like reading, is a unique personal experience, not transferable, and that the process will bring the translator more satisfaction than the product itself (Sánchez 245).

Although not accompanied by the same deep analysis, literary translators’ commentaries have been collected in a variety of anthologies, from Edwin Honig’s *The Poet’s Voice* to the recent anthology *In Translation: Translators on Their Work and What it Means*, as well as works in other languages such as the 2010 Mexican anthology on literary translation, *De oficio, traductor*. Honig acknowledges the personal nature of his anthology, and as a consequence of the translating act, a characteristic which he believes might be the most effective way to demonstrate the “ubiquity and elusiveness” (1) of translation. During his several years of work as a literary translator, just like Jill Levine, Honig realized there was a “need for more direct and realistic information on what translators actually do” (7).

Anthologies such as *Writing between the Lines: Portraits of Canadian Anglophone Translators* are a window to explore the relations produced by the official bilingualism that exists in Canada. Along with other anthologies under the same thematic line, these books have a common thread, as Agnes Whitfield says in her introduction to *Writing between the Lines*, they're all interested in "captur[ing] the intercultural spirit writing between the lines" (1), making translation less of an invisible activity. The challenges, motivations, as well as questions of their role within the institutions are some of the questions the translators answer in this anthology while also delving into the matter of translation as a social practice and their role as agents in choosing texts that deal with the politics of bilingualism.

All the examples mentioned above fall under two different categories of translators' commentary texts. There are texts with an analytical approach to translation, such as Buzelin's and Levine's, and commentaries that read more like anecdotes of the process. Although the anecdotal texts are also of interest, it is the critical exercise around translation undertaken by the scholars that has helped, in the past years, to further broaden the role of translation and translations studies. No matter the category, the existence and appearance of more and more texts of this kind is an answer for one of the strategies Carol Maier proposes in deciding which translation to use in a classroom, but that can as well help the translator in choosing a text to translate. These testimonies, a resource to understand how the translator approaches the different culture represented in the text, are of great help, not only for readers to understand the process of translation, but for translators themselves to see their practice under a reflexive light that turns them into agents and can help to place theory and practice closer in the same scale as opposed to opposite sides.

CHAPTER TWO

English Canadian Literature in Translation in Mexico

Overview of Political and Economic Relations between Canada and Mexico

The economic, political, and cultural place that the United States has taken in the configuration of North America has been a theme of discussion for several years and it has become an important issue in the study of literature. Both Canada and Latin America, in this case Mexico in particular, have suffered the consequences of the central place the United States has in the minds of fiction readers around the world. On one side, given that they share the same language, English Canadian literature has been marginalized under a “terra incognita” status which writers have been trying to shed (Wyile 49). On the other hand, there is an awareness in Latin American literature of the imperial power that the US represents, and although this is more visible at an economic level, it also influences the literary production, and as a consequence cultural and literary connections with the US are always under scrutiny, always highlighted.

The fear of both countries, Canada and Mexico, of the impact that their neighbor country could have on their culture and literature has inspired different responses; while Canada has preferred to keep a distance from the southern neighbor, Mexican writers have drawn inspiration from US literature with a satirical twist. These two strategies, ignoring and reusing, hinder writers from both countries from seeing beyond the seemingly ever present US figure, and makes them forget their opportunity to reach to the rest of their North American neighbors, each other. Over the past years, Canada has taken more into consideration its relations with Latin America and the extent to which these relations can change their approach to the US.

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) signed in 1994 by the three countries that comprise North America has been the subject of criticism from both Mexico and Canada and, although this agreement mainly relates to issues of trade, industry and agriculture, it can also affect the cultural exchange among the countries. Just as many critics see the economic trades done under NAFTA as unequal exchanges, Herb Wyile notes how many writers and artists have expressed their concerns that it also poses a threat to the world of arts and culture (50). According to Wyile, this is especially true in the case of Canadian literature, still considered an emergent literature given the shift that occurred during the 1960s when it started an internationalization process, and now it is considered an “autonomous and vigorous literature” (52). Being characterized as a new literature, the theme of identity and the search for it have always been common topics in Canadian literature, which has led to a constant concern of “the local against a more international literary and cultural sensibility” (Wyile 55).

Despite, or maybe because of its “ever-precarious sense of identity” (Wyile 55), Canadian literature experienced a growth during the 1990’s and Canadian authors began to join the lists of international prizes and the shelves in libraries around the world as explained by Di Brandt (106). For her, this new literary role has given confidence to upcoming writers to write about their own places under their own genre rules, without being concerned with how they will be received internationally (107). However, Brandt expresses distress over how the international success of Canadian literature may threaten writers’ capacity to maintain a “sense of the importance and prestige of local literary traditions and cultures while at the same time cultivating a flourishing international market” (110).

The relation between the US and Mexico has, like Canada’s relation to the US, been one of inequality. However Mexican literature has never been at risk of falling under the shadow of

its neighbor; due to reasons of language; they are simply not the same. As well, Mexico's history has allowed for its literature to develop under a more nationalistic influence, it has a long history and, as a consequence, is rich in literary periods and movements. Because of the long history of literature in Mexico, the stigma of being a "lesser literature", especially in comparison to that of the colonizer, Spain, is no longer a worry; it is a complex, mature literature in its own right that does not have the need to be measured against the literature from Spain. Now, because of the constant important economic trade and the political influence of the US, "la cultura de norte" has become the main concern for writers and literary critics. Some, like Valeria Luiselli, ask if, after NAFTA, a new identity crisis has influenced Mexican literature. And so, literary critics in Mexico have focused on the struggle between the bonds that literature should have with a national or regional identity, which can mean a threat for talented writers who might not fall under this trend.

For Luiselli, people in Mexico seem to still be fixated with the images that the world has of what it is to be *Mexican*, as well as on how Mexicans are seen. By being aware of these images, Mexicans can choose which ones inspire a sense of pride of belonging to the culture, while others can be the subject of rejection or shame; this ability to choose is what helps in the process of making sense of oneself, of reflecting on identity. The Mexican reflection on identity finds itself in a struggle between the foundational myths that influenced early literature, the struggles for independence from the colonizer, the influence of Europe during the 19th century, and a contemporary US perspective of violence and political struggle (the only stories that seem to have international exposure currently). Trying to limit its literature to primarily reflect local and nationalistic features is a situation which both Mexico and Canada can relate to, and it is a constraint which both Mexican and Canadian writers and artists are fighting. The real struggle

for Mexican literature, as conceived by Luiselli, although also applicable to Canadian literature, is not to limit local and global to a complete dichotomy but to try and question the conservatism of the identity discourse and conceive cultural globalization as a “process of cultural dissemination, transference, and interchange that retains and respects cultural specificity and cultivates new and dynamic hybrid forms” (Wyle 56). According to Fredrick Buell, this focus on the local-global question has expanded the “number of communities [...] people are aware they belong to, and it has made these memberships and identities simultaneously global and local in significance” (298).

This new approach to the development of the country, not only in the cultural but also in the economic sphere, has promoted in Canada a new and wider search for partners beyond their immediate neighbour to the South. Oliver Santin recognizes that, starting from the decade of the 80's, Mexican and Canadian governments have had to face similar issues regarding their hemispheric interests (1). As he points out, after the end of the Cold War, then US President George H.W. Bush established the role of his country as one of guardian and role model, leading to a new promotion of US culture among all other nations (5). This placed Mexico and Canada, as the geographic neighbours, in a delicate position, basically trying to implement policies that could match those of the US but always careful of not losing their independence in issues of foreign policy (6). This approach to US economic practice meant for Canada to be identified mainly as just the US neighbor, according to Santin (6), an image that forced them to struggle more when it came to finding a trading place among Latin America.

This might explain the growth of the international relations between Canada and Latin America, according to a 1994 study by Canadian security analyst Hal Klepak, as a new alternative for the country to find partners to create exchange projects, as links with Europe

decline and distancing from the US seems desirable. It is interesting to note that, for Klepak, the same feeling of survival and sovereignty that writers experience in their struggle to differentiate their work, also exists in the political goals that many Canadian governments strive for and that Klepak lists as one of the challenges for Canada in the 1990s (9), highlighting a significant interrelation between the political and the cultural realms.

The ties that Canada began to form with Latin America in the late 1980s have led to a contractual accord between Canada and Mexico which, according to Klepak, is stronger than any other that Canada has, including with the United Kingdom (5) thus diversifying Canada's international relations. The situation for Mexico rings similar to Canada's when it comes to its expansion of trade agreements. Even though Mexico is considered part of Latin America because of its cultural and historical standing, in recent years it would appear that, because of these government trades, economic and ideological ties with the neighbors to the North have become more present than those with the South, or other parts in the world. These ties have had consequences in the Mexican economic, social, and cultural spheres.

Even though NAFTA faced hard criticism especially against the US, both from Canada in regards to investments and from Mexico in regards to the impact on farmers, Klepak recognizes the increase in cultural exchange between Canada and Latin America, and immigration from Latin America to Canada has been increasing since the 1980s. However, he also notes that these exchanges are slow and limited to the specific development of the attractive elements of Latin America, mainly beaches and tourist resorts, which continue to be present in the minds of many Canadians (17). Both countries have been “strengthening and sharing commercial [and economic] perspectives [...] due to their different exchange and cooperation endeavors¹” (Santin

¹ My translation.

29), a situation that can as well affect other areas of contact such as arts and culture. Mexico and Canada both share a concern when it comes to the threat of a homogenized culture, which has led to new collaboration between them. In resisting homogenization, by focusing on the diversity beyond their borders, Klepak believes a possibility exists to create multilateral connections in which cultural outreach can enrich the national arts scene of both countries (20).

Literary, Cultural and Artistic Endeavours between the Two Countries: Presence of Canadian Culture in Mexico

Universities are the main venues through which this collaboration has been taking place, as pointed out by Klepak (20), and in Mexico it has been the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM, for its abbreviation in Spanish), one of the most recognized universities in Latin America, which has developed cultural exchange projects with Canada. In 2002, the Cátedra Margaret Atwood-Gabrielle Roy was established by the UNAM, in collaboration with the Canadian embassy, and it continues to be held every year. The Cátedra is comprised of a number of lectures and activities over the course of a number of days. Throughout the years it has developed from strictly literary events to film and other cultural productions. The main goals of the Cátedra are to encourage interdisciplinary exchange between academics in both countries, either in teaching or research, as well as in the diffusion of Canadian culture in Mexico, including the publication of anthologies of Canadian writers in translation, both from English and French. The translation team behind these anthologies has established their central purpose as promoting a better knowledge of Canadian literature for Spanish readers, in an attempt to draw them nearer to this northern country (Lucotti 7).

The international literary success of authors like Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, and Alice Munro, as representatives of English-Canada, and Robert Lalonde and Monique Proulx, as representatives of French-Canada, has made it possible to introduce Canadian literature to Mexican audiences. Over the years, other names have also been introduced by the Cátedra, both through its publications and events. These include Miriam Toews, Nino Ricci, Susan Swan, Elizabeth Hay, Austin Clarke, and others. The range of events has also expanded through the years, addressing both a general audience and students interested in the world of Canadian culture and its dissemination, translation and translation workshops, films, and the world of journalism have all been featured in events.

Another project that has encouraged the circulation of Canadian literature in Mexico through translation has been the Banff International Literary Translation Centre program (BILTC) based at the Banff Centre for the Creative Arts in Alberta, Canada, through funding provided by the Centre and the Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes² (FONCA) in Mexico. This three-week residency has hosted Mexican translators working on Canadian projects such as the anthologies for the Catédra and the translation of the play *Incendies* by Lebanese-Canadian playwright Wajdi Mouawad. The commercial success of this drama, later produced as a movie, led to the Mexican translation of this play to become a success in contemporary events of cultural exchange, such as theatre festivals in Mexico City and other Latin American theatre festivals. The opportunity provided by the Banff Centre, as well as what its participants have achieved, is evidence of the importance that these institutions have when it comes to fostering awareness of Canadian culture among Mexican audiences.

Projects such as the Cátedra and the BILTC have brought to light lesser known authors in Mexico whose works portray daily life in the various provinces and the many communities that

² The National Fund for Culture and Arts, a public agency of the Mexican federal government.

live in Canada. By widening the number of writers that depict the Canadian experience in their fiction, Mexican audiences are more exposed to what is hopefully an increasingly comprehensive and rich depiction of Canadian literature, culture and reality, establishing its uniqueness and differences from US culture. As a representation of individuals and communities, literature proves to be a rich medium for one community to know more about the Other, establishing a distinctive image of that Other. In Mexico, the image of English Canada has been, in part, the result of cultural events carried out by academic institutions, such as the Cátedra, with the help of governmental organizations through sponsorship, and publishing houses that print English Canadian literature in Mexico.

Efforts to increase Canadian content in literature are not only being undertaken in Mexico; Latin American communities in Canada, of which Mexicans are a considerable percentage, have also started to develop their own projects to share cultural experiences between Canada and Mexico, as well as other Latin American countries. In the world of literature and academia, projects such as *TranslateCanada* by the School of Translation and Interpretation in the University of Ottawa are evidence of this. The project, managed by the *TranslateCanada* Research Group, consists of a database of Canadian writing, both French and English, fiction and non-fiction, which has been translated. In their overview to the project, the group conceives translation as the motor of intercultural and cross-cultural exchange of texts and ideas between languages and cultures promoting as well knowledge transfer (“Canada in Latin America”). It wants to examine “the scope of this cultural transfer, the trajectories along which it moves, the agents and networks that promote it, and the images of Canada circulated as a result” (“Canada in Latin America”).

So far the database consists of approximately 1,000 translated works and also includes literary reviews or critical commentaries in which Canadian literature is mentioned. Although the project is mainly interested in languages spoken in Latin American—Spanish and Portuguese—the database also includes translations published in Spain. The inclusion of translations made in Spain helps to compare the publication activities, trends and practices between Spanish and Latin American publishing houses. The section of the database that relates to Mexico was carried out by academics and students at the UNAM. The participation of this university as the only Latin American institution directly involved with the project confirms an active Mexican interest in the project. The research group also organized a conference, “Canada in Latin America: Tracing the Effects of Transfer through Translation”, hosted by the UNAM in October of 2012, where various topics such as literary translation, theatre translation, the role of anthologies, and the dissemination of Canadian culture were discussed and the database was officially presented.

English Canadian Literature in Translation in the Mexican Literary Polysystem

The slow but significant growth in interest and presence of Canadian literary figures in Mexico helps to conceive of Canadian literature in translation as a sub-system belonging to the literary polysystem in Mexico. Given that these activities depend considerably on government participation from Canada, the cultural and political interests that exist between English Canada and French Canada affect how the system develops. It is important to distinguish between the English Canadian and the French Canadian literary system, as their cultural and political interests differ. For the purposes of this research, given that Dionne Brand belongs to the English Canadian literary system, this system will be the object of research. Also, given that the main goal of this paper is to investigate “the conditions under which a certain literature [Mexican] may

be interfered with another literature [English Canadian]” (Even-Zohar 25), the polysystem theory is being applied.

According to Itamar Even-Zohar, a system is established as a network of relations that generate activities, which in the case of the literary polysystem are considered “literary” (28), and that can help to hypothesize “laws governing the diversity and complexity of the phenomena” (9) that comprises it. The activities outlined previously are evidence of the growing networks developing in Mexico interested in the diffusion of Canadian literature which are strengthening the existence of a sub-system under the larger system of translated literature being published in Mexico. Investigating the relations between the literary systems and the translated literature sub-systems in Mexico, specially the Canadian one, has the potential of delineating to what extent translated Canadian literature in Mexico is integrated to the local system, its diversity and complexity. It also explores the status of the Canadian sub-system, its importance and influence on the Mexican literary system, and the space it has to develop relations and its potential among readers.

As it already has been established, English Canadian literature in translation is a sub-system part of the literary polysystem in Mexico, but this system can as well be divided into two more sub-systems, the one published by Spanish publishing houses and the one published by Mexican publishing houses. This is an important division since the institutions governing each one will have different norms and hence the nature of production and consumption will be altered by this. Given that these systems are part of the same polysystem, they coexist under a hierarchy and, analyzing the *TranslateCanada* database, it is the Spanish publishing world the one that has the central position in the Mexican literary polysystem when it comes to the translation of English Canadian literature. This is a tension that can be noticed in economic

factors, as the Spanish publishing houses have more resources to commission translations, print, distribute, and promote them.

There is also a language factor involved in the importance of this division. Although efforts are made in order for translations to be written in a “standard Spanish”, this notion proves impossible, especially when it comes to the translation of allusions or humor. As most of the main Spanish language publishing houses are based in Spain, the language of the books that reach the Mexican audiences, and most of Latin American countries, may not be familiar for the readers. The origin of the translation could affect how the book is received by the audience since, if the local target audience does not understand a non-familiar translation of a pun or joke, it could lead them not to relate to the characters or their concerns. Considering that Spanish is the third largest target language in the world and that Spain occupies the second place in the list of countries that translate the most, while Mexico is in 43rd place, we can see the significant presence of products translated into Spanish, from all over the world, in the Mexican market³.

The scheme that Even-Zohar created to discuss the various external factors that are part of the literary polysystem (31) can be of help in analyzing the relations of the English Canadian translated literature sub-system part of the literary polysystem of Mexican literature. As noted before, many of the elements belonging to each of these factors do not exclusively belong to just one factor in specific as many of the elements interrelate, evidencing the interdependency of all factors in the system.

Since we are dealing with a polysystem of translated literature, translators have a significant role in it, just as much as writers, although this fact is rarely recognized. However, when talking about the Mexican publishing houses subsystem, it is possible to see that there is a change of attitude when it comes to the role of the translator. Because most of the publishers

³ Statistics from the UNESCO database, IndexTranslationum.

doing translation of Canadian literature in Mexico are either independent houses or belong to academic institutions—a factor that will be discussed later—it is usually the translator who proposes the project and becomes then the editor or compiler, in the case of anthologies, giving more presence to the translator's name.

The anthologies published by the UNAM, in collaboration with a large Mexican publishing house that focuses on cultural publications, were a project born of an academic venture developed by a group of professors and translators of the university, and so the name of each translator is printed along with the name of the author or is to be found in the first pages. With the publication of other anthologies, the faculty of the UNAM can be considered a producing community since, as Even-Zohar states, the producer does not have to be necessarily just one individual (35). The introduction of the notion of communities as producers is of help in the Mexican subsystem especially when talking about the cultural centres involved with Canadian culture that are often the result of a communal collaboration. This has been the case in the last years especially in the world of theatre where the translator is joined in the translation process by actors, directors, producers and others. And where, along with the performance of the plays, the translations are also printed.

It is common for the first consumers of the products published by the academic and independent institutions to also belong to these communities and have a direct awareness of the different activities that revolve around them. However, these activities can also draw indirect consumers as people get in contact with the literary products without this being their main goal. This is the case of the academic activities where students of a variety of disciplines are exposed by being in the academic facilities, listening to other students talk about it and maybe attending the events out of curiosity. Cultural centres might be the main points of exposure for many

consumers as people look for recreational activities. For the case of a large number of literary activities, consumers in Mexico belong to certain communities which are the regular audience for these activities, not only when talking about English Canadian writers but also about other kinds of foreign writers that haven't reached a certain international or commercial success.

Given that the English Canadian literature in translation sub-system within the Mexican literature polysystem is a small one, we find that the factors that constitute the producers and the institutions can often intermix. Now that the nature of the producers has already been discussed, it is possible to find some repetitions in the analysis of the institutions. Publishing houses and their activities are clearly an important factor in the analysis of the reception of English Canadian literature and how it gets translated, as they have created two different sub-systems already. One thing that characterizes the publication of translations carried out by academic institutions is the "independent" nature of the undertaking. Although it could be easy to disassociate economic reasons from independent publishers it is important to consider that independent publishing houses are also interested in selling but they align to a specific mission of quality and target a specific readership, most of the times an educated readership, while at the same time taking risks when deciding which works to publish. This differentiates independent publishing houses from their commercial counterparts that weigh their publishing decisions giving more attention to financial profit. Nowadays, bestseller lists are comprised of self-help books and what is known as mass-market fiction, which leads to the interest of commercial publishing houses in finding books to translate under these categories; their need to sell and their apprehension to taking risks limits then the kind of literature that is translated.

The *TranslateCanada* database shows that the publishing houses involved in the translation of Canadian writing fall under three main categories: cultural institutions (such as

theatre companies and cultural centers), academic institutions (mainly universities including the UNAM and other universities around the country), and small independent companies (with small print runs). Only two big commercial companies established and printing in Mexico have commissioned and published the translation of Canadian literature: Siglo XXI Editores and Fondo de Cultura Económica (FCE). There are also those publishing houses, such as Editorial Diana and Joaquín Mortiz, founded in Mexico but that are currently part of the Spanish publisher Grupo Planeta, which makes it hard to determine how decisions are made regarding the variety of Spanish that is used for translation.

These institutions, both the Mexican and the Spanish publishers, have established certain norms depending on what they believe is needed or necessary for the polysystem, making a clear difference between the nature of the products published in Spain in contrast to those produced in Mexico. The name of known Spanish publishers, such as Seix Barral and Ediciones B, can be found more than one time in databases concerned with translation⁴, linked to a big number of books published. In contrast, it is common to see a norm for the Mexican publishing houses where they only published one title of Canadian literature but there is not a follow-up or a continuing interest to look into more titles of Canadian literature. As mentioned before, for many small publishers, their projects follow a specific mission and have a specific readership in mind; in many cases they can even have personal reasons to start a translation, so one can assume that they are not focusing on the “Canadian literature” nature of the writer of the work, but on particular features of the book they are publishing that they want to share with their audience. This does not mean that they are not interested in promoting the Canadian culture; it just might not be their main goal.

⁴ Although the *TranslateCanada* database was my main tool, the UNESCO database, the Index Translationum, was also consulted.

In exploring the database, one can establish another norm. The translation and publication of novels, especially by renowned writers, has been mainly dominated by publishing houses based in Spain, mainly important commercial publishing houses stand out, and it is these editions that readers in Mexico receive. The genres that dominate the world of the Canadian literature system translated in Mexico are short stories, poetry and drama, mainly published by magazines, journals and newspapers. As publishers of a certain genre of Canadian literature, mass media⁵ proves then to be an institution to consider when talking about the Mexican subsystem. There is also the case of anthologies, as those published by the UNAM, that contrast with the single author book, a format which is not commonly published in Mexico. The anthology format, a collection of short stories or poems by different authors, proves to be a successful enterprise in Mexico as a means of presenting a wide number of English Canadian authors in order to introduce more than just one perspective to readers and maybe inspiring their curiosity. It is important to note as well that, by being translated, less known Canadian authors can gain recognition as well among Canadian readers back in their country.

The importance of academic institutions has already been pointed out and it is significant to highlight their role in the development of not only literary but of cultural events in general. It is because of their significant participation that it is difficult to assign them to just one of Even-Zohar factors, as they are producers, institutions, markets, and sometimes even consumers. Besides being promoted through the many cultural events already mentioned, the presence and importance of Canada is also promoted in the classrooms through the curriculum that is offered, for example in postcolonial literature courses that include Canadian texts, courses that compare US poetry to Canadian poetry and even specific seminars focused on Canadian literature. The

⁵ It is important however to limit the nature of the mass media institution to the print media; only in rare occasions broadcasting has a significant presence, mainly in educational TV and radio channels.

curriculum has as well been linked to translation through the *Seminario Permanente de Traducción Literaria*⁶, the group behind the Canadian short stories anthologies. Finally, government bodies are mainly represented in the subsidies that publishing houses or cultural institutions receive in order to generate their products, mainly the FONCA in Mexico, in collaboration with the Canadian government on many occasions. The analysis of the database, along with my personal experience with the Mexican subsystem, shows that, maybe because of the monopoly of Spanish publishers, all the institutions mentioned previously are not only co-existing, as pointed out by Even-Zohar (37), but they have the need of a constant collaboration in order to achieve their projects and goals.

It is important to highlight the role of the market factors in the promotion of Canadian literature and its translation in Mexico, which evidences the deep interrelations between all factors of the Mexican subsystem. As producers, professors of academic institutions prove to be promoters as well; when professors engage in a literary translation project, it is common that this is related to their academic research or interests, promoting then specific writers, genres, topics, etc. They have to keep in mind that, at the end, it is not only students who are exposed to their promotion, but the general readership receives as well this specific literary perspective. Unfortunately, direct promoters such as bookstores and libraries are victims of the monopoly of Spanish publishers since theirs are the main products they hold on their stacks. Searches on the databases of the reduced number of bookstores that exist in Mexico show that, even when looking for Canadian literary figures known internationally such as Margaret Atwood and Michael Ondaatje, the number of results is small. And searching the biggest library system in the country, belonging to the UNAM, we found that most of the titles of English Canadian literature they offer are in the source language, most probably since they are targeted to the students in the

⁶ Permanent Seminar of Literary Translation

field of English literature. In this regard, although with a significant role as a producer and an institution, academic institutions lack a better position as a market factor in the polysystem.

Literary events, also products of the system, are as well marketing opportunities and, as such, important factors in all aspects of the marketing process: selling, buying and promoting. While the literary events carried out by the UNAM have proven to help in the promotional aspect, they rarely become important trading opportunities; the academic nature of these events might hinder the chances of selling and how it could help, since if the consumers are not offered the product, they might not be sufficiently motivated to find it by themselves later on. The goal of these academic events could be described as an endeavour to create a specific kind of knowledge given that they are targeting a specific readership, evidencing a gap between this knowledge and the literary knowledge of a more general public. In order for translation to become a more present issue in the minds of general audiences, it is important for academic institutions to consider the strategies they could undertake to attract a more general public.

Big literary events might be more efficient in regard to this, in particular book fairs where the publishing houses are in attendance and offering their products. Canada has already been the special guest in one of the biggest literary marketing events in Mexico, the Feria Internacional del Libro de Guadalajara⁷ in 1996 when writers such as Linda Spalding and P.K. Page attended. It is interesting to note that, through a search in the translation databases, only one of the authors in attendance that year has, to this date, been translated. The presentation of these writers might have been the consequence of an interest to introduce new voices as opposed to what was presented in other events, an important responsibility for the market since “proliferating the market [is] in the very interest of the literary system” (Even-Zohar 39), widening the offering of products and promoting the acceptance of new literature. However, as important as this mandate

⁷ Guadalajara International Book Fair

might be, it is also important to offer the consumers products available in their language, in order to raise their interest even more. In my opinion, in these marketing events, it is the translator who can get the most as he or she is introduced to a new voice that might provoke a desire to translate.

For Even-Zohar, the survival of a literature depends on the variety of its repertoire (26), and in order for this repertoire to grow, it is necessary to receive products from other communities, creating polysystems. The repertoire of literature in Mexico is a rich one as it has been influenced by many other literary traditions over the years, and as such we can find that the rules and materials which guide the making of the products are varied. Nowadays the close relation to the US has worried literary critics who believe that it is influencing literature at a deep level, either because writers are using the same elements or because they are fighting against them, ultimately the focus on this geographical reason can be detrimental to Mexican literature. Given that the repertoire is the product of communities and shared knowledge, it is not strange to find that the US represents such a big influence at present, but it is also possible to find writers that draw from other repertoires, national and international; this is evidence of the different communities of the polysystem. So far it would be hard to declare that English Canadian literature exerts a significant influence on the Mexican repertoire at large, meaning on writers or audiences; maybe only when considering certain communities such as the academic one.

When talking about products, as it has been mentioned before in regard to the Mexican subsystem, short stories and poetry are the main products being published by the Mexican institutions. The commonly brief nature of these genres might be what attracts periodical publications, as they know this will attract its readers as well. This constant seems to be a norm of the products in the subsystem that could be considered an advantage given the success of short

story writers in Canada and the variety of styles they offer. Novels have not proven to be a product of interest among Mexican publishers, although they are clearly of interest for consumers, who can only access what is printed in Spain. In the last years drama has also become an important literary genre for the publication of products when it comes to Canadian literature. Although it is important to mention that the interested Mexican publishers, mainly founded by theatre companies, are focusing more on the Francophone scene than on what is being produced in English Canadian theatre. For Even-Zohar, desirability seems to be one of the key features for the development of products (43), and as such something to be considered by Mexican publishing houses and translators when choosing an English Canadian literary work to translate and introduce to the polysystem, taking into account the desirability factor that it might represent among readers.

The interferences of other systems, such as the literary translation systems, are the main tool for any literary polysystem to continue its enrichment, given that, according to Even-Zohar, they are active systems as well (456); and the case of the Mexican literary system is no exception. These interferences occur more commonly on the peripheries of the polysystem which, in the case of the Mexican polysystem, are represented by independent publishing houses. Because of the independent nature of these publishing houses, their products are under less examination from their targeted readership. Given that the decisions of these small publishers regarding what to translate and publish are regularly based on a specific mission, a specific knowledge they want to distribute, it is more likely for them to print lesser known writers from a certain foreign literary system, introducing then innovative works of literature and taking risks in the subsystem. Big publishing houses, in this case most of them from Spain, are more likely to

print writers already familiar to the readers whose work is already known and hence, there is no enlargement of the system.

In his analysis, Even-Zohar relates the elaboration of new repertoires mainly when the translated literature system has a central role. In the case of the Mexican polysystem, translated literature can be considered as central for the polysystem but only when it comes to certain translated literature of which English Canadian is not necessarily one. However, the continuing interest and efforts of producers and institutions in this specific subsystem are a response to their desire of introducing what they think are nonexistent features in the literature of the home polysystem that they do find in this literature. And so, even though for Even-Zohar these new models of reality will only affect the repertoire when they are coming from a system on a central position (47), this does not seem to stop translators in their efforts to make of this translated literature a force of innovation, looking for quality, and building a readership.

In the case of the Mexican polysystem, where translated literature can be defined as a stratified system, meaning that only a section of the literature in translation takes a central role (Even-Zohar 49), English Canadian literature remains in the peripheries and so, according to Even-Zohar, it will have no influence on the literary process and it will be as well determined by the norms already established (49). Although one could agree with Even-Zohar regarding the influence of this translated literature, the translators of English Canadian literature in Mexico demonstrate that they are not interested in following the established norms that dominate the translated literature that does take a central role in the system.

Translators of English Canadian literature in Mexico seem to be trying to introduce new norms into the polysystem, especially when it comes to the genres that are chosen for translation. This new norms project can be seen as well in their choice of writers to translate, mainly

contemporary such as Andrew Hood and Rebecca Rosenblum; also seen in the French Canadian scene with the translations of the theatre pieces of Wajdi Mouawad. These translators do not appear to want to fit into established models but their efforts have not achieved any influencing power in the translated literature system that comprises the Mexican literary polysystem. The clear monopoly of Spanish publishing houses, including their global reach and economic advantage, is clearly one of the main reasons why Mexican translators and publishing houses find obstacles for their projects; as well as the uncertainty of the interest of their consumers. Translation of bestsellers is the subsystem that dominates the Mexican polysystem, but it is important to note that most of the translations are products from Spain, which highlights the extent of the challenges for Mexican publishers. The situation of English Canadian literature in translation in Mexico is just one case but it could be representative of the larger subsystem of translated literature in Mexico, no matter the source country or language. Reviewing all of the factors described above, it is easy to see why Even-Zohar gave so much importance to the relations of all factors in the translation system as they all work together to determine the future of not only the acceptance of the literature of a country and its translation, but as well of the publishing institutions and the norms that producers develop in order to create their own opportunities.

As for the clearly peripheral subsystem of English Canadian literature, both when translated by Spanish and Mexican publishing houses, although the former does enjoy a better position, it can be concluded that its influence in Mexico's polysystem is not quite significant. The changes that the relation between both countries has undergone in recent years due to political and economic reasons, which can also influence cultural matters, should be taken into consideration as an asset to promote the translation of literature, but from English into Spanish

and vice versa specifically in Mexico. The links that could be drawn between the literary scene of Canada and Mexico and each country's approach to the theme of identity seem to encourage translators' endeavours to keep translating and introducing new ways of living and thinking in the world. These actions show the interest to "develop the connections between the local and the international" (Wyile 61), hoping that by introducing new ways of being, the local can find inspiration and be sustained.

The introduction of English Canadian literature in translation can help enlarge the Mexican polysystem, as well as the introduction of literature from other countries, but in order for this to happen, producers and promoters have to take into consideration the importance of the kind of language variant that is used and how demanding translations in the regional Spanish can mean a promotion of local literature. As well, they need to consider how choosing a particular mission or motivation when deciding which product to publish, leading to targeting a specific audience, can help in their marketing and promotional activities. This does not necessarily mean an elitist audience but, thanks to the various independent publishing houses in Mexico, many communities can be targeted, each one responding in a particular way to the English Canadian literature to which they are being introduced, and hopefully instilling curiosity and interest for the audience to keep reading and discovering the different perspectives of life all around Canada.

CHAPTER THREE

Longing for a Language to Land on: About Dionne Brand

Dionne Brand was born in Trinidad and Tobago and immigrated to Canada in 1970 where she enrolled at the University of Toronto and received a B.A. in English and philosophy in 1975. Later she received an M.A. in Educational Philosophy from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in the year 1989. In the year 2009 she was appointed as the third Poet Laureate of Toronto, a position she held until 2012. As well she has worked with the National Film Board (NFB) in the creation of several documentaries concerning feminism and immigration. Currently she continues to be an active professor at the University of Guelph, as well as a writer. Dionne Brand's work is testimony of the issues that currently are of importance for the citizens of Canada and the many cultural outlets available for discussion.

The Poetry of Dionne Brand

Dionne Brand first began to gain recognition when her collection of poetry *No Language is Neutral* was shortlisted for the Governor General's Award for Poetry in the year 1990. The title of the book, which makes reference to a poem by Saint Lucian poet Derek Walcott, reflects themes of language and performativity that Brand engages with in her poetry. According to Rinaldo Walcott, Brand addresses "the performativity of black diasporic writing and speech acts because they utter a politics of difference that opens up new kinds of possibilities." (96). Performativity becomes then a common thread in many of Brand's writings as a tool to reflect on roles and role playing in society and how it affects language practices, and more specifically, the languages practices of the black community. Brand contributes to a project also important to

other black writers, such as George Elliot Clarke, who wish “to create a language of blackness in Canada: one that is at once mindful of black migrant cultures, but also recognizes and acknowledges the true genealogy of black existence in Canada” (Walcott 37).

In this collection, Brand establishes her interest in playing with language, using ambivalence and repetition among other devices, to help readers realize how it can become a performative act. The role playing capacity that language allows gives way to also perform identity through a (re)invention of the self which is reflected in a practice of (re)writing (Walcott 97). Through these practices, Brand is trying to find a new site where to locate the self, validate its language, and give it agency, to construct a new site where to reinvent and resist dominance at the same time.

For Leslie C. Sanders, Brand deals with a distinctive Canadian question, the same proposed by Northrop Frye: “Where is here?” However, Brand’s inclusion of topics of slavery sheds a new light over this concern. Sanders explains how, as opposed to the land of opportunity and new beginning envisioned by immigrants, the relation of a slave to the place of arrival is one of oppression, loss, and ambivalence (ix). The double setting of *No Language is Neutral*, Trinidad and the city of Toronto, helps depict how, for the poet, “space is hostile, place must be created” (Sanders xi). This double feature is reproduced as well with the use of the two languages in which the poem is written: “Standard English” and “Trinidadian”, as the poet called them during an interview (Silvera 368). The use of two different languages helps to emphasize the performative nature of language, and how thoughts and expressions change depending on how they are uttered.

The introduction of a new poetics inspired by a Caribbean English which disrupts the regular flow of “Standard English” can be considered an act of resistance on the part of the poet,

demonstrating the political agency of language. For Brand, “remaking language [...] is the way to come to terms with the past in the present” (Walcott 43) through an attempt at reclaiming elements of the black culture. Brand’s use of language in *No Language is Neutral* established a precedent on her view of language as a “means of recreation, [a] site of hibridity” (Sturgess 51), that continues to be a strong poetic line in her writing. This hybrid language draws lines as well to her interest and commitment to help the black community in Canada; her language reflects then “the relations of slavery, of brutality, but also of silence, of distance, of loss [that] shape the language [she] speaks” (Daurio 38) and that reflect her social and political responsibility.

Brand continued her poetic work by publishing *Land to Light On*, the narrative of which begins in Canada, as opposed to the Caribbean setting of her previous book *No Language is Neutral*. This shift of placement reflects the revision that the poet experiences and how she now constructs different connections between land, language, and history. Even though it had been present in her previous works, in this collection we are introduced in a more evident manner to the strong political and ethical responsibilities that the poet takes. While in *No Language is Neutral* the poetic voice states her use of language as a tool to question or reinforce a sense of place and belonging, for Kaya Fraser there is a sense of loss in the poetic voice of *Light to Land On*, a voice that is unable to see language as a means of escape or a device of empowerment. There is a “failure of language to enact and effect the desired politics” (300), almost as if it is losing the performative nature that had been established before. The language that we read in this collection is one of loss, a language unable to provide the poetic voice with her own words, and yet it is the only medium that she has. This contradiction is the result of her desire to possess and claim “the alien” language and the power that it entails for her own, but she realizes that this

only leads “to invert the same power axis, not to destroy it” (Fraser 302), reminding us of the consequences of colonization.

The re-evaluation of place that the poet undergoes in *Land to Light On* is deeply connected to the troubled relation of the poetic voice with language, as language takes on the figure of a “metaphorical ‘land’” (Fraser 292). For Fraser, this is Brand’s attempt at distancing herself from the trite image of Canadian identity as defined by landscape and referred to in much of Canadian literature (303). By stating that she is “giving up on land to light on” (Brand, *Land* 45) the poetic voice renounces to being bordered by a place that has been constructed by others, with a nature that has been elaborated by conventions. This struggle over space, a space bordered by a specific Canadian racial discourse, is what Derek Walcott calls “the racial geography of Canada” (36), which Brand addresses as she continues to explore the places of her writing. But she is not only giving up on physical land, she is also denying language as a land that might be imposed. For Sanders, this language is one of “home and exile, belonging and unbelonging, nation and citizenship” (xii), a language which, although marked by its conflicting nature and impermanence, might also provide a new place where to land.

Although the city of Toronto is present in most of Brand’s poetic work, *Thirsty*, her collection published in the year 2002, gives voice to its inhabitants. The deeply rooted perspective that we have in *Thirsty*, the city of Toronto, is a sign that the poet has changed again her vision of place, and the introduction of several voices is testament of the nature of the city itself. Although at the beginning the city is introduced as a hostile site, as the poem progresses Toronto becomes a place where exploration is possible and, although the “city is no utopia [...] the poet [...] finds traces of hope in the collective possibilities it offers” (Mason 797). The

Toronto that Brand depicts in *Thirsty* is one of crossroads where individuals live in a constant crossing of differences, of their present and past experiences.

The main narrative of the story is based on the murder of a Jamaican immigrant, shot by police during a domestic disturbance call, which makes evident “Brand’s engagement with specific, local material for the making of her poetic argument” (Mason 786-87), specifically those moments significant for Toronto’s black community. *Thirsty* can be considered a documentary long poem where narrative takes a more central role over the lyric, highlighting the importance of history in Brand’s writing and, according to Mason, her optimism regarding the power of dealing with history (Mason 787). Images of doors prevail in *Thirsty*, a metaphor that Brand establishes in her essay book *A Map to the Door of No Return*. Doors signify the way frames, established as social forms, have influenced the lives of black diasporic individuals, where they find themselves conditioned by social, cultural and race preconceptions.

Jamaican immigrant Alan is stopped at the door as the police officer shoots, framing his body under a stereotype of black masculinity and racism. His body, and the wounds inflicted on it, is compared to that of Christ, creating a parallel between both figures and making of Alan “a victim, as Christ was, of human hatred and fear” (Mason 789). The significant presence of Alan’s body and the memories that are now part of it, its wounds, are used by Brand as a metaphor to emphasize the importance of body as a site of memory and history. For Mason, Brand’s conflation of body and text presents how through bodies one can remember and experience devastating histories that need to be dealt with or they can destroy individuals or communities (790). As he falls, Alan thinks of his thirst which translates “for the speaker of the poem [as] a response to racism, capitalism, and patriarchy” (Mason 789). The consequences of Alan’s death spread, as well as his thirst, immobilizing the characters that are left, his wife and

daughter, who now live haunted by the circumstances of Alan's death, a sense of haunting of the past that reoccurs in Brand's writing.

Inventory, Brand's 2006 poetry collection, continues to explore the lives of the residents of a global city, especially those living in the peripheries; and although Toronto is the poet's setting, these are stories that can be found in any global city. Goulart notes how, starting with *Thirsty*, Brand already began to expand her gaze to the multicultural experiences of the city as opposed to concentrating on racial issues around the Black diaspora as with her previous works, and *Inventory* is part of this new wave. Toronto becomes one more character in *Inventory*, a character that seems to not be interested in human life and yet interferes with people's lives at all times, making its own inventories. At the end "the global city [...] cannot forget its past and multi-ethnic and multicultural heritage, or its history of oppression and exclusion" (Goulart 123). However, as Walcott notes, for Brand this revision of the past is not done as a nostalgic longing, a trait of much of the black Caribbean immigrant literature, because by taking a nostalgic approach one is destined to neglect the politics of the present (39).

Just as in *Thirsty*, the body is also a relevant subject in this collection; not only that of Toronto but also the bodies of those "impossible citizens" (Brand, *Thirsty* 40) that live in the global city. The poem concentrates on the marginal and alienated subjects who suffer the rejection of the cities that "wear bandages over their eyes" (Brand, *Inventory* 43), "as a sign of refusal to see and to testify the crimes and injustices of our time" (Goulart 127). But because these subjects' lives are so deeply marked by their experiences in the city, there are moments in which their bodies merge with that of the city. This integration is a sign of how not only the citizens are victims of the city but also of how the city can become a victim. Goulart remarks how the poetic voice of *Inventory* does not let us forget humanity's complicity in the destruction

and extermination of the present moment (132). Through poetry, the poetic voice compiles an inventory of the lives of the city as a way to make us question and problematize, but also take responsibility for, the current condition of humanity and the necessity of turning the artificial globalized cities into more humanized spaces.

Brand's most recent poetry book, and her latest published book in general, *Ossuaries* is a long poem which, as its title notes, engages with the bones of cultures. The poem has two main poetic voices, one of them, Yasmine, recounts her story, always fleeing from past actions that she regrets. This sense of constant movement is mirrored by the poem's structure which lacks in its majority capital letters and full stops, creating a fluid reading. Yasmine's voice is one of cynicism as she observes our times, but we also hear an omniscient poetic voice that lets us know more about her life and the pains that she refuses to talk about. Through Yasmine, Brand touches again upon themes of history and seems to ask what elements of our modern world, culture, and even our own lives, will remain.

The Fiction of Dionne Brand

Although fewer in number, Brand's fiction works are also of renown within the world of Canadian literature; *Sans souci and other stories* is her only collection of short stories, published even before *No Language is Neutral*. The stories of *Sans Souci* recount "the fate of migrants, on the margins of Canadian society, or of poor inhabitants of a perhaps 'post' but 'ex' colonial Caribbean" (Sturgess 53). Many of the stories, with Toronto as background, present the city as a colourless site, while the Caribbean is full of flux and desire, creating a clear contrast between not only the places, but also the characteristics of the cultures that develop in them. Brand resorts to postcolonial issues to address the challenges that black people faced as they try to adjust to a

“Canadian vertical mosaic” (Sturgess 54), dealing with “issues of race and class in a country which prides itself on its tolerance” (Sturgess 54).

In this collection, Brand touches on themes that will be characteristic of her next writings, whether is poetry, fiction or non-fiction. Sturgess stresses how personal narratives and the art of story-telling are at the forefront of the stories in this collection, as the characters try to intersect their subjective experiences to history (56). This revision of history is significant in her exploration of colonial history and “the enduring ties of colonialism within contemporary society” (Sturgess 58) that continue to stop or guide the actions of the characters in these stories and of the black community in general. Brand makes use of linguistic strategies in order to depict this failure of the characters to find their place, described by Sturgess as strategies of gaps and discontinuities (54). Some of these strategies are exemplified in syntactic breaks, idioms and code switching, which serve to highlight the orality of Brand’s narrative and destabilize the authority of Standard English. The introduction of the Trinidadian Creole dialect in her short stories adds a new poetic dimension to the narrative as well as a conceptual one by re-appropriating language and making of English a subordinate in comparison to the Creole.

Brand’s two first novels, *In Another Place, Not Here*, published in 1996, and *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, published in 1999, share a similar background: they are both driven by the history of the Black diaspora, an element that continues to be key in the development of Brand’s writings. Her first novel, with a clear poetic influence, tells the story of two women in their journey through immigration and their links and involvement with the historical movements in North America in the 1960s and the 70s and the revolution in Granada. The protagonists are engaged in a constant movement from the Third to the First World and back again which places them in a cultural and social displacement (62), as noted by Sturgess, “shifting from Third to

First World does not provide them with a destination, and shifting back does not provide a sense of belonging” (62). The narrative is clearly female-centered, but beyond that, it also has a personal and national identity background as the opposite voyages of the two female characters, Elizete and Verlia, and their narrations of their personal experiences, intertwine with the historical moments Brand chooses to describe.

Despite being a novel, Brand’s prose language continues to be one of poetry and orality. Rebecca Monteiro describes how the narrative is full of changes of language style from one chapter to the next making it difficult for the reader to know who is talking, reflecting the continuous movement of the characters (256). Exploring the issues of language in the book, Sturgess stresses the importance of words like “landing”, “leaping” and “flying” and their constant presence in the novel (63), concepts that are later picked up again in *Land to Light On*. These words take on a mythological significance as they address the language of slave narratives and African folklore in which flying provided an escape from captivity. But at the same time Brand proves the ambivalence of words and gives reasons to be suspicious of them; Sturgess provides an example in which, while Elizete “lands” in Toronto, she still has to struggle to gain “landed immigrant status” in the country (63).

The time span of *At the Full and Change of the Moon* is dictated by the time frame of the African diaspora as it follows the lives of a Trinidadian slave, Marie Ursule, and her descendants, from the early nineteenth century to the late twenty century, making of the novel an epic like narrative. The novel is described by Walcott and Sanders as a story of trauma, pain, and suffering and the role of memory and history in the process of recovery (Walcott and Sander 2). However, as much as critics have concentrated on the historical treatment of the novel, Brand has expressed her disagreement with this reading, concentrating instead on the power of

imagination and how it guides you (Walcott and Sanders 3), as well as how it is influenced by your past (Walcott and Sanders 4). *At the Full and Change of the Moon* marks a departure from Brand's usual settings; although the narrative does start in the Caribbean, in Trinidad, her focus on the diaspora forces her to follow Marie Ursule's descendants to various parts of the world, as opposed to just limiting to the Canadian landscape. We can see in the novel then, although it might prove truth for Brand as well, that the relations that a person develops towards the places of her life are complex; according to Brand "a place doesn't exist actually. It exists when you find it, when you arrive" (Abbas 3).

Female characters are also at the forefront of this narrative: Marie Ursule and her daughter Bola, as the ancestors of the diaspora. Marie Ursule, in her search of freedom, is involved in a desperate act, the massive suicide of the slaves on the plantation farm, and it is her daughter Bola who gains freedom without knowing how. The figure of both women, especially in the last stages of their lives, when they are considered old women, is celebrated by Brand as a daring stage in life, when women can attain this freedom of "not having to be concerned about the number of strictures against [them...] A moment when you can be your complete self" (Abbas 4). Brand's interest in the strictures of life can also be seen in her opinions about the criticism around her work. Despite her constant use of themes around black communities and the African Diaspora, Brand has expressed her desire not to be restricted to the "job of addressing or signing 'black behaviour'" (Walcott and Sanders 6), limited then to a sociological space instead of being read from a literary standpoint. For Brand, it is not only about the African diaspora but more about the experience of migration and the consequences of it.

The Novel *What We All Long For*

Brand's desire to cover a wider array of migrant experiences might explain the nature of the characters of her novel *What We All Long For*. Brand's 2005 novel tells the story of four young people who inhabit modern Toronto. They are daughters and sons of immigrants from all over the world who, having grown up in Canada, find themselves between the past lives of their parents and their immigrant background, and the opportunities that the city offers. Their lives are marked by the pressure of past expectations and the future that a multi-cultural city can offer. Through their experiences in the city, interacting with a wide number of individuals and cultures, they are trying to create their own stories, form their own bonds, and find their own place.

The novel is structured in 32 chapters, which at the same time are divided in two groups marked by different narrative voices. Seven of the 32 chapters, all of them titled *Quy*, are told in the first person from the perspective of a specific character, Quy, who retells his life, from being a little child living in a refugee camp to having to grow up looking out for himself. These chapters are not long, which might reflect the protective, mysterious attitude of the character himself, inspiring in readers a sense of distrust for what he is saying and what his real intentions are. On the other hand, the narrator of the remaining 25 chapters is, most of the time, an omniscient narrator that belongs to the city, a narrator that is familiar with the urban and multicultural experience and so can talk about it from the inside. However, in some instances the narrator doubts, revealing the incertitude of living in a city where people can easily pretend and try to blend among the crowds. Just like in her two previous novels, *What We All Long For* has the characteristic poetic language that distinguishes Brand's writing. This poetic nature enhances the description of the city as the characters ride, walk and experience the urban spaces, creating

images, personifications and metaphors for the readers to establish a deeper connection with the characters' experiences.

With *What We All Long For* Brand finds new avenues to keep reflecting on those subjects that are important for her. For Kit Dobson, the novel has at its core the politics of people and their place in the Canadian space, a recurrent topic for Brand, but this time under a new light dictated by the young generations of the immigrant experience (88). Represented in different ways by each character, the young generations affected by the immigrant experience are opposed to living in the lost past of their parents but at the same time they are aware of a political consciousness against the nation. "For them, finding community is a specifically urban project" (Dobson 88), and so Toronto becomes for them "a set of obstacles" (Brand, *What We* 32) to help them create a sense of self. Living in this society means to live along a system that constantly "seeks to reterritorialize drifting bodies" (Dobson 90), restricting and oppressing them, reinforcing its power over them.

Again, Toronto is depicted as another character in this novel, a character that offers possibilities for its dwellers to engage in dialogues because in the city, in "any minute you can crash into someone else's life" (Brand, *What We* 4) without knowing the consequences of this interaction. The novel's first chapter is an ode to the life in the city and its unpredictable personality; it gives it the characteristic of smells, provides it with physical characteristics and compares it with the changeable aspects of the seasons. We can see then that the city "presents both an opportunity and a risk" (Dobson 91), and by my mixing and merging with the city, the four young characters are engaged in a constant motion between these two possibilities. The narrative voice describes these young characters as Torontonians above all else, "they were born in the city from people born elsewhere" (Brand, *What We* 20) and as such they are exposed to

“transformative, open modes of being [that] seem to be readily available [...] in the city” (Dobson 96).

These characters, Tuyen, Carla, Oku and Jackie, are on a journey, just as many of Brand’s characters are, not only to find their place but to find who they are, trying to differentiate what it means to belong somewhere and what it means to be someone. Although Brand’s politics of a fluid identity had already been delineated in previous writings, her young characters in *What We All Long For* are conscious and actively living that identity, using it as a practice of resistance against “limited categories of belonging” (Dobson 90) and what is expected of them. Tuyen, a visual artist, sees the city as beautiful in its “polyphonic, murmuring” (Brand, *What We* 149) nature and spends a large part of the novel creating an installation that will record the longings of the city and its citizens. For Tuyen, there’s an indescribable language of the city contained in all these voices and longings, and she is hopeful that her installation will help bring it forward, continuing the creation of the city. Tuyen’s project grows from a *lubaio*, a traditional post to leave messages, to a three room installation which she herself is not sure how to execute. This is evidence of the “expansive [and] breaking” (Dobson 98) qualities of the longings and desires that a city contains; and so, fittingly, Tuyen’s project remains incomplete at the end of the novel signaling the “city’s ever-shifting nature” (Dobson 98).

While Tuyen is mostly hopeful in her interactions with the city, Carla is less assured of the possibilities that it contains, especially as she relates it to her brother Jamal. He is described as living in the moment and he gets tangled in the city (Brand, *What We* 32) which leads him to a vicious circle of imprisonment. His captivity since the beginning of the novel, when we learn that he is in prison once again, diverges from his sister’s “response [to] insist in constant motion” (Dobson 98) as she bikes through the city, feeling like light and of course “light moves” (Brand,

What We 29). Oku's situation could be similar to that of Jamal, except that his friendship with his three friends grounds him to a sense of family and his desire for Jackie gives him hope. He is aware of the restrictions which he faces when he describes jail as a rite of passage for a black man (Brand, *What We* 46), but he also knows he has more possibilities as an educated young man and the feeling of "the future's openness" (Dobson 99) makes him afraid as he realizes that he does not know what is it that he wants. He is conscious that the black male figures that he has as role models are not what he is looking for, he wishes not to be another stereotype and, although at the end of the novel he is still unsure, he concludes that "he desires to experience the world more broadly" (Dobson 99), beyond those figures of black masculinity in his life. Jackie watched the decay of her parent's lifestyle as they couldn't move on from the disappearance of the night clubs which, for them, gave meaning to their lives, and so she seems to be in a continuous reinvention of her persona as a commitment not to repeat the mistakes of her parents. Her promise to herself to be different from them is what restrains her from accepting Oku as a partner, as it will mean, for her, to go back to that way of living.

These four characters represent the younger generation and how they live "lives that do not adhere to national or racial categories" (Dobson 100) but, in order to create a contrast, Brand also depicts characters that are "defined by the city" (Brand , *What We* 66), mainly the older generations, the parents, who are described as "people who somehow lived in the near past and were unable or unwilling to step into the present" (Brand, *What We* 190). However, they are not the only ones who complied with the stereotypical view of their ethnic and social origins as we can see with Carla's brother who conforms to the young black attitude people in the city expect of him. Despite the introduction of these characters in the novel, Dobson believes that Brand is more optimistic than in earlier writings (95), especially when it comes to the hopes of the four

main young characters and the opportunities that they see in creating an urban space for themselves, creating communities “across borders, rhizomatically connecting to each other without a predetermined logic” (Dobson 100). It is in their transgression of borders, available through their interactions with the city, and their constant exposition to difference that the characters see hope, constantly “trying to step across the borders of who they were [realizing that] in fact [they are] borderless” (Brand, *What We* 213).

Despite the optimism that the protagonists inspire, the character of Quy makes us doubt this optimism. The lost son of Tuyen’s parents, he had to suffer the dangers of living in a refugee camp by himself, growing up distrustful of the world, learning how to find ways to take advantage of the need of others for his own purposes. He is as well in a journey for identity, but one of a different nature, as he searches in the city the element that others are running away from: anonymity and the opportunity of a fluid identity. After what Quy has experienced since losing his parents, he knows now that the city is made out of sacrifices (Brand, *What We* 137); that the people that live here have to ask themselves a question: who the hell are they?, after all “people disappear all the time into cities” (Brand, *What We* 311). Quy is not interested in finding a fixed identity, all his life he has been changing who he is in order to survive. In the moment he finds his family again, he makes a decision to stop running, he believes himself safe in this city of opportunities, but he forgets that a city like this can become a jungle, and that people can crash into your life at any given moment.

It is clear that, despite Brand’s broader scope of the immigrant experience, *What We All Long For* still addresses those topics that are always at the forefront of her writing: citizenship, immigration, sense of belonging, nation, and space, among others. Space continues to be an vague concept, and more so in a city where change is a permanent condition, where people come

to disappear; in the city it seems that a life does not leave traces, that places do not absorb the events that they witness (Brand, *What We* 112). In order to survive in the city, an attitude of negotiation is necessary, an attitude more attainable for the younger generations of immigrants, an attitude that will help them create their own “comfortable spaces” (Littlewood 504). For the older generations, the weight of their past dictates their lives and its influence detains them from negotiating the city space, to find a new sense of belonging. Because of this, their children feel “as if they inhabit two countries—their parents’ and their own” (Brand, *What We* 20) and it is in the interstices of these two worlds that they are able to negotiate their new sense of belonging. That “simultaneity of being here and not being here [which] is, in effect, an in-between position”, (Walcott 42) is a common trope not only for migrant communities but for translators’ communities as well.

According to Dobson, for some there is optimism in the city, however chance plays a big part (101-2) and so the city “does not necessarily offer a space for everyone” (Littlewood 518). For some critics such as Littlewood, it is for the black characters of the novel that the security of a future in the city looks less promising; after all Oku and Jackie are less assured of what it is that they want, and Jamal is bound to repeat the same actions of what is expected of the black young man. Although Brand focuses not only on the black community, she does continue to explore the nature of black language, a common trait in both her poetry and her narrative. For Rinaldo Walcott, “black language is particularly characteristic of the performative” (81), and it is mainly through Jamal’s use of language that Brand addresses this issue. Carla knows that the reason why her brother speaks with the accent he learned in the streets is “to assume badness” (Brand, *What We* 30), even though he might not be fully aware of it, and it is in an attempt to

contradict him that she assumes a “Standard” way of talking, “pronouncing every word” (Brand, *What We* 31).

Jamal knows that by using that language he will be recognized in his community, just as Jackie’s friends know that one her traits is her use of the word “fuck”. While Tuyen uses art as her means of reinvention, Jackie, Oku and Jamal concentrate on language, challenging those views that claim that the language of black communities is inarticulate, that they lack a capacity for artistic expression (Walcott 77). Since her first works, Brand has celebrated the performative aspect of black language and the possibilities it offers for the creation of art, continuously stressing how “black language bring[s] into being the politics for reinventing the self and resisting domination simultaneously” (Walcott 88). Following Brand’s attempt to broaden her perspective of the immigrant experience, *What We All Long For* also deals with other migrant voices, such as the Vietnamese community of Tuyen’s parents or the European background that marks Carla’s relation to her mother, Angie. Apart from migrant communities, *What We All Long For* is also a mirror of the urban young voice of Canada, mainly reproduced in the dialogues between the four young friends and that helps to mark the gap between the old and new generations.

As mentioned previously, the poetic language of Brand is an important feature of *What We All Long For*, as well as the language of the black communities; however there are other languages that need to be addressed as they are of importance for the novel. One of them is the language of the migrant communities, mainly evidenced by Tuyen’s parents and that is marked by the introduction of foreign words and the incorrect nature of their speech. As opposed to Jamal’s use of language, where his “mistakes” are made with a clear intention, Tuyen’s parents’ mistakes hurt the reader as they are a sign of their inability to identify. As well, it is important to

consider the language of the city and the streets, so seminal for the portrayal of the young characters and their lives: how they are marked by the city and how their personas change depending on who they talk to and how they relate to language. The language of *What We All Long For* is ultimately the language of the city, a language marked by a myriad of different languages, where so many communities can feel identified in what they are reading.

The Non-fiction of Dionne Brand

Brand's writing is not limited to the fiction realm, being actively involved in academia and due to her strong political and ethical interests; her work also expands to non-fiction essay collections and books. Titles like *Rivers Have Sources, Trees Have Roots: Speaking of Racism* and *Bread Out of Stone*, address many of the issues present in her fiction, and in the year 2001 she published *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*, her seminal non-fiction work where she outlines the concerns that inspire her. The image of the door, a recurrent image in her work as seen in *Thirsty*, is a symbol of the journey that the African slaves suffered in their passage to America and the Caribbean. This door is both a physical, a mental, and an emotional position; a "creation place of Blacks in the New World Diaspora" as well as "a place emptied of beginnings" (Brand, *A Map* 5-6). This contradicting nature turns the door into a paradoxical image, a place from which most of the characters of her novels, short stories, and the poetic voices of her poetry seem to come from. But beyond the image of the door, Brand wants us to concentrate on the doorway as she describes this space as a "creation place" (Brand, *A Map* 5). As Mason suggests, it will be from this site that possibilities for another kind of world will present and the potential of social transformation exists (785).

It is clear, even in her prose and non-fiction work, that poetry is Dionne Brand's first language, as she declares it herself in an interview, preferring its "neat concentration [...] its ability to do so many things in one line" (Abbas 2). It is no wonder then that the power of her writing is so strongly supported by her take on language and the strategies she finds to play with it and bend it. For critics like Fraser, the major struggle in Brand's writing is that of language against itself (291). It is a language that can be read as ambivalent but that at the end serves the purpose that she has set for herself, her language "appear[s] to slip many of the restrictions of "correct" or traditional English writing in order to convey the urgency of this articulation of a personal experience" (Fraser 293).

This personal experience is a hybrid one, reflected on the nature of her language which "allows her to voice the previously unvoiced, to speak multivocally from a divided subject position" (Fraser 292). It is not easy to declare that Brand's language belongs to either of the two languages (Standard English or Caribbean) but instead it can be seen as a third language that she constructs, a hybrid language that uses elements of both. It is through her use of this third language "[that] identity emerges as a mobile, thus discursive, construct" (Sturgess 51); language is of great importance for Brand because it voices our identity and, as such, it is the performativity of not only language but of identity as well that characterize her work. Although Brand uses mainly the characteristics of the language of the black communities to create her play of language, on a wider scale her "use of language is essential to her re-ordering of Canadian literary realities because she brings new sounds and tonality to what may be considered Canadian" (Walcott 43).

The history of the black community and its many displacements are evidently a common thread in Brand's works, reflecting her interest in "appropriating a personal heritage from within

a story of slavery and abuse, while examining and challenging continuing prejudice in Canadian society” (Sturgess 51). Brand’s awareness of the importance of the past and its relation to the present is evident in her re-examination project; however she has never presented a nostalgic view of the past, identifying it instead as a site of “erasure, transformation and deviation [...] a continual displacement of origins” (Sturgess 52). Once it has been recognized as such, it is possible then to think about the possibilities for the community; for Walcott, much of the importance of Brand’s writing resides in her ability to redraw and remap “the Canadian urban landscape in order to announce and articulate a black presence that signals defiance, survival and renewal [redrawing as well] boundaries of knowing, experience and belonging” (38), reclaiming it as a site of possible origins.

Place is another frequent concept presented by Brand, both metaphorical and literal, the last one mainly embodied by the city of Toronto. While the Caribbean is depicted mainly as a myth, blurring its corporeality, Toronto is well defined; almost personified and as so it seems to have its own language. In *No Language is Neutral*, Brand began to trace the nature of the city; for Sanders, in this collection “the language of the city is stark and simple, unmodified nouns, short simple words” (xi). The syntax evidences the detachment that Brand still feels towards the city, still unable to connect it to a sense of belonging because “connection to place in Toronto is tenuous” (xi). The poet’s relation with the city changes as she experiences it and reproduces it in her writing, a development visible in each one of her books. Both in *Thirsty* and *Inventory* the figure of the city is less disconnected and, although it still does not offer a complete site of hope, a possibility of change is present where Toronto can even function as a doorway to renewal (Mason 797). While the poetic voice of *No Language is Neutral* walks “dumbfounded [...] as if these sidewalks are a / place I’m visiting” (Brand 28), the characters in *What We All Long For*

seem to own the city, know every inch of it; just as the poet herself now, they see in the city a more comfortable place where to belong.

Minority communities can find in Dionne Brand's voice a voice of their own, and even more significantly, a voice that plays and experiments with language, creating powerful images of daily life. She has become an important figure in the Canadian literary scene but people in other parts of the world can find in her work a source of inspiration as well, and definitely a window to discover the multiple voices of various communities; maybe even uncovering as well doors and doorways to help them learn more about themselves. To guide the translation of Dionne Brand's novel *What We All Long For*, it is necessary, not only to analyze its main themes and writing strategies, but it is also important to take into consideration all of Brand's work in order to make informed translation decisions and choose the translation strategies that will enrich the process and the target text. As we have seen, Dionne Brand's interests permeate all of her work and over time she has built and expand on them, finding new avenues of expression that can talk to people all over the world, not only about the condition of life in Toronto, Canada, as an immigrant, a black person or a female, but about the factors that shape our lives, the presence of past and present, the role that memory plays, and the importance of connections among individuals.

CHAPTER FOUR

“Lo que todos anhelamos”

A Translation of *What We All Long For* by Dionne Brand

Translated by Ixchel Cervantes

Capítulo Uno

Esta ciudad flota por encima del paralelo cuarenta y tres; aunque esa es una simple ilusión, por supuesto. Los inviernos por el contrario, no son nada imprecisos. Aquí, los inviernos son inevitables, a veces implacables. Hace dos años tuvieron que traer al ejército para desenterrar a la ciudad que estaba prácticamente sepultada bajo la nieve. Las calles eran de hielo, los cables de electricidad se hicieron quebradizos, los teléfonos no funcionaban. La ciudad entera se paralizó, los árboles aún más inmóviles que de costumbre. Los coches y las entradas a las cocheras desaparecieron por completo. Los políticos se atacaban unos a otros tratando de explicar qué había pasado y quién tenía la culpa: quién había privatizado los quitanieves y por qué la ciudad no estaba preparada. La verdad es que es imposible prepararse para algo así. Es el destino. La naturaleza hace ese tipo de cosas: tirar miles de toneladas de nieve sobre la ciudad sólo para decirnos: No hagan demasiados planes o suposiciones, no se adelanten. Este año la primavera no podía llegar en mejor momento, y no lo hizo. Se tomó su tiempo, derritiendo la nieve a su ritmo, haciendo desbordar las alcantarillas cubiertas de hielo, aumentando el caudal del río Humber y del río Don hasta el lago. El sonido de la ciudad era el del correr del agua.

¿Conoces el olor de esta ciudad al inicio de la primavera? El invierno ya muerto sigue dando vueltas, huele a impaciencia y vergüenza, pero sobre todo a anhelo. La basura, enterrada bajo bancos de nieve durante meses, reaparece poco a poco como los viejos hábitos, bolsas de

plástico, latas de refresco; los callejones están abarrotados por un revoltijo de botellas y zapatos viejos y colchones olvidados. La gente parece estar desenredándose, su paciencia se agota. De repente están ansiosos por sentir el contacto humano. Se acercan a completos extraños para decirles cualquier cosa. Después de los tiempos grises y las pesadas nubes de los meses pasados, un rostro desconocido sonrío y hace un comentario como retomando una conversación que continuó durante todo este tiempo. El destino de todos está abierto de nuevo, se pueden comenzar nuevas vidas; o al menos la primavera es la ocasión para que esto parezca posible. Sin importar qué tan sombrío fue el día anterior, todas las complicaciones y los problemas que amenazaban antes parecen irse ahora a medida que la nieve se derrite en las calles. O al menos los cielos despejados y el nuevo aire que llega del lago hacen creer a la gente que así es.

Son las 8 de la mañana de un miércoles al inicio de esta primavera, y el metro retumba al cruzar el puente sobre el río Humber. La gente, abarrotada en el vagón, parece aturdida, como si todos se estuvieran recuperando después de un golpe. Huele a perfume y sudor, a cabello mojado y menta, a café y pan quemado. Parece haber una tensión que contiene todos los sonidos que los cuerpos producen en la mañana. La mayoría de la gente está calmada, a menos que sean jóvenes, como los tres que se acaban de subir, de seguro sin un jefe molesto a quien soportar todo el día. Se agarran de los postes y cuando el metro arranca chocan uno contra el otro y se ríen, su risa vibra por todo el vagón. Al notar la seriedad de los demás pasajeros, fingen estar avergonzados y se callan, pero no pueden permanecer serios y su risa explota de nuevo.

De entre los tres, una tiene una cámara; es una mujer asiática y lleva un viejo impermeable. Es imposible no verla, es de una belleza extraña, no del tipo comercial de labios carnosos como la del anuncio de champú justo sobre su cabeza, sino más bien la belleza de un halcón: vigilante, emplumada, con garras y sagaz. El segundo es un hombre joven negro que

lleva un tambor en una bolsa de lona. Intenta buscar espacio para ponerlo en el suelo y recibe miradas molestas por todas partes. Hay en él un encanto físico y una soltura envidiable. Tiene una barba de unos cuantos días y cuando sonrío, sus cejas, sus ojos, su rostro entero es incapaz de evitar su efecto seductor. La tercera, otra mujer, parece italiana, del sur. Es flaca como una mantis, y está envuelta en un moderno abrigo de plástico amarillo, pero su boca tiene cierta voluptuosidad y sus ojos largas pestañas que parecen pesarle. La mujer asiática apunta la cámara hacia ella, la convence para que sonrío, el flash se dispara y ella se ve sorprendida. Es obvio que han estado afuera toda la noche. Comienzan a hablar sobre una de sus amigas de quien el choco está enamorado. Pero el tenso silencio a su alrededor finalmente los desanima, como si cedieran ante una ley que han violado. ¿Quién quiere oír sobre amor tan temprano en la mañana?

Así son las mañanas en los vagones del metro, todo mundo ha dejado sus sublimes casas y departamentos y cuartos para adentrarse a las encrucijadas de la ciudad, al principio intentan que la ciudad no los toque, aferrándose a la escasa privacidad de una ciudad con tres millones de habitantes. Pero eventualmente algo los altera, como ahora. El anonimato es la mentira más grande de una ciudad. No eres anónimo en lo absoluto. Eres común, en serio, común como tantos guijarros, tantas manchas de suciedad, tantos átomos de materia.

Ahora esa conversación está en la cabeza de todos y los seguirá al trabajo, pasarán todo el día tratando de descifrar el resto de la historia. Ahora se preguntarán donde estuvieron esos tres toda la noche, y alguien pensará, ¿Por qué mi vida no es así? Libre como la de un joven. Alguien dará vuelo a su imaginación sobre donde estaban, quizá en las vías de tren, quizá en High Park, quizá fumando marihuana en una fiesta, tomando cerveza y bailando. De seguro bailando. Y algún otro pasajero celoso pensará, ¡Ese montón de gorriones! ¡Nunca han trabajado un día en todas sus vidas! Pero no hay de qué preocuparse, la vida los alcanzará algún día.

Y apretado en un asiento al final del vagón hay un hombre que apenas entiende inglés pero que de sorpresa se distrae de sus declives sobre el destino al escuchar el tintineo de risas: cómo termino aquí y cuál será su siguiente paso, y como el ligero pánico que siente le da asco. Se anima a sí mismo a repasar los detalles de su vida, repitiéndolos en su cabeza como si lo estuviera haciendo para la mujer que lee el periódico a su lado. La risa lo penetra y piensa que nunca ha escuchado risa que suene tan pura, y es sólo su primera semana en esta ciudad. Tan sólo cuando era muy, muy pequeño, un niño, se acuerda de haberla escuchado.

Lo que flota en el aire en un vagón de metro como este es el azar. La gente, parada o sentada, está envuelta por la delgada envoltura magnética de sus vidas. Piensan que están a salvo, pero saben que no es así. En cualquier momento puedes chocar contra la vida de alguien más, y si tienes suerte es bueno, como estar sobre luz a cada paso que das.

En esta ciudad hay barrios italianos y barrios vietnamitas; hay barrios chinos y ucranianos y pakistaníes y coreanos y africanos. Nombra una región del planeta y alguien de ahí está aquí. Todos se encuentran en tierra Ojibway, pero casi ninguno lo sabe o ni les interesa, porque esa genealogía es imposible de identificar excepto por el nombre mismo de la ciudad. Lo único que tienen que hacer es prestar atención, pero es posible que lo que saben ahora ya les duele, ¿y qué pasa si encuentran algo que los dañe aún más? Estas personas están acostumbradas a que la tierra bajo sus pies tiemble, y todos quieren que se detenga, y si eso significa que deben pretender que no saben nada, bueno, ese es el sacrificio que hacen.

Pero como en cualquier encrucijada existen combinaciones de existencia. La gente se transforma en otra sin darse cuenta, de manera inconsciente, justo aquí en el quejumbroso vagón. Y en las banquetas, después de emerger de las estaciones, después de haber sido lijados por los empujones y roces que una ciudad como esta hace, todas las vidas que han acumulado, todos los

fantasmas que han cargado, todas las inversiones que han hecho para protegerse, todas las cicatrices y señales y marcas para reconocerse; su híbrido equipaje se cae sobre el pavimento a cada paso. Hay tanto que se derrama.

En esta ciudad hay mecánicos búlgaros, hay contadores eritreos, dueños de cafés colombianos, editores letones, techadores escoceses, bailarines afganos, matemáticos iraníes, cocineros tamil en restaurantes tailandeses, niños calabreses con acentos jamaíquinos, deejays fushen, esteticistas saudí-filipinos; doctores rusos cambiando llantas, hay cobradores rumanos, pescadores de Cape Croker, empleados japoneses en tiendas de abarrotes, lectores de medidores de gas franceses, panaderos alemanes, taxistas haitianos y bengalíes con despachadores irlandeses.

Las vidas en la ciudad son dobles, triples, conjugadas, mujeres y hombres todos intentando poner en orden su propia cadena de eventos, intentando mantener una historia clara en sus cabezas. A veces se encuentran a sí mismos diciendo mentiras impresionantes, exagerando o evitando desagradables secretos por aquí y por allá, balanceando líneas de casualidad y, antes de darte cuenta, es imposible distinguir un hilo del otro. En esta ciudad, como en cualquier otro lugar, la gente trabaja, come, bebe, tiene sexo, pero es difícil no despertar aquí sin la certeza del desconcierto.

Quy

Quy. Significa, mmm, pues, significa “precioso”, la gente me subestima todo el tiempo a causa de mi nombre. ¿Por dónde empiezo a contar quién soy? Hablar es siempre un error de cálculo. Eso es lo que siempre decía mi padre, Loc Tuc.

Yo era tan sólo un niño cuando paso. Era de noche. Porque siempre es de noche cuando estas cosas suceden. Estaba con mis papás y mis hermanas. Habíamos abandonado el lugar en el que vivíamos y comenzamos un viaje a lo largo del camino. Un camión que pasaba nos recogió. Yo tenía un limón en la mano que mi madre me había dado para apretar y oler cuando sintiera náuseas. Viajamos en el camión durante un día y medio y llegamos a un lugar cerca del agua, una bahía, donde esperamos un barco. Este barco nunca vino. Esperamos durante dos semanas en el cuarto trasero de una casa. Había muchas otras personas esperando allí. Mi padre pagaba dinero extra para conseguirme leche, mi alimento preferido. Mis padres me amaban. Mis hermanas me amaban. Yo era amado. Un día mi padre nos dijo que dentro de dos noches viajaríamos. Mis padres se prepararon. Mis hermanas estaban aterradas, pero yo era tan sólo un niño pequeño; nada me aterraba. Hubiera estado aterrado si mi madre y mi padre no hubieran estado ahí. En las únicas pesadillas que tenía, no volvía a ver a mi familia.

Nadie iba a sospechar que llevaba diamantes en el cinturón. Eran casi todos los ahorros de mis padres. Era un cinturón de tela y mi madre había cosido los diamantes en las costuras.

El lugar donde llegó el barco estaba lleno de gente. Algunos ya llevaban dos semanas esperando. Esa noche, tan sólo dos barcos llegaron, no había suficiente espacio. Parte de la carga tendría que quedarse, algunas personas también. Mis hermanas caminaban en un pequeño grupo, abrazadas, mi madre me cargaba, mi padre me cargaba, me pasaban de los brazos del uno a los brazos del otro, una y otra vez. Uno de ellos me puso en el suelo. No diré quién. El agua se sentía

fría en su violento oleaje. La gente se empujaba. Todos estaban en ese silencioso movimiento, entre empujar y pelear, que se produce cuando es peligroso hacer ruido. Fui arrastrado, mis pies empezaban a mojarse. Estaba oscuro. Era de noche, por supuesto. El mar era húmedo. El aire era húmedo. Salté y salté buscando a mis papás. Distinguí la pierna de mi padre y lo seguí. Alguien me levantó para ponerme en un barco. Me senté junto a la pierna de mi padre. No dije nada. Acerqué el limón a mi nariz. El barco zarpó y me quedé dormido. Hacía frío. Llovía a veces.

Estábamos a la mitad de lo que después supe era el mar de la China cuando me di cuenta que estaba solo. Era un niño pequeño así que lloré. El mar era interminable, era como viajar al sol. Bebí agua del océano y el vientre me dolió y los labios se me partieron. El limón en mi mano se endureció. Pasaron ocho días antes de que el barco llegara a la isla Bidong, pero yo no pertenecía a nadie a bordo. Seguí unas piernas que había confundido por las de mi padre.

Tuve suerte, me enteré después, de que los otros no me hubieran aventado por la borda. Aunque si me maltrataron, me pegaban cuando intentaba tomar el agua limpia o cuando lloraba por comida. Bueno, supongo que algunos se sorprenderían de saber lo que gente huyendo hacia la democracia es capaz de hacer. ¿Por qué? Pensarías que yo hubiera terminado de mejor manera. No sucedió.

De esta manera perdí los diamantes. En el cuarto día de aquel horrible mar, piratas tailandeses abordaron el barco. Seis de ellos. Tenían tres armas y muchos cuchillos. Eran hombres asquerosos. Separaron a los hombres de las mujeres, algunos de ellos violaron a las mujeres mientras los otros registraban al resto. Encontraron mi cinturón y me lo arrancaron de la cintura. Mi pobre padre y madre no sabían que este era un escondite muy conocido. Los piratas me jalaron de un lugar a otro como si fuera un trapo. Uno de ellos dijo que me llevaría con él para convertirme en una perra. Yo no sabía entonces lo que era una perra. Decidieron llevarse a

algunas mujeres también y a las niñas. ¿Qué sabía yo sobre estas cosas? Tan sólo sé que me salvé al morder a uno de ellos y quedar inconsciente de un golpe por ello. Cuando desperté seguía en mi camino al lugar que todavía no sabía era la isla Bidong.

Después de que se fueron el barco era un lugar enfermizo. Toda la comida había desaparecido y la gente estaba aún más deprimida, así que yo era una responsabilidad aun peor. Se supone que la generosidad humana comienza en este momento, y así fue, aunque no fue humana, sólo suerte. Llegamos al lugar llamado isla Bidong. A partir de ahí me trataron con una mezcla de amabilidad, algunos lo llamarían desinterés pero en ese momento para mí era amabilidad, y brutalidad. Nunca sabía quién me daría cual.

Cuando ves fotos de la gente en la isla Bidong ves un vacío. O quizá nuestros rostros son, como dicen en algunos lugares, ilegibles. Yo sé cómo se llega a tal rostro. Estaba paralizado cuando desdoblamos lo que quedaba de nosotros sobre la costa de Bidong. Me sentí cómo se siente una insolación. Me sentí seco aunque, por supuesto, un niño no tiene estas palabras, pero no sientan lastima por mí por ser un niño. Crecí. Viví. He visto las fotos. Nos vemos como una sola cara: sin ninguna apariencia particular específica, sin ambiciones individuales. Todos uno solo. Hasta podríamos ser parientes de la misma familia. ¿Éramos nosotros o era el fotógrafo incapaz de distinguir entre gente que no conocía? Incapaz de hacernos humanos. Incapaz de ayudar a su público a vernos, en otras palabras, en pequeñas casas particulares en calles suburbanas residenciales como aquellas de donde él venía. ¿Se hubiera reducido mí tiempo en Bidong si lo hubiera hecho?

En una de las fotografías se me ve agachado junto a las faldas de una mujer que podría ser mi madre. Ella tenía dos hijos y en la fotografía parece que yo soy el tercero. Todos mirando fijamente hacía el lente de la cámara, quizá para entonces ya sabíamos que seríamos

transformados en mendigos para siempre. Yo en definitiva no tenía lo que se puede llamar un carácter. La isla de Bidong era un campo de refugiados. Un lugar donde la identidad era fluida, disponible para quien la quisiera. Refugiados políticos, refugiados económicos, ¿hay diferencia? En ese entonces era muy joven para tener creencias y convicciones, gracias a dios. Tan sólo al principio busqué amor, bondad, amabilidad. Pero después seguí tan sólo una regla: comer. Comer tanto como puedas. Hoy en día intento no tener muchas reglas. Quizá piensas que si no hubiera perdido a mi madre y a mi padre, si ellos no me hubieran perdido, sería una mejor persona. No seas sentimental. No trates de ver buenas intenciones. ¿Quién eres tú para juzgar?

Pase siete años en la isla Bidong como un huérfano, deseando que los piratas tailandeses me hubieran llevado con ellos. Hubiera tenido un rumbo y otro destino. Pero en mi situación, corría para ser fotografiado cada vez que llegaba un reportero o un oficial de refugiados. Quizá esperaba que mi padre o mi madre o mis asustadas hermanas me encontraran. ¿Cómo salieron las fotos? ¿Me reconocen? Soy el que está sonriendo intensamente cada vez menos y al final dándose por vencido cada vez más. Supongo que eso no se vio en las fotos. Bidong se convirtió en mi hogar.

Una vez en Bidong conocí a otro niño como yo. Había muchos de nosotros. Me preguntó si podía jugar con un juguete de metal que hice, el último rastro de mi inocencia. Le dije que no, sin rodeos. Me preguntó si sabía sobre su madre y padre. Respondí, “¿y yo qué sé?” Me preguntó si podía ser mi amigo. Respondí “como quieras”. No sé qué paso con él.

¿Qué paso después? Lo que paso después pasó. Esa es la única cosa que la isla Bidong me enseñó: cierra la boca.

Capítulo dos

Había llovido la noche anterior, pero hoy el sol iluminaba el estudio y al desorden de madera, lienzos, papel, los desechos que Tuyen consideraba el material para su arte. Tuyen miró por la ventaba que daba al callejón; botes rebozando de basura y una silla rota descansaban contra la pared del edificio de enfrente. El grupo de graffiteros que vivía en los pisos de arriba había pintado en la pared un gran cerdo rojo sonriente. No había notado la silla antes y la examinó desde arriba, pensando en qué podría hacer con ella.

Se había quedado con el impermeable puesto mientras esperaba a su hermano Binh; ni se había molestado en quitárselo cuando llegó. Carla se había ido a su departamento, que quedaba justo al lado, y Oku las había dejado en el metro, tres paradas antes de la suya. Justo cuando entraba por la puerta Binh llamó para avisarle que iba a ir. Eso fue hace una hora. “Espérame afuera”, le dijo con voz irritada, “voy ahora mismo”. Pero Tuyen sabía que no se podía confiar en la noción del tiempo de su hermano, y que tan sólo estaba molesto porque su padre lo había mandado a visitarla. Aun así, se quedó con el abrigo puesto para estar lista.

Estaba contemplando la silla rota cuando el Beamer de Binh entró por el callejón. Se estacionó y de inmediato tocó el claxon, después sacó la cabeza por la ventana del auto y gritó su nombre. Ella abrió la ventana y le clavó una mirada de aburrimiento profundo. Binh tocó el claxon de nuevo, sin parar, hasta que ella cerró de un golpe la ventana y bajó las escaleras hasta llegar al callejón.

—No seas tan infantil —. Le dijo ella cuando llegó.

—Bueno, sabes que odio venir a este basurero. O sea, ¿por qué vives aquí? ¡Sufriendo por tu arte! -Su tono era sarcástico pero con algo de envidia al mismo tiempo.

—¿Y a ti qué?

—Bueno, no tendría que venir aquí entonces.

—No te lo pedí.

—No claro, si tú no tienes idea de lo que es ser responsable.

—Blablablá...Eres tan gracioso.

—¡Ten! —dijo Binh con desagrado mientras le pasaba dos bolsas de plástico del asiento del pasajero—. Y esto —dijo, dándole un pequeño sobre—. Dinero, me imagino. ¿Qué no puedes conseguir un trabajo?

—Gracias, hermanito querido —. Tuyen ignoró el cruel comentario.

—Bueno, ¿qué no puedes? ¿Por qué no te encuentras algo que hacer, eh? ¿O un marido?

—Tan pronto como encuentres uno tú, marica.

—Orale, tú eres la que tiene sus secretos, no yo —. Le hizo una señal con el dedo.

—Pues olvídalo. Muchísimas gracias. Adiós —.Se volteó para regresar al edificio.

—Oye —dijo Binh, saliendo del coche—, quiero hablar contigo -Estaba vestido de manera impecable, su cabello largo y acicalado sobre el cuello de la camisa, un par de lentes de sol costosos sobre los ojos.

—Yo no quiero hablar contigo. ¡Mira, qué a la moda nos vemos! Ahora sí ¿qué es lo que quieres?

—Voy ir a Bangkok.

—¿Para qué? ¿Algo de turismo sexual infantil?

—No seas pesada. ¿Puedes abrir la tienda por mí?

—Ja, hasta crees —. Tuyen se volteó para irse.

—¡Vamos! Te pagaré.

—¿En serio?

—No lo hago por mí. Voy por Ma, me entiendes, y Bo. Ellos no pueden irse de aquí.

Están...Ma está aterrorizada.

—¿Cuándo saliste con esto? ¿Fueron ellos quienes te lo pidieron? No le estés dando esperanzas a Ma de nuevo

—Olvidalo. Gracias de todos modos.

—No te metas en eso. ¿Por qué no los dejas olvidar en vez de andar animándolos, eh?

—Mira, no se trata de animarlos. ¡Ni siquiera les he dicho que voy a ir! —Se quitó los lentes de sol como si quisiera destacar su honestidad.

—Déjalo por las buenas. No vayas buscando cosas que luego los decepcione aún más —.

Tuyen se acercó más a su hermano, tratando de intimidarlo.

Ella era un poco más baja que él pero por todo lo demás tenía la misma presencia. Tenía el mismo cabello negro abundante que le llegaba hasta los hombros, los pómulos amplios y altos, las cejas con un arco perfecto. Pero ella estaba vestida con una camisa de segunda mano y un par de pantalones holgados con manchas de pintura que ella misma había hecho.

—Me sorprendes, Miss Gran Artista. ¿No tienes curiosidad? ¿No quieres saber qué pasó? ¿No te preguntas qué fue de él? Con todo tu rollo de hacer conciencia y encontrarte a ti misma, ¿no quieres saber?

—No es sobre mí, es a ellos a quien les duele y no quiero que andes buscando.

—¿Y quién eres tú para decirme qué hacer?

—Tú eres el que preguntó, tan sólo te digo. No seas egoísta.

—¿Egoísta? Lo estoy haciendo para intentar averiguar qué paso, qué paso con él. ¿Por qué soy yo el egoísta?

—No lo sé, pero así eres tú.

—Okey, está bien, ni me importa. ¡*Chào chi!*

Bihn entró a su coche y mientras subía la ventana aceleró y salió a toda velocidad del callejón.

—¡*Chào anh* a ti también! —Tuyen gritó al coche que se alejaba.

Tuyen recibía estas visitas de Bihn cada vez que sus padres no recibían noticias de ella en un rato. Su madre, Cam, le enviaba comida y su padre, Tuan, le enviaba un sobre café con dinero. Pero ellos nunca venían. A Cam le hubiera gustado visitar a su hija, pero el padre de Tuyen se lo tenía prohibido, quería que mantuvieran un frente unido contra Tuyen yéndose de la casa. Aunque ese frente siempre flaqueaba y su ansiedad les hacía mandar a Bihn para darle dinero a Tuyen. Bihn se rehusaba a subir al pequeño departamento tipo estudio porque decía que las escaleras estaban sucias, así que siempre tocaba el claxon del coche o gritaba su nombre desde el callejón hasta que ella bajaba. Tuyen era más joven que Bihn por dieciocho meses, pero ella se sentía mucho más madura ya que él parecía necesitar la aprobación de sus padres más que ella. Aquí iba una vez más en otra búsqueda inútil tratando de ganar su atención de nuevo, pensó Tuyen, a medida que subía las escaleras.

El departamento de Tuyen era un desastre de vías de madera y pequeños troncos de árboles, ramas y cuerdas, simples desechos que había recogido caminando sobre la playa y trastos que había comprado, todo lo iba a utilizar para crear una gran escultura, un *lubaio*, el cual, una vez terminado, ella decía que cubriría por completo el departamento desde el techo hasta el suelo. Tuyen había reclutado a sus amigos, Carla, quien vivía al otro lado del pasillo, Oku y Jackie, para ayudarla a poner de pie una de las dos traviesas ferroviarias en uno de sus extremos mientras ella la amarraba a ganchos de fierro que había martilleado en cada una de las

esquinas del cuarto. Durante meses las traviesas habían estado tumbadas de manera diagonal cubriendo todo el piso. De vez en cuando Tuyen se había golpeado los dedos del pie tratando de pasar, hasta que decidió hacer un poste para anuncios con ellas.

“Robadas” es como la gente describiría a las traviesas, pero “encontradas” es como Tuyen y Oku, riendo, las llamaban, acordándose de su incursión nocturna en el patio de maniobras. Tuyen se había decidido por la idea del *lubaio* durante una de sus búsquedas mientras tomaba un atajo por el patio de maniobras. No había considerado el peso de las traviesas y la dificultad de moverlas a voluntad. Pero Oku había usado el viejo Buick Plaza de su padre, una gran lancha sin ventanas que gastaba mucha gasolina, y entre los dos habían amarrado las traviesas al techo del coche para después regresar a casa manejando de manera lenta y furtiva entre callejones. Durante meses las traviesas se quedaron en las escaleras hasta que, cuando por fin llegaron al estudio de Tuyen, ella convenció a sus amigos a que la ayudaran a parar una de ellas.

—Maldición, esta cosa pesa un chingo —Jackie chilló— Debes estar loca. Si termino aunque sea con un rasguño, se termina mi chingada carrera.

—¿De qué “chingada carrera” hablas Jackie? Sostén bien tu *chingado* lado.

—No me obligues a tirarla sobre ti, Oku

—Tírala chica. Así como te tiras al alemán ese.

—Ni te atrevas, Oku. No te me enfrentes. No sabrías que hacer.

—¡Ponme a prueba chica, ponme a prueba!

—Ya parenle —dijeron Tuyen y Carla al mismo tiempo entre risas, mientras la traviesa se inclinaba peligrosamente.

—¿Por qué chingados me molesto con ustedes chicos? —dijo Jackie de manera indiferente.

—Porque te amamos, *sweetie* —. Tuyen terminó de amarrar el poste.

—Es que andas chiflada por mí, cariño —. Oku puso su brazo alrededor de la cintura de Jackie.

—Como iba diciendo... —Jackie miró a Oku de manera gélida, lo que lo hizo apartar su brazo como si éste acabará de morir, y después se volteó hacia Tuyen— ¿Y qué chingados vas a hacer ahora? ¿Es un tipo de mierda vietnamita antigua o algo por el estilo?

—Voy a hacer un *puto lubaio*...

—Okey, querida, no digas otra chingada cosa —. Jackie observó sus uñas y sus largas piernas. Jackie podía utilizar la palabra “chingar” en cualquier parte de la oración, con cualquier categoría gramatical.

—... porque no estoy interesada en ideas de vida, muerte, fertilidad, esperanza o cualquier otra cosa, y porque la *Mujer acostada usando una camisa* de Dalí parece una muñeca muerta masacrada, y puedo ver águilas al acecho, flechas rotas y músicos de jazz en un Jackson Pollock y porque creo que Man Ray y Duchamp eran amantes.

—¡Júralo! —Oku.

—Y porque hay una mierda china-vietnamita que me pertenece y la voy a utilizar. ¿Okey?

—Por el amor de dios, que alguien la callé —Carla— Pensé que eras vietnamita.

—¿Hace cuánto que me conoces? —Esas palabras sonaron peligrosas en la garganta de Tuyen. Carla había tocado un tema delicado.

—Da igual — dijo Jackie al sentir el repentino cambio—, tal vez eres un genio de la chingada, pero lo que sé es que estás loca chica. ¡Tienes un chingado desorden aquí!

—Okey, deja te explico. ¿Has visto esos postes tallados falsos que pusieron a la mitad de la avenida en Spadina? ¿Por el barrio chino? Bueno, se ven de mal gusto ahí, pero se supone que

son postes para anuncios. Hace tiempo la gente los utilizaba para poner mensajes contra el gobierno y cosas por el estilo. Así que mi instalación es para rescatar... Por supuesto, los postes de electricidad también se utilizan para poner avisos como volantes y así... Bueno, todavía tengo que pensarlo bien, pero...

Entre pausas, Tuyen explicó su plan para hacer un asiento con una polea para poder moverse de arriba abajo por todo el *lubaio*, gravando e incrustando figuras y señales. Una vez que la instalación, su más ambiciosa hasta ahora, estuviera ubicada, tenía pensado hacer que el público pusiera mensajes en el *lubaio*. Mensajes para la ciudad.

Jackie comenzó a hacer como que roncaba.

—En cualquier caso, suena muy interesante cariño pero... —dijo, haciendo una pausa deliberada—, los veo después. Mucho después. Tengo cosas que hacer.

Tuyen era fiel, tan fiel como se podía ser a una persona, a Carla; ella le recordaba a una pintura de Remedios Varo que le encantaba, *La rabia del gato*. Al ver la pintura de Remedios Varo se puede ver a Carla, sin el gato pero con la electricidad, pura energía cinética, pura energía sobrenatural de otro mundo. Así es como Tuyen la veía, y de verdad tenía un gran parecido con la chica en la pintura de Remedios. Su cara fantasmal, los pómulos altos, el cabello rojizo y rizado, aunque en el caso de Carla esto se debía a la genealogía de su padre y no a la electricidad, al igual que los tonos oscuros en su piel. Pero el aspecto de sorpresa en su cara, la mirada de asombro y astucia, eso era una alquimia que le pertenecía a ella por completo. Tuyen podía ver, con razón, que Carla vivía en un mundo de fantasía, de distancia, de sueños. Su bicicleta, igual que los aparatos con ruedas que inventaba Remedios, se extendía de sus huesos mientras ella se abría camino pedaleando por la ciudad, su abrigo de invierno color amarillo sol y su bolsa de

mensajería a la espalda que se inflaba como si fuera una vela; y el smog de la ciudad envolviéndola parecía pintado como calcomanía. Era por todo eso que a Tuyen le gustaba Carla. La energía escondida, los pequeños choques secretos en lugares discretos. Cada vez que encontraba a Carla en su departamento de al lado apenas amueblado, parada muy quieta como si estuviera a la mitad de una conversación con gente invisible, la observaba en silencio. Si fuera a pintar a Carla, y ya lo había intentado, lo haría copiando cada una de las pinturas de Varo.

En cada una de las instalaciones de Tuyen, ya tenía seis y cada vez ganaba más fama en el mundo del arte de vanguardia, se encontraba la figura o algún aspecto de Carla. A veces su ojos con sus pestañas exuberantes, a veces su boca con su intenso y sobrio puchero. Y con cada instalación su representación de la figura de Carla se hacía más erótica, la manera en la que pintaba la pendiente de la mejilla de Carla o su tobillo o su espalda, como si fuera su amante.

Tuyen había estado atraída a ella desde el primer día de preparatoria. Las dos eran chicas listas con mucha energía, que mantenían la calma en clase y que aun así siempre tenían una repuesta excéntrica pero correcta si se les preguntaba algo. Como cuando Carla dejó escapar en clase que *Matar un ruiseñor* era sensiblero y embarazoso y no entendía porque la gente tiene que sentir lástima para hacer lo correcto. O cuando Tuyen en voz baja desde el fondo del salón en clase de historia, mientras el maestro hablaba de Normandia en lo que ella consideraba un tono de tedio, dijo que estaba harta de la Segunda Guerra Mundial y que ni siquiera había sido mundial, era Europa, y preguntó sobre qué había pasado en el resto del mundo, ¿es qué alguien más había muerto? ¿Alguien más había hecho algo heroico?

Su amistad se intensificó y expandió para incluir a Oku, un chico estudioso, el día en que le dijo al maestro de educación física, Mr. Gordon, que se fuera al carajo cuando le pidió que le diera una vuelta a la pista. Lo suspendieron por una semana por no disculparse y, como una

cuestión de moral, Tuyen y Carla, e incluso Jackie quien tenía su propia diferente y extraña de ser, decidieron también tomarse la semana libre junto a él. Fue una gran semana. Jugaron videojuegos en la casa de Jackie y la mamá de Jackie les enseñó como jugar euchre con la baraja. Comieron pizza en Joe's sobre College Street, se drogaron con un pequeño churro que los hizo reírse de todas las cosas y todas las personas que vieron. Eso fue en el segundo año de preparatoria. Ahora esa amistad, creada por su oposición a la manera en la que se hacían las cosas y la extrañeza que compartían, los mantenía unidos.

Compartían de todo: dinero, ropa, comida, ideas; todo excepto detalles familiares. Todos daban por sentado que sus familias eran aburridas y nada interesantes y en general una gran molestia, mejor mantenerlas escondidas, y no podían esperar a terminar la preparatoria para poder salirse de sus casa. Tan solo de vez en cuando suspiraban con resignación a causa de alguna ridícula petición de sus familias para integrarse y dejar de causar problemas.

—Claro, Ma. ¡Me compraré una peluca rubia y verás que fácil me integro! —Tuyen le gritó a su madre una vez. A lo que su madre respondió con una mirada de dolor y le dijo que dejara de hacer bromas y pusiera más de su parte.

Colaboraban en secreto en sus intentos de distanciarse lo más que pudieran de la irracionalidad, la ignorancia, los secretos y la locura de sus padres. Siempre llevaban con ellos un aire de tormento e impaciencia sobre lo que pasaba en sus casas. “¡Pero bueno!” era su señal para olvidarse de todas las horas que habían pasado desde que habían ido a casa y su regreso a la escuela.

Solitarios incluso antes de conocerse, pasaron sus años de preparatoria sin involucrarse, aburridos con los prejuicios adolescentes del salón de clase. No podían ver el momento de salir de la escuela, donde se habían dado cuenta desde temprano, incluso desde el tercero año de

primaria, que nada ahí se relacionaba con ellos. Sus padres no entendían nada, los habían abandonado en la hostil esfera pública que ni ellos mismos podían manejar pero de la que esperaban que sus hijos terminaran con buenas calificaciones y bien adaptados. Así que los cuatro se habían instalado como espectadores de los niños blancos de su generación.

Tuyen había notado la cuchilla del cuerpo de Carla, parecida a una guadaña, flexible y aguda, su extraña voz susurrante, y de manera inmediata se enamoró de ella. Cuando Carla soñaba despierta en clase, absorbida por un instante lejano en el que escuchó una silla caer, Tuyen le daba un codazo si el maestro le estaba hablando. Porque Tuyen podía ver una semejanza. En casa, ella también se sentía atrapada por una pena que iba y venía. Esto fue lo que las acercaba. Las dos tenían esa tranquilidad de quien ha visto; el sentimiento de vivir en dos dimensiones, la apariencia de estar en el borde, junto a la puerta escuchándolo todo.

Todos, Tuyen, Carla, Oku y Jackie, se sentían como si vivieran en dos países, el de sus padres y el propio, cada vez que se sentaban obedientemente a la mesa con un banquete de historias de cómo era la vida antes “allá en mi tierra”, y cuando escuchaban descripciones inspiradoras de otras casas, otros paisajes, otros cielos, otros árboles, se aburrían. Creían que sus padres tenían escamas en los ojos. A veces querían gritar, “¡Pues ya no estás *ahí!*” Pero si alguno de ellos tenía la audacia de decirlo, de seguro recibirían como respuesta una cachetada o una mirada desanimada, y un horrible silencio de decepción invadía el cuarto. Cada uno dejaba su casa por las mañanas como si estuvieran empezando un largo viaje, desenredándose de las algas pertenecientes a otras costas que envolvían a sus padres. Pasando la puerta, dejaban atrás el sonambulismo de sus madres y padres y corrían a través de los límites desapercibidos de la ciudad, deslizándose sobre hielo para llegar a su lugar de nacimiento: la ciudad. Ellos habían nacido en la ciudad pero de gente nacida en otro lugar.

Tan solo una vez, hace tiempo, Tuyen había compartido un detalle familiar con Carla. Una carta escrita por su madre.

Estimado My Phoung

*Usted no sabe qué tan abierto está mi corazón. ¿Usted ha visto a mi hijo Quy?
Estoy en esperanza de que esté a salvo con usted. Daré cualquieras cosas que
tenga para verlo. Mi día es nada...*

Pero antes de que Carla pudiera seguir leyendo, Tuyen ya había tomado la carta, metiéndola en su bolsa, “Pero bueno... mi madre está loca, ¿no?” Carla sonrió de manera incómoda, y no volvieron a hablar de ello. Después de eso actuaron como si nada hubiera pasado, pero la naturaleza inacabada del accidente las hizo más cercanas de una manera protectora. Cuando se trataba de sus familias tan solo podían llegar a conclusiones a medias, hacer inferencias a medias, por el miedo de saber lo que en verdad se encontraba ahí.

El padre de Tuyen era dueño de un restaurante en Elizabeth Street en donde la mayoría de los clientes y el personal sólo hablaban vietnamita. De pequeña, Tuyen se rebeló contra esta lengua, rehusándose a hablarla. A los cinco años pasó por una etapa donde se hacía llamar Tracey porque no le gustaba nada que fuera vietnamita. Solía sentarse en la caja registradora, sus piernas colgando del banco, regañando a gente mayor que ella para que hablaran inglés: “¡inglés!, ¡inglés!” les gritaba. De adolescente se cortó el cabello ella misma en mechones irregulares, rapándose el lado izquierdo y dejando que el resto cayera a la derecha sobre sus ojos. Su madre lloró, lamentándose por el perfecto y abundante cabello que Tuyen había masacrado. Ya incluso en esa época desobedecía las advertencias de Bo de quedarse cerca de la casa, registrando de noche las playas, las vías de tren, y los sitios de construcción en busca de cualquier madera

desatendida. Decía que iba ser arquitecta, y de hecho pasó dos años en el instituto aprendiendo delineado. Lo abandonó antes de terminar y comenzó a tomar escultura en el colegio de arte, pero también abandonó eso, quejándose de que la gente ahí eran unos idiotas vulgares y sin talento que sólo querían hacerle la barba a los profesores y seguir lo convencional.

Después de decirles a los otros sobre sus escapadas nocturnas a las zonas de obras y a las vías de tren, los llevo con ella. A todos les gustaba ir a las vías de tren con un doce pack, algo de marihuana y una grabadora.

Ella era la más aventurera de sus amigos. A los dieciocho, Tuyen ya se había mudado de la casa de sus padres para vivir arriba de la tienda en College Street. Se consideraba una artista avant-garde, a veces hacía instalaciones en pequeñas galerías sobre Queen Street West. Con su cara iluminada, sus ojos oscuros siempre curiosos, sus brazos elegantes con pulseras plateadas, se convirtió en una figura omnipresente en el ámbito del arte alternativo, vestida de manera dramática en las ropas que ella misma hacía. Usaba camisetas bordadas sin mangas para presumir los músculos en sus hombros, bien marcados por su trabajo en las elaboradas instalaciones, en las que perfeccionaba sus habilidades de carpintería, tallado y pintura. Tuyen era andrógina, una mezcla bella y perfecta de lo femenino y masculino, su cara de líneas elegantes y suaves. Durante los inviernos usaba su gran impermeable que había encontrado hurgando por una tienda de artículos usados.

Había ratones corriendo por el techo de los departamentos, de día y de noche, pero a ellos nos les importaba, todo era mejor que estar en sus casas. El casero, una tal Mrs. Chou, no cuidaba el lugar, no barría los pasillos y no pintaba. Carla y Tuyen tenían que reparar todo lo que estuviera roto ellas mismas, como las rondanas en cada lavabo, los azulejos rotos del baño y los fusibles quemados. La Mrs. Chou llamaba a los cuartuchos que rentaba unidades con una

recamara, pero eran apenas una habitación con un separador, la más diminuta cocina integral y un baño en el que tenías que dejar la puerta abierta para poder sentarte en el excusado. Ni a Carla ni a Tuyen les importaba. Carla estaba más que eufórica cuando el departamento junto al de Tuyen estuvo disponible. La primer cosa que compró fue un estéreo para poder escuchar a los Fugees, Missy Elliot y Lil' Kim y bailar. Durmió sobre el piso desnudo durante los primeros meses, con el estéreo resonando en sus sueños, la luz intensa encendida. Tuyen se preguntaba como Carla podía dormir con todo ese ruido, con toda esa luz.

Los departamentos de Tuyen y de Carla se convirtieron en lugares de refugio, no tan sólo para sus amigos más cercanos sino para toda la gente que conocieron en el camino a sus veinte. Como los Chicos del Graffiti al otro lado del callejón, los amigos de Tuyen del barrio gay, unos cuantos poetas de hip-hop, dos chicas que hacían joyería y tejían sombreros, y una variedad de veinteañeros que hacían varias cosas como música y trabajar de meseros. Los dos deteriorados departamentos estaban arriba de una tienda de ropa barata. La Mrs. Chou sólo se aparecía para cobrar la renta y decir, "Sin fiestas", pero además de esas visitas predecibles, Carla y Tuyen podían reinar libremente el lugar. Cuando si tenían fiestas, ambos departamentos y el pasillo estaban llenos de humo y música, botellas de cerveza y voces hablando alto sobre música aún más alta. Una nube de humo colgaba del techo y soplaba su camino hacia las escaleras. La gente no se iba a sus casas por días hasta que Tuyen o Carla, casi siempre Carla, regresaba del amigable viaje del éxtasis para encontrar su cabeza en el excusado o a algún idiota con sus zapatos en su cama y los sacaba a todos. Una vez, bajo el efecto de hongos mágicos, Tuyen vio cada detalle en la madera de las escaleras, vio que pasando la madera había un brillo como de carbón naranja, y durante toda una semana después las escaleras se sentían calientes y quemaban.

Carla tenía rachas de limpieza, que tan solo podían ser descritas como violentas, durante las cuales lavaba y lavaba su apartamento y tiraba cosas en perfecto estado como platos y cuchillos. Tuyen no tenía ese tipo de tendencias. El apartamento de Tuyen servía también como una galería de arte para sus instalaciones. Los objetos descartados por Carla podían ser luego encontrados en algún tipo de creación artística.

Las posesiones de Tuyen, su ropa, sus cacerolas y trastes y demás, estaban dispersos en pequeños montones alrededor del *lubaio* en crecimiento en su departamento. Estos objetos, su ropa, sus trastes, arrojados por todo el piso, sólo ocultaban pequeñas construcciones afiladas, parte de una idea previa para construir un *hutoung* en miniatura, y una idea aún más vieja de terrazas de adobe y otra idea simultánea de *wenshou* ornamentales: monstruos y leones, caballos y peces, aves fénix, todos animales mágicos; algunos de los cuales se los dio a sus amigos cuando su abundante cantidad amenazaba con atiborrar incluso su propio sentido del espacio. Estos últimos los hizo de madera o esteatita o barro, y estaban dispersos de manera numerosa por toda la habitación. Al final, y de cierta manera relacionado, había decidido hacer el *lubaio*.

Tuyen había tomado en secreto una carta más del escondite de su madre como si fuera un *wenshou* mágico. Había memorizado esa carta y luego devuelto, la única con la letra de su padre, dirigida al director del Campamento Chi Ma Wan poco después de que la familia llegara a Toronto.

Querido Señor,

Hemos perdido a nuestro hijo como usted sabe. Estuvimos seis meses en el Campamento Chi Ma Wan. Estoy preguntando para saber si tienen ahí un registro de él. ¿Llegó él después de que nos fuimos? En caso de que llegue al campamento, aquí hay algo de dinero para su pasaje y una pequeña cantidad para conseguirle leche dulce. También este sombrero

que le pertenece a su Bo, él lo reconocerá. Por favor cuide de él hasta que pueda estar con nosotros.

Con respeto para usted, Vu Tan

Tuyen no tenía idea de que iba a hacer con estas cartas, pero las buscaba en el cuarto de su madre cuando visitaba y las sostenía como adornos y figuras curiosas de un tiempo pasado.

A escondidas había derribado la pared entre su cuarto y la cocina, haciendo el espacio más amplio para sus instalaciones. Si había algo bueno sobre las pocilgas de departamentos de la Sra. Chou era que los techos eran altos. El oscuro cuarto de Tuyen era una gruesa cortina negra de terciopelo. Los trastes estaban en la bañera ya que los incontables pinceles estaban en el lavabo. La arquitectura china, decía ella, desde hace años, no usaba paredes como soporte; eran columnas lo que se utilizaba, decía. Evitaba las visitas de la Mrs. Chou, instalando nuevas cerraduras y utilizando a Carla como su vigilante por cualquier posible redada de la Mrs. Chou. Prácticamente había destruido el departamento. Si en algún momento se mudaba, tendría que hacerlo muy pasada la noche y rápido y sin dejar ningún rastro.

Aun frustrada y un poco alterada por su hermano, Tuyen tocó a la puerta de Carla. ¿Por qué, se preguntó, todavía sentía que tenía que estar en esta guerra infantil con Binh?

—Mira lo que tengo —dijo, cuando Carla abrió.

—¡Oh, genial! —dijo Carla, tomando las dos bolsas de plástico con comida que Tuyen le ofrecía.

—¿Sí? ¿Y qué obtengo yo?

—Abrazos —dijo Carla, abrazándola con gratitud—, pero en realidad deberían ser para tu hermano.

—Ni siquiera me lo menciones. Estoy tan encabronada con él

—¿Por qué? Ojala yo tuviera un hermano como él

—Oh, tú *no* lo conoces. Es tan manipulador...

—Pues te lo cambio por el mío si quieres —. El tono de Carla anunciaba malas noticias.

—Perdón, ¿qué paso ahora?

—Lo tienen en Mimico de nuevo. Robo de vehículo a mano armada.

—¡Uf! ¡Dios!

—Maldito robo de vehículo. ¿Cómo se supone que arregle eso?

—¿Y por qué tienes que ser tú quién lo arregle?

—Porque él es mío

Tuyen experimento un peculiar sentimiento, como si estuviera traicionando a su propia sangre, al escuchar la palabra “mío”. Binh le había preguntado más o menos lo mismo: ¿qué no quería saber qué le había pasado a su hermano? ¿Qué no quería que ese vacío anómalo en su vida, en *sus* vidas, se llenara de alguna substancia o algún cuerpo en específico? ¿Qué no sentía ese sentimiento de pérdida, por no llamarlo fatalidad, envolviendo su niñez?

Carla se había movido para ir a ver por la ventana, y temblando por estos pensamientos Tuyen cruzó el cuarto para ir con ella. Miró el delgado músculo en el cuello de Carla temblar como el tallo de un tulipán. Quería acariciarlo, quería poner sus labios en él. Y luego moverse a su boca, ahora en con un gesto fruncido y de mala gana, que quería cambiar con besos a esa sonrisa flexible que sabía estaba ahí. Al tocar el hombro de Carla de manera suave, como si tuviera miedo de romperlo con su deseo, dijo, “Estará bien. No te preocupes”.

Capítulo tres

Carla se despertó con el sonido del tranvía que pasaba por College Street. El diminuto departamento estaba ya hecho un horno. Había dormido hasta tarde. Podía oír a Tuyen todavía cincelando en su *lubaio* de madera en el cuarto de al lado, e imaginó en su cara un gesto de intensidad, las virutas en su cabello, batallando contra sus demonios, martilleándolos sobre el poste de madera, con el olor siempre presente de café que invadía la habitación.

Pasó un tiempo antes de que sus ojos se aclararan lo suficiente para poder ver el reloj. Las diez de la mañana. Ya era tarde. Maldición. La idea la alarmó por un brevísimo segundo. El resto de la habitación se reveló por completo ante ella. Escuchó al hombre desenrollando el toldo del escaparate de la tienda de abajo. Su mente se sentía confundida como si hubiera estado bebiendo; recordó, sí, pero sólo una cerveza. De nuevo, ese breve sentimiento de alarma. Estaba con medio cuerpo fuera del futón, su cabeza en el piso. Así es como se despertaba cada mañana, doblada, como si hubiera estado en una gran pelea mientras dormía. Se escuchó rechinar el toldo de la tienda. La luz de un sol nublado ya había llenado el departamento. Se esforzó para poder levantarse, pero una flojera la envolvía. No era la flojera del sueño sino de la conciencia. Desplomándose otra vez sobre el futón, recordó el día anterior.

Había llegado a casa exhausta, arrastrando su bicicleta por las sucias escaleras. Estaba chorreando en sudor. Había pedaleado tan rápido y por toda la ciudad, desviándose de su ruta, quemando esa luz blanca dentro de su cuerpo. Primero a través del pequeño suburbio residencial de Etobicoke, que se parecía a las tierras baldías de una ciudad alienada con sus edificios bajos como sin terminar, los trechos de calles sin creatividad, los signos de la árida apariencia del invierno que ya ha pasado presentes en todo, la gente con un aspecto desgastado, como náufragos.

Estaba pedaleando para alejarse del instituto penal de Mimico, a donde había ido a visitar a su hermano, Jamal. Su visita tan solo había aumentado la mezcla de enojo y miedo que había sentido durante las últimas dos semanas. No le gustaba esta parte de la ciudad, no tan sólo a causa de Jamal sino porque por alguna razón parecía estar oprimida. Una periferia desolada: vías de tren, trozos de plazas comerciales y una prisión guardada como un secreto. Ajustando la marcha de la bicicleta dejó atrás esta desolación, dirigiéndose al centro. Cuando pasó la intersección de Runnymede, el brillo seguía en su cuerpo, abrasador y húmedo. La luz vespertina era intensa para ser primavera. El sol del oeste caía sobre su cabeza con un ángulo muerto mientras pedaleaba hacia el este, esquivando coches, desafiando semáforos sin pensar. La ciudad estaba vívida. Cada espectacular chillaba felicidad y entusiasmo. Los coches, la intensidad de las multitudes en su esto y aquello dentro de comercios, de compre esto, obtenga aquello, las pequeñeces de deseos y necesidades pasajeras. A pesar de lo rápido que pedaleaba, todavía podía distinguir la particularidad de cada objeto o persona que veía, de tan aguda y abrasadora que era la luz a su alrededor, hormigueando en su piel. ¿Podía alguien verla? ¿Bañada en estos rayos?

La prisión detrás de ella tenía una lentitud paralizante; una peligrosidad, una peligrosidad que era tan rutinaria como petrificante. Esa misma pereza se podía ver en la apariencia de Jamal en la cabina de visita. Había estado en la sala de espera con el guardia de la recepción, quien parecía estar crónicamente escéptico de todos los que entraban, crónicamente lleno de odio. Por qué Jamal la hacía pasar por esto, no podía entenderlo. Por qué, simplemente no podía entender, quería él sufrir con esto, y más aún, por qué la hacía sufrir a ella.

Se precipitó hacia la exclusiva región de High Park, con sus casas al estilo antiguo inglés. La gente que vive en ellas con sus pequeñas vidas ordenadas la asqueaban aun más de lo usual ahora que acababa de dejar a su hermano. Las lindas tiendas costosas, el caparazón de riqueza

parecía no ser afectado por su cuerpo iluminado. El manubrio de la bicicleta era como parte de sus huesos, y al igual que sus huesos giró los frenos en dirección al parque. Tal vez ahí podría quemar el ritmo de sus piernas subiendo las pendientes y a través de los árboles. Pero antes de darse cuenta ya estaba fuera del parque. Los arboles no se quedaron con nada. El bien cuidado círculo de flores, el falso oasis del parque, tan solo la asqueaban más. En pocos minutos estaba de vuelta sobre Bloor Street, pedaleando al este a toda velocidad hacia el centro de la ciudad, abalanzándose para cruzar los semáforos de Keele y doblando al sur hacia el lago; el claxon vociferante y los frenos neumáticos de un tráiler estremecieron su sinuosa espalda, pero no se detuvo ante el camionero que la maldijo a toda voz. Dejó el drama del estupefacto conductor y del tráfico descarriado detrás de ella. Si pudiera detenerse, lo hubiera hecho, pero ella era luz y la luz se mueve.

Su estómago siempre estaba en un nudo cuando Jamal estaba cerca. Ya tenía dieciocho años, por el amor de dios. ¿Por qué todavía no podía cuidar de sí mismo? ¿Por qué siempre esperaba que ella fuera a rescatarlo? ¿Y por qué existía esta ansia incontrolable dentro de ella, este miedo frenético cuando se trataba de él, como si tuviera que evitar que él cayera, como si tuviera que cuidarlo como se cuida a un bebe con su descuido infantil?

De repente se dio cuenta de la música. Esto la confundió hasta que recordó que había encajado los pequeños audífonos de su reproductor de CD a sus oídos y lo había prendido tan pronto dejó el edificio. Oku le había prestado “Take it as It Comes” de Dizzy Gillespie. Los céfiros de trompetas y saxofones aparecieron como una marea sobre ella en Dundas Street. En el momento en el que sonaron las trompas sintió el lago y aceleró calle abajo para llegar a Roncesvalles. Normalmente la bicicleta saltaba al cruzar las vías del tranvía, pero hoy no las podía sentir, se sentía resbalando sobre luz por la ciudad. Pedaleó siguiendo la orilla del lago

sintiéndose translúcida. El sol estaba sobre el lago, convirtiendo su habitual aspecto turbio a un azul perlado que se extendía amplio hacia el sur. Carla alzó su espalda de su posición encorvada, sintió una pequeña brisa de esperanza.

—¿Cómo puedes dejar que otros abusen de ti de esa manera y te digan que hacer cada minuto del día Jamal?

Habían estado sentados uno frente al otro de manera incómoda, con una pared de plexiglás separándolos.

—¿Abusar de mí? A mí nadie me abusa —No le había entendido, pensó que se refería de manera sexual—. Fantasma, así es como me llaman aquí, ¡pa que sepas Carla! ¡Crees que soy un maricón! Los maricones aquí me hacen los mandados, ¡pa que sepas!

Se jaló el cuello de su traje gris para mostrarle la marca de una áspera y fea G en su pecho, debajo del hombro izquierdo. No era un tatuaje, sino más bien la marca de una cicatriz protuberante que todavía no cerraba. Era del color de un rojo enfurecido, algunas partes todavía supurando. Ella reprimió un grito ahogado. Su cara presentaba esa máscara del hermano que ella no reconocía. No entendía por qué él insistía en hablar de esa manera, algo que había aprendido con sus amigos en las calles. Lo hacía para adquirir malicia. Se enojaba cuando hablaba así con ella, como si no lo conociera, como si no fuera ella quien prácticamente lo había criado.

—Es que no lo entiendes, no lo entiendes para nada, ¿no es así? ¿Qué sentido tiene?

—¡*Cho*, a volar! —dijo, tratando de impresionar a su compañero de celda en la cabina de al lado—. ¡Yo no me rajo, Carla!

Parecía que todas sus conversaciones en los últimos años habían sido conversaciones de confusiones delibradas. Ella no podía hablarle de manera clara o encontrar manera de hacerle entender y él parecía no entenderla a propósito.

—¿Te das cuenta de dónde estás de nuevo? Y esta vez no te puedo sacar. ¡Robo de vehículo a mano armada, Jamal! ¿Y ahora qué va a pasar? Dime —. Sabía que estaba pronunciando claramente cada palabra, negando el vocabulario descubierto por él. Quería traerlo de vuelta de ese mundo de sueños en el que él parecía estar—. No me dejan pagar tu fianza, y él no contesta el teléfono. ¿Ahora qué?

—¡Gallina él! ¿Yo pedirle a *ése* algo?”

“Ése” es como ambos le decían a su padre cuando no estaba delante, desde que eran pequeños. “Ésa” para Nadine, aunque Nadine de hecho si había sido la mamá de Jamal. Carla la llamaba “ésa” y Jamal, a medida que crecía, de mala gana había empezado a hacerlo.

—¿Y a quién más puedo hablarle? Soy yo la que tiene que estar preguntando. Tú me pusiste en esta posición. ¿Quién más, eh?

Él siguió con su malhumor así que ella se despidió, prometiendo dejarle algo de dinero en la oficina. Ya no podía esperar para montarse en su bicicleta y pedalear lejos de él. Lo dejó parado ahí, su boca en una mueca de berrinche como un bebe, lo usual. A medida que pedaleaba se lo imaginó todavía parado ahí, esperando a que ella se diera la vuelta y regresara, pero lo único que podía hacer era correr, y lo único que podía encontrar era ese profundo pozo de calor y frío.

Los músculos de carreteras y calles convergían en el lago. A lo largo de todos los pasos a desnivel, el grafiti marcaba las vigas de concreto. Podía reconocer las firmas tags; los chavos que vivían al otro lado del callejón frente a su departamento eran graffiteros. El cerdo sonriente de

Kumaran, la inicial de “soplón” de Abel, luego el desierto de Keeran y el relámpago de Jericho. Se sintió algo animada, aunque ya les había pedido varias veces que pintarán algo diferente si iban a hacerlo toda la ciudad. Cualquiera cosa. Prácticamente habían llenado todas las paredes de la ciudad con estos cuatro símbolos, mientras que ella esperaba que pintarán una jungla floreciendo o una playa, aquellos lugares a los que su mamá, Angie, había soñado con ir pero nunca pudo. Pero ella amaba la ciudad. Le encantaba pedalear a través de su cuello, las vigas triangulares ahora poseídas por los graffiteros. Adoraba el sentimiento de peso y balance que le daba.

Jamal no veía la ciudad como ella lo hacía. Para él, su vida se encontraba en su piel, en su boca, en sus ojos, en los encuentros físicos más cercanos. A Carla le parecía que él tan solo actuaba de acuerdo a sus sentidos. Pero ella veía la ciudad como un conjunto de obstáculos que había que cruzar y rodear, evitar y dejar pasar. Él la veía como un lugar en donde enredarse. Por qué él no podía ver un poco más allá de sus narices, se preguntaba, una necesidad por encima de la propia, mientras cruzaba y flotaba bajo las circunvalaciones de la carretera. Todo tenía una inmediatez para Jamal, todo en el momento. Así que tenía que aprender, como ella lo había hecho. Yendo contra la circulación del tránsito de la hora pico que hacía su camino hacia la autopista, ocupada sacando carros de la ciudad, ella pedaleaba a un ritmo demoníaco. Mierda, mierda, mierda. Tenía que dejar de pensar, tan solo pedalear, tan solo seguir, seguir, seguir.

Sus piernas eran de plomo para cuando por fin arrastro la bicicleta por las escaleras. Sus muslos eran rocas. Era como si, por el simple hecho de haberse detenido, se hubiera convertido en plomo, como si la lentitud de la prisión la rodeara de nuevo. Si hubiera seguido estaba segura que hubiera volado, pero su propio peso y la idea de su hermano en el penal de Mimico la

aplastaban de nuevo. Se bañó con agua fría hasta que sus dedos se entumecieron, y luego se envolvió en una áspera toalla. Goteando y entre ardiendo y congelándose, había escrito algo en su cabeza. Pensó que lo había escrito en un papel así que lo buscó de manera frenética sin poder encontrarlo. Sus manos eran inútiles, entumecidas y reseca por la larga ducha; intentó ponerse una camisa pero no podía encontrar el cuello. Se sentó desnuda al lado de la ventana, congelándose y derritiéndose.

Ya habían pasado seis meses desde la última vez que había visto a Jamal. Se había convencido a sí misma de que si no lo veía, si no oía de él, si él no le llamaba, entonces todo estaba bien, de que él estaba bien donde sea que se encontrara. Le tenía miedo a sus llamadas, sobre todo aquellas a la mitad de la noche; no podía entender porque siempre tenía que meterse en problemas a la mitad de la noche. Así que ya habían pasado seis meses y ella no había hablado de manera directa con él; pero si había escuchado de él. Había dejado dos mensajes en su contestadora, en uno se le escuchaba dulce: “Carla, tan solo quiero que sepas, verás, que de verdad te amo y que aprecio todo lo que has hecho. Estoy bien. Tan sólo llamo porque ¿ya ves cómo, eh, siempre dices que te hablo cuando tengo problemas?” Rió. “Quería decirte que estoy bien y, ya sabes, solo para saber si tú...” La siguiente vez sonaba eufórico: “C, carnala, lo estoy arreglando todo. Todo va chido, increíble.” Había empezado a sentirse segura pero debió de habérselo imaginado, cuando él sonaba eufórico es que algo iba a pasar.

La siguiente vez que tuvo noticias fue de un abogado de oficio quien llamó para preguntar si ella podía pagar la fianza. Después fue una llamada por cobrar donde él sonaba avergonzado: “Ah, C, carnala, este, bueno, ya ves, creo que estoy en problemas, me entiendes.” Ella se quedó en silencio, se rehusaba a seguirle el juego. Por alguna razón, cada vez que él se metía en problemas, ella siempre se culpaba. Ella le hacía una pregunta incrédula como, “¿Qué

rayos estabas pensando, Jamal?”. Y él se ofendía como si fuera su derecho y como si ella estuviera preguntando algo sin sentido y ya debería saber que no era la culpa de él, para nada. Simplemente me sucedió, decía él, o que en realidad habían sido los chavos con los que estaba. Era un soñador. Ella no dudaba de que en verdad le hubiera sucedido; él estaba, a comparación de ella, dispuesto a que las cosas le sucedieran.

Le contó historias complicadas de cómo estaba en el lugar equivocado en el momento equivocado, sabes, él y sus amigos sólo estaban pasando el rato en el parque, platicando, fumando un porro, y otros chavos de Flemington Park llegaron y así nada más comenzaron una pelea por una chica y él no quería involucrarse así que se hizo a un lado y de repente la policía llegó y sin razón se fueron contra él y sus amigos mientras los otros chavos se escapaban. Otra historia era sobre un tipo que le debía algo de dinero y cuando fue a recogerlo, justo en ese momento la novia del chico lo delató a la policía y ellos llegaron y empezaron a hacerle preguntas, a él, no al tipo, diciendo que había una orden de arresto en su contra porque no se había presentado con su oficial de libertad condicional, “pero eso eran puras mentiras, Carla” y encima de todo los oficiales lo acusaron por oponer resistencia, lo que todo mundo sabía que era un cargo falso. “Carla”, decía, “sabes que resistirse al arresto es un cargo falso, cualquiera te puede decir que cuando un negro es acusado de oponer resistencia, fueron los policías hijos de la chingada los que empezaron, ¿verdad? ¿Verdad, Carla?”

Con Jamal, no tenía sentido intentar ver entre líneas para llegar a lo que de verdad había pasado. Había señales ocultas en todo lo que decía, pero Carla sabía que nunca obtenía toda la verdad. Para empezar, nunca era su culpa. Y aunque era cierto que los policías eran unos hijos de la chingada, Jamal también era problemático y ella lo sabía, era su hermano. Era problemático y negro y por lo tanto esas dos cosas ganaban sobre lo demás cuando las cosas se ponían feas. Ella

intentaba hacerle entender, pero él simplemente no escuchaba. No quería que él terminara muerto o en prisión por el resto de su vida, pero por el amor de dios, esto la estaba cansando. Cuántas veces le había dicho “¿Jamal, te das cuenta de que eres negro, verdad? ¿Sabes lo que eso significa? No puedes estar en el lugar equivocado en el momento equivocado.” Y él le contestaba “C, ¿Crees que soy estúpido o qué? No estaba haciendo nada, C. De veras”.

Esta vez había estado esperando escuchar la saga. Se había quedado callada en el otro lado del teléfono, y cuando él escucho su silencio dijo, “Eh, C, Carla, estuve, pues, me involucraron en un crimen”. Tal vez pensaba que esto tenía un tono oficial y formal, y de seguro creía que estaba diciendo que en realidad no había estado involucrado y que se sabía las “movidas”, como las llamaba, que conocía el sistema y la jerga, y que no le estaba pidiendo ayuda tan sólo porque fuera su hermano sino porque lo habían acusado falsamente. *¡Implicado!* Quería gritarle. Lo quería despellejar vivo, decirle, pequeño mocososo, idiota. No pudiste seguir en la escuela el tiempo suficiente para pasar de año, pero puedes decir que estuviste “implicado” en un crimen. Pero antes de gritarle con toda la rabia que la palabra “implicado” le hacía sentir, colgó el teléfono de manera tranquila.

El abogado le había llamado para preguntarle sobre la fianza y decirle que era mejor si Jamal se declaraba culpable y así entonces lo podrían asignar a un juez que le daría una sentencia leve, o tal vez libertad condicional, aunque eso era menos probable ya que él ya estaba en libertad condicional cuando se le implicó en el crimen; de ahí es donde Jamal debió haber escuchado “implicado”. Y que si había manera de que ella visitara a su hermano para convencerlo de que se declarara culpable, porque si pedía un juicio y se declaraba inocente y gastaba el tiempo del juzgado, entonces en definitiva el juez se molestaría y le daría una sentencia más larga.

Odiaba tener que hablar con estos abogados con aires de superioridad. El tono en sus palabras sugería que sabían mucho más de lo que ella o Jamal sabían, algo genérico, algo inevitable. Así que se vio a sí misma preguntándole con malicia, “¿Y si no es culpable? ¿Debería tan solo declararse como negro?” Hubo un silencio al otro lado del teléfono, a lo que ella respondió, “Te digo después”.

Su hermano era sin duda todo un personaje, pero ella lo defendería contra ese tipo de suposiciones en cualquier momento. Su padre tendría que pagar la fianza esta vez, ella simplemente no tenía ni un centavo o ni donde caerse muerta. Al menos la última vez le había ofrecido vivir con ella, pero eso sólo le había traído problemas, lo que le gustaba de él cuando era un niño ahora le parecía insoportable. No había manera de negociar con él, tú haces esto y yo hago lo otro. Cuando él era más joven ella pensaba que era algo tierno, rompiendo tradiciones estúpidas, siendo honesto, pero ahora lo veía como una incapacidad para demostrar su lealtad o para darse cuenta de su conexión con los demás. O con ella, en realidad. Era ella quien lo había amado más, y pensaba que él vería eso y la amaría de regreso, lo suficiente para...¿para qué? ¿Para qué se comportara? ¿Para qué viviera tranquilo? ¿Para qué? Ella misma no tenía la menor idea... al menos para no estar en problemas. Pero robo a mano armada, ¡Por el amor de Dios! Involucrarse en el robo de un coche a mano armada, ¿qué maldito cuento diría esta vez? Ella misma ya se la sabía: C, yo ni sabía que el coche no era del tipo, él llegó y me dijo que diéramos una vuelta. Esa iba a ser la historia. De nuevo él era el inocente, quien sin darse cuenta había sido arrastrado a una conspiración.

La primera vez que se enteró de la acusación le hablo a su padre, pero Nadine contestó.

—Dios mío. Él no está aquí ahora pero yo le digo. Dime dónde está Jamal, Carla, para poder visitarlo. Dios.

—En Mimico —respondió Carla—. Tienen un horario de visita específico—. No quería prolongar la conversación con Nadine—. Deberías llamar.

—Dios, dios, ese niño.

Quería colgar el teléfono pronto. No podía soportar la histeria de Nadine, ni quería que pareciera que eran amigas. Siempre había existido una incomodidad entre las dos, incluso cuando era una niña, y Carla prefería mantenerlo así. La lealtad a su madre muerta, Angie, se lo dictaba. Nunca sabía que decirle a Nadine así que dijo “adiós” y “nos vemos” y colgó el teléfono antes de que Nadine dijera otra palabra.

Tres horas después su padre aún no había llamado y ella dejó otro mensaje, esta vez en la maquina contestadora. Cuando él tampoco contesto a eso, ella estaba tan furiosa que su cabeza ardía en dolor. ¿Quién carajos se pensaba que era? ¿Cuándo le hablaba para pedirle algo? ¿Cuándo lo necesitaba para algo? Fue en ese momento en que su cuerpo empezó a sentir esa incandescencia. Durante los siguientes dos días podía ver que su cara irradiaba cada vez que se veía en el escaparate de una tienda y una energía cinética nerviosa la mantenía despierta. Finalmente había decidido ir a ver a Jamal y decirle que no había fianza para sacarlo de este problema. Que no lo sacaría de ningún otro problema nunca más.

Sentada junto a la ventana después de la ducha la tarde anterior, fumó para calentarse, prendiendo el cigarro como si todos sus dedos fueran pulgares. Un fantasma, mis nalgas, pensó. Su fantasmagoridad no impedía que los policías lo encontraran. Eso es lo que le quería decir ayer. Maldito fantasma que eres, cada vez que haces una tontería te encuentran. Oh, Fantasma, por qué no simplemente desapareces de mi vida. No, eso no, eso no. Se sintió despreciable después de pensarlo. Fumar no la había calmado. Fumar era una simulación que había

comenzado temprano, durante la preparatoria, en el café en frente de la escuela, Harbord Collegiate, en el parque de Grace Street, donde ella y sus amigos se sentaban en el terraplén, dando caladas y bromeando.

Cuando el teléfono sonó, ella no contestó. ¿Su padre? De seguro no. ¿Tuyen desde el cuarto de al lado u Oku, Jackie? ¿O era Jamal de nuevo, llamada por cobrar? Quien sea que fuera, ella no había contestado en todo el día Y no podía haber sido Jamal, pronto se dio cuenta, si fue también durante la noche. Le había cedido ese privilegio a aquellos en trajes y uniformes. El escucharlo la calmaba de una fría manera. Mientras más sonaba el teléfono, más distante se volvía. Miraba por la ventana, soplando humo hacia el aire.

Tuyen tocó a su puerta. Carla podía escuchar su voz haciéndole preguntas a través de las ranuras, “¿Cómo estuvo Carla? ¿Cómo está él? Vamos, ven y habla conmigo”. La voz de Tuyen fue de suave a áspera a finalmente darse por vencida. Entonces la escuchó regresar a seguir esculpiendo su *lubaio* de madera. No quería contarle sobre eso a Tuyen de inmediato. Tuyen era su mejor amiga, lo compartían todo, pero desde hace tiempo ya habían establecido que algunas cosas, para ambas, no se podían saber, no se podían contar. Tuyen era la que normalmente empujaba y tiraba de estos límites, su curiosidad de artista podía más que sus restricciones. Carla la había ignorado, intentando calentar su cuerpo glacial con su cigarro.

El departamento de Carla era escaso y se hacía cada vez más escaso después de cada visita al departamento de Tuyen. Tenía un futón y tres cojines en el piso, un refrigerador y una estufa diminutos que estaban incluidos en la renta, su estéreo y una pequeña televisión sobre unos cuantos cajones de leche rojos y azules, y su bicicleta que colgaba en la pared. Su ropa, la que mantenía a un mínimo, colgaba en dos closets de manera cuidadosa y sobria. Sus zapatos los dejaba en formación militar fuera de su puerta. No quería meter tierra en su cuarto, y ya que ella

y Tuyen eran las únicas inquilinas en el segundo piso, sus zapatos estaban a salvo. El desorden la asustaba.

La tarde anterior, la calle a la que daba la ventana parecía distante, borrosa, iluminada de manera suave. Había visto a los vagabundos discutiendo, al dueño de la tienda tratando de moverlos de ahí, al hombre que iba a Mars diez veces al día por helado, al hombre de los boletos de lotería, gente sentada en los cafés, la fila de gente cargadas de bolsas de plástico que venían del mercado. Observó y observó hasta que la luz desapareció y las lámparas de las calles se prendieron y el tipo de gente cambió, a excepción de los vagabundos habituales: el hombre que siempre le decía “Que tengas un buen día, que tengas un muy buen día”; la mujer que fumaba de manera compulsiva y que, en sus malos días, proclamaba que era fea a quien estuviera a unos metros; la otra mujer que esperaba en el callejón todos los días para decirle al peatón desprevenido que su perro había muerto; y el hombre bajo e hinchado sin zapatos y con cabello negro. Después observó el atardecer, no el verdadero atardecer sino el que la gente en una ciudad ve, sin valorar que los tintes naranjas rosados que envuelven a los edificios reflejan la luz del sol que desaparece. Así que vio desde su ventana, la falange sin división de edificios carcomerse al sol.

Mucho tiempo después, ella misma carcomida por la mirada de la calle y su marea y el clic eterno de los tranvías, se quedó dormida bajo la ventana. Cuando despertó con la ventana aún abierta, el aire se había vuelto algo frío, y la luz ictericia de la lámpara de la calle le daba en el rostro, le “bendecía” el rostro, como su mamá decía. “Cuando bendigo mis ojos al verte”. ¿Por qué había recordado tal juego de palabras? *Blessed, blessé*, Bendecir, herir. Cuando mis ojos te hirieron, cuando el verte me hirió, ¿cuál de las dos era? Sintió la caricia de la luz, eso la debió haber despertado. La calle era ahora un silencio húmedo. Tal vez eran alrededor de las tres, tal

vez las cuatro de la mañana, ese momento en las mañanas en el que las calles parecen ser ellas mismas, reflexivas, respirando otros aire, tomando otros caminos sin la complicación de la gente.

Se había despertado entonces con una claridad y pensó, *Si esperas que te pueda ayudar*. Se estiró para tomar su cuaderno y lo anotó. La había estado soñando una y otra vez, esta línea de palabras dicha a alguien durante sus sueños. “Si esperas...” haciendo eco durante el resto de la línea “que te pueda conocer, que pueda ver eso que te impulsa, si esperas que tenga que...si esperas ver a Dios en mí...” Bueno, era algo dramático pero no era difícil adivinar a quien estaba dirigido su sueño, pensó, dejando el cuaderno de lado. Deseaba que sus sueños fueran más complicados. Siempre los anotaba pensando que lo eran, y luego los leía en las mañanas sabiendo que no eran parábolas sino solo extensiones de su vida diaria. Deseaba que fueran más ingeniosos, que escondieran un secreto que ella pudiera descubrir en ellos.

Uno de los brazos del *lubaio* de Tuyen llegaba casi hasta la pared donde, del otro lado, se encontraba la cama de Carla sobre el piso. Carla ya se había acostumbrado a escuchar a Tuyen tallando todo el tiempo mientras dormía. La noche anterior había soñado que Tuyen le preguntaba, “¿Qué piensas de esa pared?” Refiriéndose a la que estaba al lado de la cabeza de Carla. Refiriéndose a si podía derribarla también, si podía extender su escultura al departamento de Carla. Si podía guardar las traviesas ferroviarias en su departamento. Carla siempre sueña eso cuando está nerviosa.

La noche anterior quería levantar la cabeza y golpear la pared para que Tuyen dejara de tallar. Pero en cambio simplemente se volteó, colocando su pie contra la pared y soñó, *Si esperas que pueda aliviar algún dolor que sientes...* Lo escribió en sus sueños mientras un pedazo de papel desde el cuarto destrozado de Tuyen flotaba hacia ella. Trató de agarrarlo y, con ese esfuerzo, se despertó, se levantó, la sensación del papel en la punta de sus dedos. Tenía sed así

que fue al refrigerador donde encontró una cerveza y regresó a la cama, cerrando la ventana y tomando su cuaderno.

El sonido del cincel se detuvo por un momento. Ahora, Tuyen estaba escuchándola moverse por el cuarto. Carla relajó su cuerpo de manera discreta sobre la cama; estaba segura de que Tuyen la había escuchado y podía aparecerse, y no quería que eso pasara. Se sentó en silencio, su silencio y la atención de Tuyen balanceando la pared entre las dos. No quería hablar. Esperó de manera furtiva hasta estar segura de que Tuyen entendiera. No quería contarle sobre estar sentada con Jamal en la prisión de Mimico. Su hermano la había mandado a toda velocidad por la ciudad con la lógica aleatoria de un elemento, y ella sentía que se estaba desenredando. Quería que el fuego en su cerebro se aquietara. Oyó que Tuyen cincelaba de nuevo y acercó la cerveza a sus labios, bebiéndola toda en un solo trago como si fuera agua, saciando la sed que el fuego te da.

Al despertarse y ver que parte de ella estaba en el futón y la otra en el piso, y ver que ya se le hacía tarde para el trabajo, Carla decidió no ir. Esa decisión la hizo levantarse de golpe, bañarse y vestirse. Llamaría al Pendejo, así es como le decía al despachador del servicio de paquetería de Allied Swift Packages. De todas formas, ¿cuál era el punto de ir al trabajo? Era lunes y a veces le gustaba tomarse los lunes libres para simplemente moverse en dirección contraria al mundo que se movía tan deprisa enfrente de ella con las preocupaciones de un lunes por la mañana. Nadie quería estar donde estaba, lo que los hacía a todos groseros e infelices. El lunes es el día de los errores, por lo que le alegraba no estar en las calles, su bicicleta serpenteando entre los coches, intentando negociar con puertas abiertas y viéndose comprimida en los carriles para girar a la

derecha. Los lunes prefería caminar. Para el martes la ciudad se había calmado, aceptando el hecho de que tenía que trabajar, de que no había alternativa.

Hoy, hasta ella misma hubiera sido descuidada.

—No puedo ir a trabajar hoy —dijo, sorprendida al escuchar la fuerza en su voz.

—¿Por qué?

—Simplemente no puedo—. Sin poder encontrar una razón convincente que decir además del simple hecho de que estaba retrasada y que apenas se acababa de despertar de un sueño tan inquietante que no le era posible involucrarse con el mundo real. El despachador estaba a la mitad de una oración, “mira Carla, es lunes, necesitamos”, cuando ella lo interrumpió, “te veré si es que te veo”, y colgó. No le importaba si no le daba buenos turnos, no le importaba si mañana cuando llegará la hiciera esperar más que a los demás o le diera encargos cortos. Era lunes y ella quería caminar contra la corriente de la ciudad.

Se lavó la cara de manera compulsiva una vez más antes de partir, intentando borrar la bendición fantasmal de la lámpara en su frente. Se restregó la cara con la toalla, todavía sintiendo el trazo de luz sobre ella, y rápidamente dejó el departamento, intentando ignorar la puerta abierta de Tuyen. Últimamente encontraba que la atención de Tuyen estaba muy concentrada en ella, muy ardiente, muy difícil. Algo estaba cambiando entre ellas, de manera muy leve y se sentía incomoda, sin saber que era.

Rechazando a Tuyen con la mano, fue por un café al Mars deli y se perdió entre la gente en College dirigiéndose hacia Yonge Street.

Capítulo cuatro

La puerta de Tuyen estaba abierta cuando Carla se fue. Todavía estaba golpeando y cincelandos la madera para su escultura, pero también estaba esperando a Carla. La escultura se extendía alta como un tótem sobre todas sus cosas. Estaba trabajando en tallar pequeñas figuras en el cuerpo de la madera. Las figuras estaban de pie o dobladas en incómodas posiciones; algunas no tenían cabeza y parecían estar en agonía extrema, ¿o era euforia?

Estaba consciente de que últimamente se había comportado de manera muy intensa con Carla. No lo podía evitar. Estaba realizando un lento baile de músculos alrededor de Carla, que al principio ni ella misma sabía lo que era en su totalidad. Pero ahora sentía una cierta urgencia, un sentimiento de que Carla comenzaba a compartir más con ella. Pero tal vez sólo era su vanidad, pensó, riéndose de sí misma mientras echaba un vistazo y veía que Carla se movía de manera rápida hacia las escaleras. Tuyen casi dijo algo, después cambió de idea al ver que el cuerpo de Carla estaba pegado a la pared tratando de evitarla. Carla pasó, agitando su mano en un gesto defensivo, rechazando la silenciosa invitación. A pesar de sus instintos, Tuyen corrió hacia la puerta, dirigiendo sus gritos al fondo de las escaleras.

—C, Jackie y Oku van a venir para tomar un café, ¿no te quedas? —Carla hizo un gesto de despedida con la mano—. Vamos. ¿Cómo está Jamal? ¿Está bien? —preguntó—. ¿Te veo después? —dijo con un pequeño tinte de esperanza en la voz—. Tengo algo que preguntarte. ¿Puedo ir contigo? —No pudo evitar decirlo. Carla negó con la cabeza, no.

—Hasta más tarde —, apenas escuchó murmurar a Carla.

La noche anterior Tuyen llamó a Jackie y a Oku para preguntarles si habían hablado con Carla. Les dijo que tenía un mal presentimiento y que Carla no estaba respondiendo al teléfono o la puerta.

—¿Y qué más hay de nuevo? —Jackie contestó—. Ya sabes cómo es ella, bipolar.

Bueno, lo intentaré, ¿okey?

Jackie actuaba despreocupada ante todo, era su manera de no perder la cabeza. Esa despreocupación era superficial, por dentro Jackie estaba arreglando de manera frenética todo el alboroto. Tuyen sabía que Jackie pasaría por su casa, de manera casual, la mañana del día siguiente.

—Oh Tuyen, ¿por qué tanto drama? —le preguntó Oku, cuando por fin consiguió hablar con él después de tener que escuchar qué tan molestó estaba su papá por recibir una llamada tan tarde.

—Bueno, sé que fue a visitar a Jamal, y ya sabes cómo se deprime con eso.

—Sí, es cierto —. Carla había estado tumbada en su futón por una semana la última vez que Jamal estuvo en problemas.

—Dale tiempo hasta mañana. Caigo por tu casa antes de mi clase—. Oku colgó rápidamente, el sonido de su papá en el fondo quejándose de la gente que llamaba a todas horas de la noche.

Ahora los tres se encontraban entre las ruinas del departamento de Tuyen, tan sólo le perdonaban el desorden porque hacía muy buen café. De todas formas, ya todos se habían acostumbrado al desorden y de hecho ayudaba, al llegar a sus casas, después de visitar a Tuyen, comenzaban con entusiasmo una limpieza vigorosa. Tanto Oku como Jackie se dirigieron hacia el sillón desgastado en la esquina, Jackie ganó al dirigir su mirada de diva a Oku.

Jackie se había pintado el cabello de rojo y ahora tenía una tienda de ropa de segunda mano, se hacía llamar “Diva” y saludaba a los clientes de manera efusiva, alagándolos para que compraran de manera excesiva y escandalosa. “Amiga, ¡luces increíble!” decía con entusiasmo,

animando a alguien a comprar el conjunto más inverosímil. Desde que tenía nueve años había empezado a quedarse sola en casa durante las noches, negándose a ir a la casa de Liz Dorry para que ésta la cuidara mientras la mamá y el papá de Jackie se iban de fiesta. Veía canales de moda y música como Fashion-Television, MushMusic y MuchMoreMusic, con programas nocturnos de chisme como “Entertainment Tonight”, “Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous”, “Trading Places”, “Martha Stewart”, “Emeril Live”, y videos de hip-hop en el canal de Black Entertainment Television. Su jerga era tal que incluso sus padres, por más a la moda que estuvieran, no la podían descifrar. Hablaba como una chica fresca, un matón con dinero, como hip-hopera, como alguien de la cultura mod británica, al igual que francés por ver Radio-Canadá. Se había sentado noche tras noche, absorbiendo el lenguaje y la cultura de la televisión, familiarizándose con sus locutores y ciudadanos, cambiando su cara al perfil estilizado de una supermodelo, su sonrisa grande e insolente, sus uñas siempre largas y arregladas, su actitud de sabelotodo, cosmopolita y desdeñosa como la de Naomi Campbell. Tenía un novio alemán, Reiner-Maria, quien teñía su cabello de un negro recargado y usaba cuero de manera siniestra y tocaba la segunda guitarra en un grupo. Su sonido era tipo industrial como el de Ministry, Throbbing Gristle y Skinny Puppy. Jackie había conocido a Reiner rondando la escena industrial que se movía por toda la ciudad, pasando de un ubicuo club que parecía calabozo al otro, durante un período en su vida en el que usaba su vestido negro, sombra de ojos negra, y múltiples perforaciones en los lóbulos. Ninguno de los amigos de Jackie recordaba el nombre de Reiner, así que lo llamaban el novio alemán.

—¿Qué onda?

—Pues que agarraron a Jamal por robar un coche. Bien que lo sabes Oku.

—¿Y yo cómo voy a saber?

—Tú sales con él a veces, ¿no? ¿Allá afuera en la jungla?

—Me lo encuentro, pero no sé en qué anda metido.

—Sí, claro —dijo Jackie escéptica.

—Chale, sabes que soy un adulto, yo no me meto en esa mierda. Esos son sólo chavos haciendo estupideces. Lo checo porque es el hermano de Carla, pero güey, esos chicos sí que están bien metidos en esas cosas.

—¿Así que sí sabes?

—Carajo, ellos saben quién soy. Soy demasiado intelectual para ellos. Tan solo voy para conseguir algo de ganja, ver a unos amigos que conozco, pero ellos son mayores.

—¿Y qué no pudiste hablar con él?

—Lo hice. Pero es un asunto de hombres, ¿sabes?

—¿*De hombres*? ¡No me chingues!

—Sí, un asunto de hombres, Jackie.

—¿Entonces es de hombres ir a la cárcel?

—Es un rito de iniciación en esa cultura, chica. Un rito de iniciación para un joven negro.

—Claro, como no es tu trasero el que está en la cárcel Oku.

—No, pero si me entiendes, ¿no? La policía me puede joder cualquier noche tan sólo por estar caminando en el lugar equivocado. Y eso lo sabes Jackie. No te hagas que no. ¿Qué hablas otro idioma ahora? ¿Te has olvidado de cómo son las cosas?

Oku provocaba a Jackie sobre el chico alemán cada vez que podía. Estaba celoso. Había estado enamorado de Jackie desde el primer año de prepa, pero ella no le prestaba atención, sólo para mandarlo a comprar refrescos y cigarrillos. Era por ella que Oku había comenzado a salir con Carla

y Tuyen, pensando que eran las mejor amigas de Jackie y que así podría llegar hasta ella de cierta forma. Pero a pesar de su fracaso hasta el momento, se habían vuelto amigos cercanos. Oku era un poeta. Vivía en el sótano de sus padres, siempre esperando el momento en el que su padre se fuera para poder saquear el refrigerador de arriba. A su mamá no le importaba, pero su papá le había dicho que aunque nunca le negaría un techo, tenía que trabajar para comer. Llevar a la casa buenas calificaciones de la universidad: ese era su trabajo principal. Su papá también se refería a trabajar renovando casas, como él. Los veranos eran un infierno para Oku. Fitz, su papá, siempre tenía un amigo que podía darle a Oku un trabajo acarreado escayola o aislantes. Oku no soportaba llegar a casa empolvado en yeso y cubierto de pintura y herido por martillos en caída libre. En vez de eso escuchaba a Miles Davis, investigaba los chillidos y bocinazos futurísticos del Conjunto de Arte de Chicago, viajaba por el enredado laberinto del bajo y los tambores del Afro-jazz, una jungla. Lo relacionaba todo al “Epistrophe/y” de Thelonious Monk . Veía a su padre como un hombre, por desgracia, pequeño, de mente estrecha, y un día tal vez se lo diría.

Ninguno de ellos invitaba a los demás a sus casas en esos años de adolescencia. Al único lugar al que fueron una o dos veces fue a la casa de Jackie porque la mamá y el papá de Jackie eran buena onda. O al menos eso pensaban, excepto por Jackie. De hecho, no llevaban nada a casa, ninguna alegría y ningún problema. La mayoría de los días se la pasaban juntos fumando fuera de la escuela, planeando y soñando cada uno sus propios sueños de lo que podrían ser si simplemente pudieran dejar la escuela y salirse de sus casas. Sin más historias de lo que pudo haber sido, no mas diatribas sobre lo que nunca hubiera pasado si estuvieran en casa, allá en el sur, allá en las islas, sobre el mar de la China, ninguna otra frase que inicio en el pasado, un pasado que nunca había sido él de ellos.

Nunca habían sido capaces de ser parte de lo que sus padres llamaban “una vida normal canadiense”. La pieza crucial, por supuesto, era que no pertenecían a la raza necesaria. Aunque eso tampoco garantizaba un salvoconducto y uno también podía doblarse hasta alcanzar la forma requerida; hacerse el lamebotas, hacerse el tonto; actuar como si no sintieras o percibieras el rechazo, como si no pudieras sentir la hostilidad. Simplemente no podían ver esto como una posibilidad de estar en el mundo.

De manera instintiva decidieron que esta era una idea alarmante. “Son unos raros”, Tuyen gritaba mientras describía la mano extendida de su padre mientras le decía “Llévate bien, ¡sí! ¡Júntate con ellos y llévate bien!” Las imitaciones de Tuan que hacía Tuyen provocaban en los demás ataques de risa, aunque después Tuyen se sentía un poco desleal.

—De todas formas —, Tuyen quería regresar al tema de Carla—, sí, sí, Jamal está en la cárcel. ¿Pero y Carla? ¿Qué hacemos?

—¿Y qué podemos hacer, Tuyen? Ya está atorada con el pequeño cabroncito.

—No es un “cabroncito”, Jackie, tan sólo es un chavo negro que se cree hombre y que está tan jodido como el resto de nosotros. Está intentando encontrar su camino, pero simplemente no lo dejan.

—Pues yo soy sólo una chica negra buscando mi camino, y no estoy en la cárcel, ¿okey? ¿Quién rayos son estos “los que no lo dejan”? No me vengas con esa mierda de especies en peligro de extinción porque yo soy una de las especies en más peligro, ¿okey?

—El hombre negro no tiene poder, Jackie

—¡Chingados! Y yo debo ser la reina de Inglaterra. Oku, no empieces con esas estúpidas excusas, güey.

—Pues sí, las mujeres negras no tienen que soportar esta mierda, sabes. Ustedes son fuertes...

—¡Oh, chingada madre! ¡Oh dios! ¡Ahórrame tener que escuchar esa mierda, por favor! ¿Hablas de tu mamá? ¿De la mía? ¿De verdad ves algo de fuerza ahí?

—De todas formas —, Tuyen intentó de nuevo poner la conversación en marcha —. ¡Chicos! Carla, ¿se acuerdan?

—Claro, tú no tendrás ese problema, ¿verdad? Con el niño Nazi.

—Oh, ni te atrevas, ¡no te atrevas a chingarme con eso!

—Estúpida distopía heterosexual.

La riña terminó de manera abrupta. Tuyen por fin había conseguido su atención.

—Distopia heterosexual —, repitió ella—. Que dios me libre de la heterosexualidad.

Todas esas tonterías sobre hombres y mujeres, todo ese odio en carne viva, todo ese caos, incluso la cárcel, ¿para qué? Y ustedes dos, ¿por qué no simplemente se cogen y acabamos con esto?

Los dos estaban asombrados, pero como siempre Jackie sabía que decir.

—Ay mira, no te pongas así querida, tan sólo porque el amor de tu vida, quien ni siquiera te hace caso por cierto, está en esta mierda.

Oku se quedó callado y después dijo:

—Tómalo en serio Tuyen. Estoy hablando de problemas cabrones allá afuera.

—Yo también Oku. ¿Por qué ustedes los hombres apuestan tanto para seguir con esta estupidez? ¿Por qué no hacen huelga?

—¿Huelga?

—Sí, una “chingada” huelga, como diría Jackie. A *fucking strike* contra... contra... la masculinidad. Si no les gusta, si los tortura tanto, ¿por qué no hacen huelga? Renuncien.

Jackie no se pudo contener, escupió rociando su café y se echó a reír con esa fuerte y ondulante risa suya.

—Amiga, eres tan graciosa, me estás matando —dijo Oku fríamente. Se volteó a ver a Jackie con una mezcla de celos, enojo y deseo —. Que chistosita eres.

—Hablo en serio —Tuyen rió. Cuando dejó de reírse preguntó— ¿Pueden quedarse aquí hasta que ella regrese?

—Tengo que ir a hacer dinero chica. Te veo después —. Jackie estaba en camino a su turno vespertino en la tienda —. Mira —dijo cuando llegó a la puerta—, ese chavo siempre estará en problemas. Nunca tendrá las cosas en orden y Carla tiene que entender eso y seguir con su vida. Y tú, deja de esperar a que ella te haga caso. ¡Hablando de distopía! —Le hizo un gesto a Tuyen levantando una ceja, después sonrió de manera picara y se fue.

Oku cruzó el cuarto de un salto y salió por la puerta siguiendo a Jackie.

—Sí Tuyen, tengo que ir a clase —, lo escucho decir con pena mientras llamaba a Jackie. —Oye, Jackie, espérame, no tenía la intención de...

Las últimas palabras de Jackie hicieron sentir incómoda a Tuyen. Es cierto que había estado esperando a que Carla cambiara de opinión. Había aguantado sus depresiones, su atención distante. Todo con una única esperanza.

Carla le había dejado claro a Tuyen que ella era heterosexual, pero Tuyen aún no le creía por completo. Tal vez si la ayudaba lo suficiente, si la escuchaba y la persuadía lo suficiente, tal vez Carla cambiaría de opinión. Las mujeres heterosexuales nunca lo eran tanto como decían, creía Tuyen. Después de todo, ella ya se había acostado con varias mujeres heterosexuales, simplemente había que convencerlas. Y ya había sucedido varias veces, después de una de sus fiestas, en las que se había encontrado en la cama de Carla, abrazándola bajo el pretexto de que

las dos estaban drogadas y borrachas. Lo que Carla utilizaba como excusa para pretender que nada había pasado y para apartarse del cuerpo dormido de Tuyen temprano en la mañana. Tuyen era cuidadosa con ella, sabía que si la presionaba demasiado Carla correría asustada. Siempre tenía miedo de que Carla se decidiera, de que la excluyera por completo. Sabía que Carla era capaz de hacerlo, ya se había distanciado de su papá y de su madrastra. Sólo se preocupaba por su hermano, sin dejar espacio para otras relaciones íntimas. Eran amigas, pero siempre había existido un espacio de despedida donde Carla abandonaba su amistad en alguna región de su cerebro, lo que Tuyen encontraba imposible y al mismo tiempo seductor.

Carla había abandonado a Tuyen en su exploración sexual, diciendo, “No estoy interesada. Simplemente no. No es lo mío, okey”, cuando Tuyen intentaba persuadirla para ir a los clubs gays en Church Street. De manera inocente, Tuyen respondía, “Está bien, tan solo digo que vayamos a bailar. Los heterosexuales también bailan, ¿no? Tan solo es un baile.” Tuyen también dejaba libros como *Frutos de rubí: Crónica de mi vida lesbiana* descuidadamente en el departamento de Carla, esperando que despertaran algún interés latente en ella, pero hasta el momento sus suplicas habían sido rechazadas y se tenía que conformar con exploraciones y caricias en estados de inconsciencia cuando Carla podía pretender amnesia inducida por las drogas o su borrachera.

Era en estas ocasiones cuando Tuyen intentaba mantenerse tan alerta como fuera posible, tan vigilante como pudiera, para poder tomar notas y memorizar los detalles del cuerpo de Carla, las respuestas a sus caricias, el compás de su respiración y los precisos sonidos de sus susurros. Carla siempre decía que sus manos eran agradables y le rogaba que masajeara los nudos en su espalda hasta hacerlos desaparecer, los nudos que se formaban después de andar en bicicleta todo el día. Tuyen siempre se lamentaba cuando se quedaba dormida, pero no podía evitarlo, mientras

acariciaba la espalda de Carla, sus orejas, escuchando a Carla responder a sus caricias con gemidos somnolientos. A la mañana siguiente Carla se despertaba antes que ella y borraba su intimidad sexual con olvido y distancia. Tuyen nunca estaba segura de cómo presionar a Carla, no quería arruinar el ligero entendimiento mutuo que tenían, y sinceramente tampoco quería enfrentar sola el terreno obviamente problemático que era la vida de Carla. Ella tenía su propia “mierda”, como Jakie diría.

Así que sí, Jackie tenía algo de razón, pensó Tuyen. Carla había sido aún más clara con ella después de la última borrachera. Cuando esa mañana Tuyen la había besado de manera juguetona, abrazándola mientras Carla intentaba levantarse, Carla se había apartado de manera abrupta, diciendo, “Maldición Tuyen, ya te dije, eso no me interesa”.

Y Tuyen, herida, le había respondido, “Bueno, me pudiste haber engañado”. Dedujo que había pasado más de lo que en realidad había pasado. Se levantó del futón de Carla y salió, cerrando la puerta con un golpe haciendo su berrinche. Después, pensando que se había comportado de manera infantil, regresó al departamento de Carla donde la encontró en el baño.

—Crees que por que no es sexo, entonces no hay deseo —, le dijo Tuyen. Carla dejó de cepillarse los dientes, miró a Tuyen y siguió cepillando con fuerza —. Lo es, sabes.

—Mira, yo no siento ningún deseo, ¿okey? Tienes que sentir deseo, ¿qué no?

—¿Cómo puede ser que no sientas ningún deseo?

—Simplemente no lo siento. Por nadie.

—O tienes miedo de ello.

—Muy bien Tuyen, piensa lo que quieras —. Carla se enjuagó la boca.

—Digo, no sentir ningún deseo puede significar algo más, sabes. O sea, ¿quién no siente deseo? Y si no tienes ninguno, ¿cómo lo sabes? ¿Cómo puedes estar segura? Todo mundo siente deseo... así que...

—Sé lo que me gusta y lo que no...

—Sí, pero acabas de decir que no sientes ningún deseo, ¿qué no?

—Pues... así son las cosas, ¿okey? No es lo mío.

Tuyen podía sentir que Carla se sentía atrapada, así que lo dejó ir. Tratando de aligerar el momento dijo:

—Okey, heteraza, me voy para que te puedas ir a trabajar.

Carla se dio cuenta de que se le estaba dando una salida fácil y salpicó a Tuyen en la cara con agua de la llave abierta. Tuyen la agarró, la besó en la oreja, dejando que su lengua se entretuviera ahí de manera suave, y se fue a su cuarto. Eso fue una semana antes de que el abogado de Jamal llamará. Desde entontes no había tenido la oportunidad de mencionar esa conversación de nuevo, y ahora Carla se había metido en su capullo depresivo. Las puertas de sus departamentos, una al lado de la otra, normalmente se encontraban abiertas, pero en los últimos días la puerta de Carla se había mantenido cerrada y apenas había hablado con Tuyen sobre lo que estaba sucediendo. Justo cuando pensaba que tenía una ligera ventaja, un pequeño destello de esperanza, Jamal le había robado toda la atención a Tuyen al dejarse arrestar.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Translation Process: Translating Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For*

The importance of translators' commentaries has been supported by a number of translation scholars such as Carol Maier and H  l  ne Buzelin, as addressed previously in the theoretical framework. However, it is important to distinguish between the "experiential" commentaries and those that are more concerned in conflating practice and theory in order to add to the exercise of reflection so crucial for translators and address the invisibility of translation. No matter the nature of the commentary, the simple fact that readers are made conscious that they are reading a translation is a critical first step to shine a spotlight on the field; for readers to know that the text is the product of a different culture and of a series of choices made by the translators. The merging of practice and theory works as a tool before, during and after the translation process. First, it can be of guidance when deciding the texts that should be translated; afterwards it helps in the choices that present themselves during the process, helping the translator to reflect on the different levels of language, ideology, poetics, and discourse that are at play when considering the many available possibilities. Finally, after the translation, it can be a basis to reflect on the new product and how it can be a fit in the target system into which it has been placed.

In my commentary, presented in this chapter, all three stages of the translation process are addressed. First I will discuss the decision of text I have made and the choices made even before starting to translate using the polysystem concepts of Even-Zohar introduced in the framework. Second, I concentrate on how the textual part of the translation process, going from source language to target language, was informed by a theoretical analysis of translation, structured on the various levels of Lefevere's literary translation framework: ideology, poetics, universe of

discourse, and language. And third, I will discuss how it can fit with the intended audience, as well as the different publication strategies and avenues for promotion available for the translation; taking into consideration theories such as Maier's described in the framework, as well as the Mexican polysystem conditions outlined in chapter three.

Extratextual Factors

As outlined in chapter three, when translators in Mexico consider publishing a translated work, independently of the source language and country of origin, they have to think about the power dynamics at play between the possible publishing options: the publishing world of Spain and the publishing world in Mexico. The majority of the translated texts from English Canadian authors belong to what can be conceived of as an international canonized English Canadian literature, such as Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, and Alice Munro, mostly commissioned by Spain-based publishers. Translation in Mexico is usually characterized by the publication of up and coming writers or unknown in the country, although they might be recognized in Canada. As well, most translations in Mexico are not commissions from publishing houses but start rather as independent projects from the translator or translators themselves. Because of the independent nature of translation projects in Mexico, translators usually choose short texts, either poetry, shorts stories or drama, which later can be performed as well. The reason behind these choices of texts can be linked to time and/or economic causes: not a lot of space to print, if it is in a journal or magazine, need to print reduced amount or pages in a book, low wages, lack of promotional resources, etc. These elements explain why when it comes to the translation and publication of novels, Spain is the main source of work.

Analyzing these conclusions regarding the nature of publishing in the Mexican literary polysystem, it could be said that my choice of text to translate departs from the norm in some respect. My main motivation to choose to translate Dionne Brand's *What We All Long For* is mainly a personal one, which mirrors how a lot of publishing projects start in Mexico. However, the fact that it is a novel, a long piece of fiction, might prove challenging at the time of publishing. Dionne Brand is also a poet but my first introduction to her was through her novel, a work that created a great impact on me, and so the translation of this novel became a more significant project for me. I also believe that presenting new literary voices, such as that of Dionne Brand, would add more variety and present more complexity to the urban and immigrant experience lived in Canada present in the literary subsystem of English Canadian literature in Mexico, introducing and broadening new perspectives on what life is in this country of the North and that of immigrant writers. There is great value in the projects that a large number of Mexican translators and publishing houses choose to do; by framing their translations within a Mexican world where the voices of its citizens can be read, they help Mexico get a place in the world of translation. This is an important feature for my project since I am interested in creating a translation with a Mexican audience in mind as opposed to a "standard" Spanish audience. In my translation I wished to focus on the importance of reader identification with the characters and their situations by speaking to them with familiar words or concepts. This is a task that does not necessarily mean a domestication of the text but an awareness of the target audience, a strategy interested in changing the patterns of the translated subsystem in the Mexican literary polysystem.

Textual Factors

This analysis is based on the translation levels proposed by Lefevere and outlined in chapter two; however, in many cases some of the translation problems discussed were found to belong to more than just one level. It is noted if a translation problem discussed was thought to belong to more than one level.

Ideology

Based on the notions proposed by Lefevere, my translation can be seen as an act of Mexican rewriting of an English Canadian text, a notion that also fits into the objective of my project of expanding the scope of the literary English Canadian subsystem and introduce new paradigms into the literary Mexican polysystem. This overall decision to use the Mexican variant of Spanish in the translation works as a macrotextual decision, and it is maybe the first of the chain of decisions involved in my translation process. With the importance of Mexican Spanish in mind for my translation, all levels of Lefevere's model are affected, mainly the levels of language, ideology and discourse; this will be exemplified later.

Along with this choice, another important decision I made even before starting to translate revolves around the importance of the setting in which the novel unfolds which frames the novel under a certain ideology. As indicated by the first chapter of the novel, the city of Toronto is not only the place where the story is set, but it is also almost a character in itself. The significance of the city is also highlighted by the analysis of Dionne Brand's writing and the constant presence of it in both her poetry and fiction. This location does not only mean a geographical site but it entails a unique kind of living, mainly the immigration experience that creates, affects and guides the actions of the characters in the book. Because of this, my

translation is aware of the importance of presenting this ideology, letting the reader know that this is not a story set in a city in Mexico where immigrant communities are less common and in a lesser number. As a consequence, markers of place such as names of streets, neighborhoods, locales, etc, distinctive of the city of Toronto and that address issues at the level of ideology, were kept in mind and mainly remained the same.

These decisions, what I consider as macrotextual, affect the translation on a number of levels. Given that these are decisions taken even before starting the translation, they fit into the level of ideology, the main level that guides a translation according to Lefevere (87). To think about translation at the level of ideology means to have in mind the possibilities that the translated text has of publication, considering the literary standards of the target language and market. By choosing to limit the nature of the Spanish to the Mexican variety, I am aware that my possibilities of publishing are restricted, but it is a way to highlight my ideological stance in regard to how the literary translation subsystem works in Mexico in general. This ideological stance also comes into play when it comes to the English Canadian literature subsystem in the Mexican literary polysystem, where I do believe that there is a gap in what is introduced to Mexican audiences and maybe Spanish speaking audiences in general. Dionne Brand's novel represents a different range of English Canadian literature and the introduction of literary texts such as hers can help the literary subsystem of Canadian translated literature expand and avoid a petrification of the system, when only the cannon is translated, manifested by a "growing stereotypization of the various repertoires" (Even-Zohar 17).

The presence of the immigrant communities in the book necessarily includes a racial discourse that differs from the usual one in Mexico. Racial issues discussed in Mexico usually revolve around the indigenous communities of the country, susceptible as well to racial profiling,

just as the black communities in Canada and the US are; although the stereotypes in Mexico refer to ideas of ignorance and simplicity. Even though there is a difference between which communities are victims of racial discourse, racism is always present in Mexico as well. And even more, with the influence of US culture in Mexico, the black racial stereotype is also somewhat known in the country, which helps in the translation process given that this ideological notion does not need to be over explained. As a translator I was influenced at first by a politically correct way of thinking which lead to the translations of racial adjectives like “Asian” and “black” (Brand 2) as “de rasgos asiáticos” y “de color” (82-3). However, considering the importance of the racial standpoint that Dionne Brand takes in all of her writing, it was important for the translation to reflect a similar one and be clear and straight forward about the issues affecting life in the Canadian urban societies that could also mirror circumstances in Mexico.

The subculture of the graffiti world, part of the urban ideology Brand wants to transmit, became a key element to take into consideration for the translation. The presence of this world in the novel reinforces the young, artsy, urban life of the four main characters and a belief that is expressed in the novel: that art and colour can improve the urban experience and the lives of the residents. The four guys that compose the famous “graffiti crew” that lives in front of Tuyen and Carla’s building (Brand 11) seem to be only present through their art, their graffiti, and yet their actions are meaningful for the novel. In order to be truthful to the ideological notions of the world of graffiti, the language had to adapt as such, and so concepts like “graffiti crew” and “tags” required a Mexican urban parallel. The translation had to find a balance between a vocabulary that belongs and is spoken by graffiti groups but that could still be understandable by readers not familiar with this subculture. While a word like “graffiteros” (91) is easily recognizable, the notion of tags, a basic artist signature, presented a bigger challenge. Graffiti

groups in Spanish speaking countries use the English word for this form of graffiti but it wouldn't be understood by a broader audience. The final translation: "firma tag" (113) is a combination of the English word and a sort of explanation of what it consists of; because the narrative continues with Carla explaining what is it that she is seeing, this might help the readers complete the picture.

Poetics

An important element that guides the translation is the nature of the narrative voices that will affect the levels of discourse and poetics. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this novel presents two different narrators, each one with its own characteristics. The narrator in the third person, belonging to the numbered chapters, is a voice that keeps itself close to the events, a voice that seems to be speaking as an insider of the city. The effect of this lack of distancing between the narrative voice and the characters also mirrors the close relation that the narrator wants to create with the reader. In order to convey this feature of the narrator's voice, it was important to make a decision when it came to translating the pronoun "you"; a pronoun that can be read both as formal and informal in English, while in Spanish there are two different words for each case. As in the next example: "The truth is you can't prepare for something like that" (Brand 1) with options of translation such as, "no te puedes preparar"/"uno no se puede preparar", both of them grammatically correct. But the final translation took into account the close relation of the narrator with the city and so by translating "es imposible prepararse para algo así" (81), the narrator becomes part of the people that have to prepare for the weather while still keeping the reader close.

The translation strategy for the third person narrator chapters, one focused on the use of pronouns to create that relation between narrator, characters and readers, is also important for the first person narrator chapters. Quy is talking about events of his life on an extremely personal level, which wants to be highlighted by the translation decision of using the informal version of you. However, there is one case in which the version of you was altered to address an audience in the plural, when he asks “Do you recognize me?” (Brand 9). The decision to change the translation is an attempt to give a clue to the readers regarding the nature of Quy’s background and to whom he might be actually talking. And there was as well another important translation strategy that was kept in mind. The first chapter in which the voice of this narrator is introduced, the one included in this project, relied on an effect created through the use of syntax. While for the numbered chapters, syntax was not a major issue, and there was more freedom in joining sentences, the short sentences of the Quy chapter were kept in search of a specific effect. The character Quy starts by recounting the incidents in his childhood that made him who he is now and the short sentences help in the creation of this childish mood of broken thoughts and the desperation that characterizes what the child is going through.

Parallelisms were also used in order to recreate the childish nature of the first Quy chapter, showing the use of poetics as a tool to show psychological aspects. It is important to note that as Quy keeps recounting his life, he starts to show a more mature, sometimes immoral persona, and so the translation will also have to reflect that. The phrase “they passed me between them time and again” (Brand 7) does not present an actual parallelism but the structure does represent a challenge for translation that can be rendered in a parallelism. The translation “me pasaban de los brazos del uno a los brazos del otro, una y otra vez” (86-7) produces that parallelism that at the same time reinforces the child’s feeling of going from one place to the

other. The addition of the concept of “cargar en brazos” was used to create a more comprehensive structure and build into the more simple, almost careless, structure that could be used as translation: “me pasaban del uno al otro, una y otra vez”.

Another instance is the decision of translating “salté y salté” (87) instead of “salté de arriba a abajo” for “I jumped up and down” (Brand 7), with the repetition of the verb conveying as well the desperation of the child. Finally, at the end of the chapter there is a double parallelism in the line “I’m the one who is smiling brilliantly less and less and then giving up on that more and more” (Brand 9), both with the internal nature of the “less and less”/“more and more” constructions and with how they relate to each other in the overall sentence. Although a construction such as “más y más” is regular in Spanish, the opposite, “menos y menos” is not as common, and so a final translation that could maintain both repetitive structures is not achievable. The final decision: “Soy él que está sonriendo intensamente cada vez menos y al final dándose por vencido cada vez más” (89) manages to maintain the overall structure, keeping one of the levels of the repetitions.

The first chapter of the novel is a good example of the poetic language used by Dionne Brand and so important in her writing, both in her construction of images and her use of words. Throughout the chapter she uses a series of parallelisms and lists to construct the image of the city in this specific time of the year, evoking sights, smells and human emotions; seemingly endless lists that give to the reader an overwhelming effect, evoking the busy life of the city. Although the parallelism of the sentence: “The streets were glacial, the electrical wires were brittle, the telephones were useless” (Brand 1) can be conserved by using the auxiliary verb “eran” with each of the verbs, the rhythm of the sentence does not achieve the same thing as the original, this feeling of desperation. By changing the verbs with every element there is an

increase until the narrator reaches the climax, the real problem behind the chaos, things just don't work: "no funcionaban" (81). The author used parallelism to achieve her purpose, but in the case of the translation that device did not seem like the most helpful strategy and so the effect of the sentence was given preference over the used rhetoric approach.

As seen in chapter three, Brand plays with punctuation in most of her writings, usually holding back periods and using more commas or semicolons. In the case of this novel, Brand still employs this technique which helps throughout the first chapter for this sense of overflowing. The list of the different nationalities and the varied professions that people can have in the city (Brand 5) is a long list to read, and the fact that there are only commas creates a long sentence. The use of commas in Spanish helps for the same effect, easing the translation. But Brand also sets aside punctuation and takes advantage of conjunctions to string together her lists as in the case of "There are Italian neighbourhoods, and Vietnamese neighbourhoods in this city; there are Chinese ones and Ukranian ones and Pakistani ones and Korean ones and African ones" (Brand 4). In Spanish it is not possible to emulate the construction of English with the pronoun that refers to the neighbourhoods, and so it is necessary to add one more explanation, "barrios chinos" (84) so the list that continues has a referent. The lack of the pronouns after each adjective in Spanish, with only the conjunction "y" between them speeds the rhythm of the list even more, gaining something in the process.

A feeling of disconnection between the hectic, populated city life and the individual lives of all of its citizens is one of the main elements that Brand conveys through her poetics; by relating poetics with the urban space, she manages to deliver place through language. It is interesting to note that she does this mainly through the harmonics of rhythm and a sense of rhyme; an example of this is the line "Any minute you can crash into someone else's life, and if

you're lucky, it's good, it's like walking on light" (Brand 4). The use of the commas gives the sentence a specific rhythm and the similar sound between the words "life" and "light", although not a perfect rhyme, provides the sense of a rhyme. In order to achieve a translation that will have the same effect it was necessary to alter the rhythm through a different placement of the commas to attain a rhythm more akin to the Spanish while the rhyme meant a more drastic change of the words in the sentence; with the final translation: "En cualquier momento puedes chocar contra la vida de alguien más, y si tienes suerte es bueno, como estar sobre luz a cada paso que das." (84).

Discourse

The universe of discourse is used to describe the objects, customs, and beliefs of a culture, according to Lefevre it is an expression of them (*Manipulation*, 87). By giving words to a culture's ideology, it marks the narrative and serves the author to contextualize and frame the nature of the setting and the characters themselves. Most of these concepts required explanations in the translation given that they are unknown for Mexican audiences. The concept of suburban life is a common urban experience in the US and Canada, although they have different characteristics in each country, and a strong symbol in the novel as life in the suburbs is a style of life, the life of their parents, that the young characters are against. The Spanish word "suburbio" could be considered a form of *faux-amis* given that, although similar words, they do not mean the same; while in English it has a connotation of middle class life, in Spanish it is related to a more low-class setting. In order to provide full information to Mexican readers, the translation makes use of two words to create the full image of what the suburban spaces represent. By using the concept of "suburbio residencial" in the various occasions where it

appears in the source text, the translation provides the idea of a location on the outskirts of a city: “suburbio”, and as well the idea of a place destined to houses of middle-class residents.

The card game of euchre (Brand 19), a popular game during the 19th century in the US and Canada appears to be the main pastime for Jackie’s parents. The fact that the author chose a card game no longer popular and related now to older generations lets us see the nature of these characters: Jackie’s parents are lost in their past, what they consider a golden era. A longer explanation would be necessary in order for the Mexican reader to understand the meaning behind this card game and so the translation, by only highlighting that they are playing “con la baraja” (99), represents a loss for the complete ideological representation of what the game means. Thrift stores are a common phenomenon in the US and Canada, the source of clothing for not only low-income people but also a regular source for the middle-class as well. Recently, buying clothes at thrift stores is a demonstration for young people to deny the mass produced clothing of big retail stores, which might be also a reason for Tuyen to buy there (Brand 22). Second hand stores are not rare in Mexico, although they are usually not in formal settings, but it is the concept of a second hand store run by a charity organizations that can be more foreign. In the translation there was a preference for the concept than for the actual name of the specific store, Goodwill, and given that the main effect of introducing this store is to emphasize the low-income status and rebellious nature of Tuyen, a translation/explanation for a simple “tienda de artículos usados” (102) was deemed sufficient.

The idea of “back home” is an important ideological concept both for the themes of the novel and for the immigrant experience in the city; as well it is a concept that affects at the level of discourse. The feelings evoked by this phrase, explained also by the narrator (Brand 20), relate mainly to the nostalgia of missing home on the part of the parents; the stories they tell are a tool

to convey the sacrifices they have made for their families, and that they hope their children understand. This is not a completely foreign concept though, given that there is a regular immigration from rural areas of the country to the urban centres, people do experience it. The main difference lies in the short and succinct linguistic way it can be expressed in English. While the word “home” helps to suggest this feeling, in Spanish “hogar” does not have the same effect, reason why the translation refers more to the idea of “my land”/”allá en mi tierra” (100), linking it to the concept of “tierra patria”: from where one comes from.

It has been established that the city is another character in the novel, and the vocabulary used in its description is an important discourse feature to construct the profile of the city. In several instances of the novel the narrator uses words usually associated to the description of a human being: the city can touch its residents (Brand 3), it is capable of doing things—like jostling and scraping (Brand 5); and it even has human parts such as the neck (Brand 32). As well, in chapter three during Carla’s frantic ride through the city, all of the elements that constitute the city become alive and active in the day to day bustle of urban life, like the highways doing their job by taking cars out of the city (Brand 32) or the billboards screeching of life (Brand 28). All of the words used by Brand to create a particular image of the city belong to a specific semantic realm and as such the translation had to find ways to convey the same feeling of life that characterizes Brand’s city. Although in many instances finding a target word to relate the meaning of the source word was an easy task, in some cases it required an explanation or substitution. In the case of the highway, it was necessary to be more explicit about the role of this road in its busy job of leading people out of the city: “ocupada sacando carros de la ciudad” (113).

Descriptions are a big part of the narrative as Brand explores different areas of the city and as we learn more about the characters. Given the nature of the English language, the creation of descriptions through a simple addition of adjectives to the noun is easier to create, while in Spanish it is necessary to transform single adjectives into adjective phrases to rearrange the elements. The account of Tuyen and Oku's task to steal the railway ties with the help of Oku's father's old car gains a more herculean feeling through the detailed description of the car as a run-down machine (Brand 15). The car is described as an "old gas guzzler", "windowless", and a "sea scow", a series of adjectives that had to be rearranged in order to create a coherent, cohesive Spanish sentence. The adjective clause regarding the kind of car, which appears at the end of the sentence in the source text, represented a challenge in translation, and so it was positioned as the first element in the description of the car, with the rest of the elements added in an appositive clause: "el viejo Buick Plaza de su padre, una gran lancha sin ventanas que gastaba mucha gasolina" (95).

Language

Register

A crucial feature of Brand's work is the central role that the black community has, a feature that will affect the translation at the level of ideology and discourse, but that is also greatly manifested at a level of language through the vocabulary and the accent the characters use. Oku and Jamal are clearly the two main characters who perform inside a black language, either exaggerating or trying to avoid it. Because both characters represent a different side of the figure of the black man, an issue the writer is interested in addressing, the image of each one has to also be conveyed differently through the translation. This is as well an element at the levels of

discourse and ideology given that the author is presenting concepts that the target culture is not as familiar with.

Black communities in Mexico are mainly settled in the coastal areas and their language is not such a constant presence as it is in North American cities where the Black diaspora has established itself. Generally, it could be said that there is an image in Mexico of black communities either as they are stereotyped in the US, or as the image of the Caribbean Spanish speaking black communities; however, their language does not correspond in the same manner to the language used in the novel. In the translation I was cautious of using Spanish Caribbean vocabulary or accents heavily given that there is also a stereotype for these communities in Mexico, where it can be seen as a language that can come across as joyful and exoticized. While on some occasions it can be used, for example when Oku is talking to his friends, when it comes to the case of Jamal it is more important to communicate his violence and “badassness”.

Part of the interest of Brand’s work for me and the reason to introduce it to Mexican readers, is exactly an introduction of the different immigrant communities which can be so rare in Mexico. This decision entails a departure from a domestication perspective, and so it is important for the readers to be aware that the language of the characters has certain indicators that differentiate it from what could be used in Mexico. The fact that the main context around Jamal is jail could easily lead to render his lines in translation through the common language used in jail in Mexico; mainly what is known as the “cholo” language, a word often used to describe young men involved in gangs. However, translating with this strategy can result in a complete erasure of the black identity of the character which, although mentioned by the narrator, is so present in his speech. The narrator refers to his speech by describing it as

something he “picked up with his friends on the street” (Brand 30), a description to keep in mind in order to achieve the full effect of his speech and convey the personality of this character.

In order to attain the desired effect, the translation played with the grammatical errors that are used in the original to resemble the sociolect of the character, as well as with the contractions of words. Vocabulary is also an important element for the depiction of the character and it was used on several occasions as the main strategy for the target text when the impact of the character’s line was mostly based on a reproduction of his accent in the source text. The use of all these strategies meant as well a work of compensation, removing and adding grammatical errors, contractions and vocabulary in different parts of the character’s lines. The line “Me nah ‘fraid of nutten” (Brand 31) replicates the Jamaican English accent and relies as well on contractions to communicate the aggression of the character. To find a correspondent accent, one that will convey all of the things the source line does, to translate the line into Spanish is an impossible task, and so for this instance a vocabulary strategy was used that draws more from the criminal lingo of Mexico: “¡Yo no me rajo, Carla!” (112). However, some of his vocabulary was also inspired from a Caribbean Spanish perspective, having in mind the stereotype already mentioned; an example of this is the use of the word “maricón” (92) which, because of its ending, can be more related to a Caribbean setting informed by violence for a Mexican audience. In order to create a distance between characters’ personalities and backgrounds, a different word was used for the same concept when Tuyen is talking to her brother: “marica” (111).

Because the reproduction of an accent was not the main strategy for the translation, it was also necessary to make changes when translating the thoughts of Carla during her visit to her brother. When the narrator describes her thoughts as “She didn’t know why he insisted on speaking in this accent” (Brand 30), it is referring directly to the accent picked up by her brother

in the streets, probably a mix of black Caribbean accents, which would make no sense if translated as such into Spanish. In order to broaden the different approaches to the black language taken during the translation, this phrase is rendered as “No entendía por qué él insistía en hablar de esa manera” (111), not confine it to just one feature of his speech.

As already mentioned, the manner of speaking of both Oku and Jamal is the consequence of a sociolect, but each young man represents something different in the possibilities of a black young man living in the city. Oku cannot escape the language he has learned in the streets, but he is also informed by the academic language of his university studies, resulting in his specific idiolect. In order for the target reader to create these two different personalities, in the translation I also made use of speech markers which, although the same in English, were chosen to be differentiated in Spanish to augment the distinction between characters. The main one is the use of the word “man”, usually performing a simple phatic function, which in translation changed depending on the character using it. For Jamal, when he is calling his sister (Brand 33), the translation reads “carnala” (114) which functions both as a marker of slang and of affection towards her sister; while Oku’s use of “man” while talking to Jackie and Tuyen (Brand 46) was translated as “güey” (127), more related to a Mexican slang. As an attempt to reproduce a Caribbean black mood in Oku’s speech, the word “chica”, with a clear Caribbean connection in the minds of Mexicans, was used whenever the word “girl” was present.

Mexican variety

The choice of using a Mexican variation of Spanish and the impact on an ideological level has been discussed previously, but it is also an important consideration when talking about the level of language. There are several cases in the translation in which the vocabulary follows the

Mexican standards, mainly when it comes to slang, and the use of the word “fuck” by the character of Jackie is a good example of this. Although the word “joder” as a translation of “fuck” is also acceptable, it will be expected out of a translation made in Spain or other Latin American countries. In Mexico, the use of the word “chingar” is so widespread that it has become a cultural phenomenon, with even a dictionary published in 2010, *El Chingonario*, described by its publishers as “a dictionary of the most used verb in Mexico: *chingar*”⁸. The word works just as the narrator describes it, when referring to Jackie, as a word that can be used “as every part of speech, in every grammatical construction” (Brand 16), and with which you can create a myriad of different expressions to talk about any type of feeling. This is one of the instances in which the use of Mexican vocabulary distinctly marks the nature of the translation and it is a direct calling to the reader to identify with the characters.

Since Mexican Spanish is the language variant used in this translation, it is also possible to take advantage not only of the specific use of vocabulary choices but also of the particular nature in the construction of words. Diminutives are not as produced in the English language as they are in Spanish, a language rich in diminutives easily created through suffixes, although just because they are easy to create does not mean that they are commonly used in everyday speech by its speakers. Mexican Spanish however is known for its extensive use of them, probably a consequence of the mix with indigenous languages as Ignacio Dávila Garibi notes (94), a feature that can be use during the dialogues to inspire a more Mexican feeling. One of these instances is when Tuyen, talking to her brother Binh, calls him “sweet brother” (Brand 12) in a way of irony that can be enhanced in the translation by the use of a diminutive. The final translation, “hermanito querido” (92), conveys the sarcastic mood that she is trying to achieve not only by replicating the antithesis present in the source text between what she is saying and the

⁸ My translation.

circumstances of fight from where it comes from, but also by adding a new level through a lexical strategy.

Language in Dialogues

The conversation between Tuyen and her brother does not belong to the realm of black language discussed previously and that is so important for the depiction of some characters, but it does display a specific nature as young siblings that are talking to each other. It is important to note that the conversations between the four young characters of the novel also have specific characteristics informed by different parameters, such as their age and familiarity to each other, and so the translation strategies have to adapt accordingly.

The conversation between brother and sister can serve as an example of the various “empty” words that can be found when writers are reproducing conversational language and that work differently depending on the language. Some of the common fillers used in the novel include “anyways”, “well”, “so”, etc, which correspond to some of the most used in the English language as well as to the age and social circumstances of the characters. During the translation of this conversation some substitutions were made, placing new fillers throughout the target text that were not present in the source text, and eliminating others. Some of the fillers used in Spanish were “o sea”, “pues”, “oye”, etc, many common in the Spanish language but some of them also following the Mexican variant. An example of how the nature of these fillers changes depending on the language can be seen when Binh uses the word “Listen”, with an appellative function, whereas Spanish uses another one of the human senses to convey the same appellative function: “Mira” (93).

Allusions

Allusions are an important part at the level of language when translating given that they hold a great deal of information for the readers. Even though they will be explained as issues at the level of language, allusions also make great impact at the level of ideology since in various occasions the ideology that guides an allusion in the source text might not be shared by the target audience. Brand uses cultural references when describing the past of Jackie and the importance of music and television in her upbringing, highlighting the strained relation she has with her parents (Brand 45). The names of TV channels such as MuchMusic and Fashion Television or of TV shows as the ones mentioned in the book would not say much to a Mexican reader, which is why it felt necessary to add explanatory words for the type of TV Brand refers to and that ultimately will influence Jackie's argot. The description of her language is also full of cultural allusions that required explanations or even, in some cases, appropriation. For example in the case of "valley girl" (Brand 45), a reference to a whole Californian phenomenon which includes a movie and its own dialect Valleyspeak, in the translation I used an appropriation of the term to match it with a similar phenomenon, that of "la chica fresca" (126) in Mexico; while concepts such as "baller" had to be explained.

Other cultural allusions present in the novel are those to paintings and music. Tuyen's love for art and her obsession with Carla leads her to compare her to the figures in Remedios Varo's paintings, one in particular. Remedios Varo is a known name among Mexican audiences given that the Spanish painter spent almost 20 years in the country after being forced into exile from Spain. The Spanish title of her work was easy to find and the reader does not need more explanation about the reference to understand the relation between the paint and the character. As a poet, music is an important component for Brand, especially the genres of part of African-

American music like jazz; Oku and his father, Fitz, are both music lovers and there are several references to famous jazz players. However, jazz music does not have the same influence as it does in countries like the United States and Canada and some explanations were felt necessary in the translation. In the first occurrence of a musical allusion (Brand 30) gives the full name of the musician and his song so the reader has easy access to the information. Other musical references (Brand 47) however refer to the musicians only by their last names and so the translation (128) names them by their full name to give more information to the readers.

Literary allusions, both direct and indirect, are also present in the novel. The narrator refers to a book that Tuyen uses in her attempts to seduce Carla (Brand 51); when researching the book, *Rubyfruit Jungle*, it was easy to find that it has been translated into Spanish and that the Spanish title already makes a reference to the thematic of the book: *Frutos de Rubí: Crónica de mi vida lesbiana*. Having the Spanish reference makes it easy for the reader to know why the book is important in this situation without a need to be more explanatory in the translation. There are also literary allusions to the work of Brand herself in the repetition of words. Describing the relation of the young characters with the city and their life as inhabitants of two worlds, Brand uses the word “doorway” (20), a reference to her non-fiction book *A door to the Map of No Return*. As seen in chapter three, the idea of door and doorway is recurrent in Brand’s writing and so it is crucial to keep the same word and referring to this concept. However, given that the work of Brand has not been widely translated into Spanish there is no previous reference to follow and so the main concern throughout the translation of the novel was to keep a consistency in the translation of the word as a way to start familiarizing the readers with Brand’s concepts. It helped to use the word “puerta” as a basis for the rest of the imagery that Brand creates around it,

but it was necessary in one instance to add an adverb to complete the meaning of the sentence: “junto a la puerta” (100).

Foreign Words

Since the book is dealing with characters from different nationalities, it is normal to find the presence of foreign words, a translation problem at the level of language. The Vietnamese brother and sister, Tuyen and Binh, use them during their conversation when they are saying goodbye (Brand 14). The fact that they change to Vietnamese only at the end of the conversation and only use a common every day expression such as good-bye, after they have had a full conversation in English, lets the reader see their lack of familiarity with the language; it is important to keep the foreign words to create a full portrait of who these characters are. Just like in the source text, at this moment of the narrative we still don't know the background of the characters and so the target reader is in the same place of unknown; it won't be until later when we the narrator says that they are Vietnamese that the reader can know to which language these foreign words belong to. Considering that Vietnamese is not of easy access to Mexican readers, in the translation (94), the diacritic to the word *chào* has been added, missing in the source text, but the most common way to write it, which can help readers to find the meaning of the words.

Although the presence of foreign words is categorized by Lefevere as a translation issue at the level of language, it is important to note that when considering the presence of the word *lubaio* in the novel, the art installation project Tuyen is planning throughout the narrative, it can also be part of the level of ideology. Tuyen's project is a main symbol for Tuyen's search of identity and demonstration of love to the city and its residents, the fact that she decides to use the Chinese word to refer to her signpost project reveal, as Tuyen puts it herself, that there is “some

ancient Chinese-Vietnamese shit that's [her] shit and [she's] taking it" (Brand 16). It is important for the translation then to keep this ideological stance and given that the concept behind the *lubaio* continues to be explained throughout the novel, both the source and the target reader will learn more about the importance of the foreign word.

In chapter three of the novel, Carla is thinking about her mother and remembers a word play that also involves foreign words (Brand 39). The word *blessé*, the French word for injured or wounded, is compared to the English word "blessed" as *faux-amis*, creating an antithesis between the idea of being blessed but also of being wounded by someone's gaze. The fact that the wordplay involves a French word and is not only between two English words adds another level to the translation, problematizing the process and requiring explicitations. Right before the words are introduced, Carla asks herself "Why had she remembered that?" (Brand 39), the pronoun in translation is explained in the translation as "tal juego de palabras" (121) giving the readers clues of what is coming next. Creating a word play of *faux-amis* between only English and Spanish, although this would mean losing the French reference, or French and Spanish, is not possible since none of these two words in Spanish, "bendecir" and "herir", have a correspondent *faux-amis*. The translation then presents all four words, those in Spanish, and the English and French words in the source text, giving the reader an explanation of what those words mean.

Although technically not foreign words, the type of language of the short letters that Tuyen finds from her parents in search of their lost son let us see that they are written by someone with English as a second language, specially her mother's, Cam. The grammatical errors are there to achieve a special effect, not only the struggles of this woman to express herself in another language, but also the grief of losing a child. Constructions such as "how my heart is

open”, “I am in hopes”, “I will give any things” and others (Brand 21) express both and the translation needs to reproduce that. The resulting translation takes the same phrases with grammatical errors of the source text to create the same effect in the target text: “que tan abierto está mi corazón”, “Estoy en esperanza”, “Daré cualquiera cosas” (101).

Slang and Idioms

Given that the author is dealing with a group of young characters, it is not surprising to find a large presence of slang vocabulary in their dialogues. During their conversation in chapter two, Oku uses two different slang words when talking to Jackie. In the first instance the word also works as wordplay, “drop” (Brand 15), taking both the standard meaning of letting something fall and the slang meaning with a sexual innuendo. In order for the translation to achieve the wordplay, it was important to find a word with this double meaning. Luckily, one of the words for the translation of “to drop” in Spanish, “tirar”, has as well a sexual suggestion, which rendered Oku’s wordplay as “Tírala mujer. Así como te tiras al alemán ese” (95). The second use of a slang term by Oku, also used when interacting with Jackie is “Jones”, a strong desire for something. An explanation of what the word means could provide a translation such as “tu intenso deseo por mí”, which was my first option, but that losses all the colloquial nature of the source text and so diminishes the depiction of Oku as a character. The importance of keeping the colloquial nature of the word lead to a research of colloquial words in Spanish that could express the same sentiment, concluding with the adjective “chiflado” which describes someone with an exaggerated attraction to something or someone; and with the final translation as “Es que andas chiflada por mí, cariño” (96).

Idioms are a common translation issue given that they rely on figurative and literal meanings which depend as well on the ideological nature of the language, just like in the case of slang. Idioms have been integrated as a common feature of daily language and they present themselves usually in the conversation of the characters; as well many idioms are so intrinsic now that the narrative voice uses them as well. Referring to Carla's thoughts, the narrator explains why she can't help her brother now given that she doesn't have "a pot to piss in" (Brand 36). The literal meaning, to not have money, is expressed differently in Spanish and so the translation reflects that: "ni dónde donde caerse muerta" (117). When describing Jackie, the narrator explains her pretense in keeping calm while in the face of disorder, saying how she keeps things together (Brand 44). This is a case of an idiom where the figurative meaning is not so out of the ordinary but that differs slightly from its literal meaning: to keep things in order, arranged. The translation presents a different idiom more suitable to the Spanish language: "no perder la cabeza" (125), and although with a more peculiar figurative meaning, it does fit into the literal meaning of the source text.

New Words

As someone who likes to play with language, Dionne Brand does not only experiment with rhythm but with words as well. Although words like "dangerousness" (Brand 28) and "ghostliness" (Brand 37) are part of the dictionary as the noun form of their respective adjectives, they are not of common use among the everyday language, signaling a literary nature. The first term is mostly related to a legal concept and in Spanish its translation, "peligrosidad" (109) is also use in the same field, which helps to draw the same line, and given that the word is used when talking about Jamal it is important to inspire this legal, criminal realm. On the other

hand, the second term does not have a correspondent translation and so it was necessary to use a noun morpheme to produce a word (“fantasmagoridad”, 119) that could fit the function of the one on the source text which, although a new word for the reader, does contain all the grammatical information to be understood.

Pronouns

Given the different nature of pronouns between both languages, they presented a challenge, especially when they were used as deictics which in some occasions required adding the name of the character to give more information to the reader. When Jamal uses the pronoun “he” (Brand 31), incorrectly on purpose, he is doing it with a specific goal in mind, trying to convey a certain meaning, his dislike and detachment from his father. The pronoun here can be seen as a name in itself, the name Jamal and Carla use to refer to their father and stepmother (“she”) that reflects their indifference and reluctance to be related with him. Translating both pronouns literally would erase the grammatical incorrectness of the speech and would fail in conveying the attitude of the characters, reading more like the neutral pronouns that they are. The final translation, “ése” y “ésa” (112), both pronouns, works inaccurately in this construction and transmits the feeling of discomfort Carla and Jamal have when talking about their father.

Considering Publication and Reception

Considering all the decisions and the process of translation described, the translation of *What We All Long For* hopes to offer Mexican audiences a new window, maybe even a kind of door, depicting Canadian urban life and the various communities that can be found. As well, by considering the poetics and images that are important and distinguish Dionne Brand’s writing,

this project can have an important role given that her work has not been widely translated into Spanish.

Although the translation of *What We All Long For* is at an initial stage, it is a project intended to keep moving forward and find a way to reach Mexican audiences; it is with this goal in mind that the translation process was influenced. Being that it is in its first steps, it is difficult to make final conclusions regarding the acceptance of the target text within the audience or its place on the English Canadian translated literature subsystem of the broader literary Mexican polysystem. Informed by what has been described in chapter three, it is possible to outline steps forward to take in order to accomplish the publication of the novel; for example, given that journals and magazines are important producers and institutions in the Mexican polysystem, there could be an attempt to publish excerpts of the novel in these kinds of printing media.

Carol Maier's advice on the use of translation in the academic world can also be considered. Since the project is the result of an academic approach, it is also possible to connect with academic institutions that could be interested in the novel as a product that can help advance other academic projects related to the introduction of Canadian literature in Mexico. The novel is a good example of the existence of "linguistic diversity and alterity" (Pizer qtd in Maier and Massardier-Kenney 1) in the world, and as such it is important to frame it by its context of production in order to be of help to students, both the production of the original and of the translation. As Maier suggests, it is important to provide readers with this information, and it is more likely for academic publishers to be interested in investing their resources in translators' commentaries or introductions, than other institutions.

Because independent publishing houses usually have a mission that guides their choice of published texts, if this is a road that wants to be explored, it will be necessary to find an

institution interested in the same goals that the translation has. Some of these goals are: making translation visible, the importance of highlighting minorities and multicultural communities, and the role of Canadian literature. Government help, through cultural branches, is a common resource for independent publishers, as well as for academic institutions. In order to obtain these resources, government grants are targeted to texts that will mean an exposure of their specific objectives. The fact that it is a novel where Toronto, and a Canadian way of living in general, is highlighted could mean that Canadian cultural institutions might be interested in funding such a project. As well, artistic government programs in Mexico that want to promote translation could also be a source of help.

Based on the analysis made in chapter three, publishing might not be the biggest challenge but rather the promotion of translated literature. The institutions that produce translations do not always consider that they might also have the role of marketers, or the importance of being involved with the factor of market. A promotion strategy, reaching out to all those institutions that can be of help (bookstores, libraries, cultural centres, etc) is just as important in a subsystem like the English Canadian one. Considering the risk that both Garayta and Maier address, Mexican audiences might have an idea of what English Canadian literature offers, based on their ideas of US culture, and so the promotion strategy is not only a task of supporting a specific book or author but is as well an endeavour in promoting a whole culture. Agents of the market have to think of strategies that take into account the possible existing stereotypes around English Canada and how the literature they want to introduce relates or contradicts the expectations of readers. Promotion strategies can be varied but they are certainly an important element and can determine how successful the English Canadian subsystem, or any other subsystem inside the Mexican literary polsystem, can be.

Independently of the material medium that the translation will find to reach its audience and its promotion strategy, it is important that it always be presented as what it attempts to be: A Mexican rewriting of a Canadian text that wishes to create links between two countries and cultures through the introduction of new voices. As well as an incentive for the literary translation subsystem part of the general literary polysystem in Mexico to be considered under a new light, where the information about the process of translation can be known by readers and the role that the translator has can become more visible.

CONCLUSIONS

With this thesis I had two goals in mind: First, to introduce an opening to analyze and reflect on the publication world of translations in Mexico, specifically when it comes to the translation of English Canadian literature; as well, to present my translation of the first five chapters of the Canadian novel *What We All Long For* by writer Dionne Brand, focusing not only on the product but also on the process behind it. With this analysis and the translation I wish to introduce new works by Canadian writers that offer Mexican readers new perspectives of life in English Canada.

In order to know the status of English Canadian literature within the literary system at place in Mexico, the analysis based on polysystem theory was useful as it examines extra textual elements that influence the diffusion and acceptance of literary works. The analysis of the literary polysystem in Mexico is by no means a comprehensive one, and since it is mainly focused on English Canadian literature, it could benefit from further research that looks at the factors in general, drawing conclusions from the publication of translations in the country including other source languages or countries of origin. The projects that institutions such as the UNAM and the University of Ottawa have started, trying to map out the evolution and nature of publications of Spanish translations of Canadian literature, prove to be valuable for projects of this sort. Highlighting their importance can help to bring attention to them, gathering support from translators, publishers, authors, other academic institutions, etc, to keep growing and keeping current information that could help others in the future. As well, they could encourage translation scholars in other language pairs to develop similar projects that can provide a perspective on the translation world of their specific countries.

The information of this polysystem analysis shed light on the fact that most of the novels that circulate in Mexico are translated and published by Spanish publishing houses, so there is a possibility that the publication of this novel by a Mexican publishing house could be a failed attempt. However, now that the analysis of the translation scene in Mexico is outlined, efforts from different perspectives, such as the translation of short stories or poetry, could be attempted to introduce the perspective that Dionne Brand presents, enlarging as well the image of English Canada in the minds of Mexican readers.

The use of Lefevere's literary translation analysis provided a structure when thinking of the translation process, revealing and guiding translation strategies. For me, the advantage of Lefevere's model resides in that it places ideology as the first concern translators should deal with, as opposed to a model where language problems would be the main focus. Lefevere's translation levels were not only helpful during the analysis of my translation process as guidelines to what every translator should consider even before starting with the process, but as well they are guidelines for the analysis of the original literary text itself. To consider ideology as the basis for the translation process involves a pre-translation thinking exercise from the translator as a starting point to outline strategies. By taking into account ideology as my main guideline, I was able to determine translation strategies that were helpful whenever I was faced with a translation problem involving two or more options in the rest of the translation levels: poetics, discourse, and language. During the process, certain translation problems came up that I did not consider previously or that were not completely covered by the ideological macrotextual strategy outlined, but that can still be solved by considering the other levels proposed by Lefevere.

Looking into Dionne Brand's writing was a useful exercise as it also raised important considerations when deciding translation strategies. It is clear that certain topics and literary techniques are used by Brand recurrently, which provided me with an image of what elements were important to convey in the target text in order for readers to know who Brand is and how her work depicts the image she is creating of life in an urban space as well as a Canadian city. This examination allowed me to narrow or to determine more clearly the strategies already established and make of my process of translation a more comprehensive and fulfilled experience. It gave me the tools to better understand the features and characteristics I found so compelling in Brand's work, as well as how to communicate them to the target readers.

Informed by these analyses about the Mexican polysystem and Dionne Brand's work the process of translation turned out to be a more enriched one for me in my development as a translator, as it gave me the confidence to trust my decisions and the resources to defend them. I expect that this is reflected in my commentary as I address issues of both theory and practice. The field of translation studies has to take into consideration the importance of differentiating between translation as a product, something final and static, and a process, a series of decisions. It is here where translators' commentaries prove to be of great importance given that they introduce to readers the goal the translator had in mind during the process and the strategies used to address this goal. By presenting the process, translators can expose the different steps and the chain of decisions behind the final translated product. I hope that, by presenting my translation commentary, target readers of the translated novel will have the tools to analyze and judge the translation based on all the available knowledge of what decisions were made and what strategies steered the translation process. As well, the commentary is another window into the author's

world since it also engages with the elements of Dionne Brand's literary work and so it expands and presents a possibility for readers to be more curious about the author.

Although valuable for the translation community, as translators' commentaries give a place and a voice to translators and their profession, it is important for these commentaries to reach a general readership. When translators' commentaries are available for readers of literature, and not only as simple academic exercises, they can gain the more value as they make more evident the fact that people are reading translations and that they belong to foreign cultures that could or could not share the same belief systems as theirs. By making Mexican readers aware of the English Canadian origin of the novel, I hope that they are more likely to engage in an active reading, reflecting on the conditions under which, not only the original text, but as well the translation was produced.

While presenting the process of translation as informed by scholarly perspectives that address issues of domestication, foreignization, ideology, cultural translation, discourse analysis, etc., can help within the translation studies field, and can as well provide the general audience with a new perspective of the profession as an intellectual activity, it is important to think about the language used to write these translators' commentaries. During my process in writing my commentary, I realized that in order to engage with readers that will have little or no knowledge of the world of translation studies and its vocabulary, the language used has to be taken into account. This might explain the proliferation of translators' commentaries, especially in the field of literary translation, that deal more with a personal or anecdotal level. Although most of the time the literary translation process is obviously a personal one, the translators that write these anecdotal commentaries also have to attend to the fact that translations are part of a certain society in a specific time and space frame. It is this balance between personal and theoretical

information that, I believe, translators should look for to truly achieve the reflexive approach that could help in the world of translation studies.

The connection made in this thesis between the English Canadian literature and the world of publishing translations in Mexico is an example of how international relations are established nowadays. Part of these relations is the place that language has in the construction of cultural images and exchanges between countries. Through cultural and artistic endeavours it is possible to create more connections and strengthen the relations between the two countries. This project can also be an opportunity not only for Canadian authors to engage with Mexican translators, but for Mexican authors to engage with translators interested in introducing their work, and a new Mexican perspective to Canadian readers, enriching the cultural spheres of both countries.

This thesis project is an attempt to raise awareness among translators about the importance of reflecting about extratextual factors that affect translations, such as the possibilities of publication, the place the target text can have in the target polysystem and the information given to readers regarding the process. Although conclusions were made regarding the goals set out in the introduction, the project also raised new questions and opened avenues for new research that can help enrich the knowledge of the Canada-Mexico relations through translation, the benefits of a polysystem analysis and, for me personally as a literary translator starting in the field, the active place of translators as bridges, or doors, between cultures. In order for projects of cultural contact to succeed, a goal central to translation, both cultures have to be engaged in a dialogue that can benefit them both.

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APPENDIX A
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APPENDIX B

What We All Long For (excerpt) by Dionne Brand

DIONNE BRAND

WHAT

WE

ALL

a novel

LONG

VINTAGE CANADA 

FOR

THIS CITY HOVERS above the forty-third parallel; that's illusory of course. Winters on the other hand, there's nothing vague about them. Winters here are inevitable, sometimes unforgiving. Two years ago, they had to bring the army in to dig the city out from under the snow. The streets were glacial, the electrical wires were brittle, the telephones were useless. The whole city stood still; the trees more than usual. The cars and driveways were obliterated. Politicians were falling over each other to explain what had happened and who was to blame—who had privatized the snow plows and why the city wasn't prepared. The truth is you can't prepare for something like that. It's fate. Nature will do that sort of thing—dump thousands of tons of snow on the city just to say, Don't make too many plans or assumptions, don't get ahead of yourself. Spring this year couldn't come too soon—and it didn't. It took its time—melting at its own pace, over running ice-blocked sewer drains, swelling the Humber River and the Don River stretching to the lake. The sound of the city was of trickling water.

Have you ever smelled this city at the beginning of spring? Dead winter circling still, it smells of eagerness and embarrassment and, most of all, longing. Garbage, buried under snowbanks for months, gradually reappears like old habits—plastic bags, pop cans—the alleyways are cluttered in a mess of bottles and old shoes and thrown-away beds. People

look as if they're unravelling. They're on their last nerves. They're suddenly eager for human touch. People will walk up to perfect strangers and tell them anything. After the grey days and the heavy skies of what's passed, an unfamiliar face will smile and make a remark as if there had been a conversation going on all along. The fate of everyone is open again.

New lives can be started, or at least spring is the occasion to make it seem possible. No matter how dreary yesterday was, all the complications and problems that bore down then, now seem carried away by the melting streets. At least the clearing skies and the new breath of air from the lake, both, seduce people into thinking that.

It's 8 A.M. on a Wednesday of this early spring, and the subway train rumbles across the bridge over the Humber River. People are packed in tightly, and they all look dazed, as if recovering from a blow. There's the smell of perfume and sweat, and wet hair and mint, coffee and burned toast. There is a tension, holding in all the sounds that bodies make in the morning. Mostly people are quiet, unless they're young, like the three who just got on—no annoying boss to be endured all day. They grab hold of the upper hand-bars and as the train moves off they crash into one another, giggling. Their laughter rattles around in the car, then they grow mockingly self-conscious and quiet, noticing the uptightness on the train, but they can't stay serious and explode again into laughter.

One of them has a camera, she's Asian, she's wearing an old oilskin coat, and you want to look at her, she's beautiful in a strange way. Not the pouting corporate beauty on the ad for shampoo above her head, she has the beauty a falcon has: watchful, feathered, clawed, and probing. Another one's a young black man; he's carrying a drum in a duffel bag. He's trying to find space for it on the floor, and he's getting

annoyed looks all around. There's an enviable loose physical allure to him. He has a few days' growth on his face, and when he smiles his eyebrows, his eyes—his whole face can't help its seduction. The third is another woman, she might be Italian, southern. She's bony like a mantis in her yellow slick plastic coat, except her mouth has a voluptuousness to it, and her eyes, the long eyelashes weigh them down. The Asian woman points the camera at her, coaxes her for a smile, and the flash goes off and she looks startled. It's obvious they've been out all night. They're talking now about some friend of theirs whom the young man loves. But all three are finally subdued by the taut silence around them, as if succumbing to some law they'd broken. Who wants to hear about love so early in the morning?

Mornings are like that on the subway trains—everyone having left their sovereign houses and apartments and rooms to enter the crossroads of the city, they first try at not letting the city touch them, holding on to the meagre privacy of a city with three million people. But eventually they're disrupted like this. Anonymity is the big lie of a city. You aren't anonymous at all. You're common, really, common like so many pebbles, so many specks of dirt, so many atoms of materiality.

Now that conversation has entered everyone's heads, and will follow them to work; they'll be trying to figure out the rest of the story all day. Now they'll be wondering where those three were last night, and someone will think, Why isn't my life like that? Free like a young person's. Someone will go off into a flight of imagination as to where they'd been—probably the railroad tracks, probably High Park, probably smoking dope at a party, drinking beer and dancing. Definitely dancing. And some other jealous rider will think,

That bunch of free loaders! Never worked a day in their lives! Life will get them hard some time, don't you worry.

And jammed in a seat down the car there's a man who hardly understands English at all, but he hears the tinkle of laughter, and it surprises him out of his own declensions on fate—how he ended up here and what's to be his next move, and how the small panic that he feels disgusts him. He rouses himself from going over the details of his life, repeating them in his head as if to the woman reading a newspaper next to him. The laughter pierces him, and he thinks that he's never heard laughter sound so pure, and it is his first week in this city. Only when he was very, very little—a boy—then he heard it, he remembers.

What floats in the air on a subway train like this is chance. People stand or sit with the thin magnetic film of their life wrapped around them. They think they're safe, but they know they're not. Any minute you can crash into someone else's life, and if you're lucky, it's good, it's like walking on light.

There are Italian neighbourhoods and Vietnamese neighbourhoods in this city; there are Chinese ones and Ukrainian ones and Pakistani ones and Korean ones and African ones. Name a region on the planet and there's someone from there, here. All of them sit on Ojibway land, but hardly any of them know it or care because that genealogy is wilfully untraceable except in the name of the city itself. They'd only have to look, though, but it could be that what they know hurts them already, and what if they found out something even more damaging? These are people who are used to the earth beneath them shifting, and they all want it to stop—and if that means they must pretend to know nothing, well, that's the sacrifice they make.

But as at any crossroad there are permutations of existence. People turn into other people imperceptibly, unconsciously, right here in the grumbling train. And on the sidewalks, after they've emerged from the stations, after being sandpapered by the jostling and scraping that a city like this does, all the lives they've hoarded, all the ghosts they've carried, all the inversions they've made for protection, all the scars and marks and records for recognition—the whole heterogeneous baggage falls out with each step on the pavement. There's so much spillage.

In this city there are Bulgarian mechanics, there are Eritrean accountants, Colombian café owners, Latvian book publishers, Welsh roofers, Afghani dancers, Iranian mathematicians, Tamil cooks in Thai restaurants, Calabrese boys with Jamaican accents, Fushen deejays, Filipina-Saudi beauticians; Russian doctors changing tires, there are Romanian bill collectors, Cape Croker fishmongers, Japanese grocery clerks, French gas meter readers, German bakers, Haitian and Bengali taxi drivers with Irish dispatchers.

Lives in the city are doubled, tripled, conjugated—women and men all trying to handle their own chain of events, trying to keep the story straight in their own heads. At times they catch themselves in sensational lies, embellishing or avoiding a nasty secret here and there, juggling the lines of causality, and before you know it, it's impossible to tell one thread from another. In this city, like everywhere, people work, they eat, they drink, they have sex, but it's hard not to wake up here without the certainty of misapprehension.

Quy

Quy. It means, well, it means “precious,” and people underestimate me all the time because of my name. How do I start to tell who I am? Talking is always a miscalculation, my father, Loc Tuc, used to say.

I was a boy at that time. It was night. Because it is at night that these things happen. I was with my parents and my sisters. We had left the place where we lived and travelled along a road. We were picked up by a lorry on this road. I held a lime in my hand that my mother had given me to squeeze and to smell when I felt nauseous. We travelled in the lorry for half a day, and we arrived at a place by the water, a bay, where we waited for a boat. This boat didn't come. We waited two weeks in the back room of a house. There were many other people waiting in that house. My father paid extra money to get me milk, which I liked. My parents loved me. My sisters loved me. I was loved. One day my father told us we would travel in two more nights. My parents prepared. My sisters were terrified, but I was only a small boy; nothing terrified me. I would have been frightened if my mother and my father weren't there. I only ever had nightmares about not seeing my family.

No one would suspect I had diamonds in the belt around my waist. That was almost all of my parents' savings.

It was a cloth belt, and my mother had sewed the diamonds into the seams.

At the boat site there were many people. Some of them had been waiting for weeks. Only two boats arrived. There wasn't enough room. Some of the goods and some of the people would have to be left behind. My sisters walked in a small knot, holding each other, my mother held me, my father held me, they passed me between them time and again. One of them put me down. I won't say who. The water was cold and lapping. People were pushing. There was that quiet fighting-pushing people do when it's dangerous to make noise. I was swept along, my feet were getting wet. It was dark. It was night, of course. The sea was humid. The air was humid. I jumped up and down looking for my parents. I made out my father's legs. I followed him. Someone lifted me into a boat. I sat next to my father's legs. I said nothing. I put my lime to my nose. The boat sailed, and I fell asleep. It was cold. It rained sometimes.

We were in the middle of what I later knew to be the South China Sea when I understood that I was alone. I was a small boy, so I cried. The sea was endless, it was like travelling to the sun. I drank water from the ocean and my belly hurt and my lips cracked. The lime in my hand hardened. It was eight days before the boat arrived at Pulau Bidong, but I didn't belong to anyone on board. I followed the legs I had mistaken for my father's.

It was fortunate, I learned later, that I wasn't thrown overboard by the others. Though I was mistreated, beaten back when I reached for the good water or when I cried for food. Well, it would surprise some, I suppose, that people running to democracy are capable of such things. Why? You would think I would've turned out better myself. I didn't.

This is how I lost the diamonds. On the fourth day of that ugly sea we were boarded by Thai pirates. Six of them. They had three guns and many knives. They were disgusting men. They separated the men from the women, and a few of them raped the women while the others searched the rest of us. They found my belt and wrenched it from my waist. My poor father and mother didn't know this was a well-known hiding place. The pirates pulled me around like a rag. One of them said he would take me with them to make me a whore. I didn't know then what a whore was. They decided to take some women too, and the girls. What did I know about these things? I only know that I saved myself by biting one of them and getting knocked unconscious for it. When I woke up I was still on my way to the place I didn't know yet was Pulau Bidong.

After they left, the boat was a sick place. All the food was gone and people were more depressed, so I was an even worse liability. Human kindness is supposed to set in now, and it did, though it wasn't human, just chance. We reached the place called Pulau Bidong. From there on I was treated with a mix of goodness—some would call it disinterest but at the time I thought of it as goodness—and brutality. I never knew who would bring me which.

When you look at photographs of people at Pulau Bidong you see a blankness. Or perhaps our faces are, like they say in places, unreadable. I know how you come by such a face. I was paralysed when we unfolded what was left of ourselves onto the shore of Bidong. I felt like you do with sunstroke. I felt dried out, though, of course, a child doesn't have these words, but don't give me any sympathy for being a child. I grew up. I lived. I've seen the pictures. We look as one face—no particular personal aspect, no

individual ambition. All one. We might be relatives of the same family. Was it us or was it the photographer who couldn't make distinctions among people he didn't know? Unable to make us human. Unable to help his audience see us, in other words, in individual little houses on suburban streets like those where he came from. Had he done it, would it have shortened my time at Bidong?

In one photograph you can see me stooped at the dress tail of a woman who could be my mother. She had two sons, and in the photograph I look like a third. Staring together into the camera's lens, perhaps by then we knew we were transformed into beggars for all time. I for sure had none of what you would call a character. Pulau Bidong was a refugee camp. A place where identity was watery, up for grabs. Political refugees, economic refugees—what difference? I was too young then for beliefs and convictions, thank heavens. Only at first I looked for love, for goodness, for favour. But after, I lived by one rule: Eat. Eat as much as you can. Nowadays I try not to make too many rules. You probably think if I hadn't lost my mother and father, if they hadn't lost me, I would've been a better person. Don't be sentimental. Don't ascribe good intentions. Who are you to judge?

I spent seven years at Pulau Bidong as an orphan, and I wished the Thai pirates had taken me with them. I would have had a destination and another fate. As it was, I ran to be photographed each time some news reporter or refugee official arrived. Perhaps I hoped my father or mother or my frightened sisters would find me. How did the pictures turn out? Do you recognize me? I'm the one who is smiling brilliantly less and less and then giving up on that more and more. I don't suppose it showed up in the pictures. Bidong became my home.

Once in Bidong I met another boy like me. There were many of us. He asked if he could play with a metal toy I'd made, the last sign of my innocence. I told him no, bluntly. He asked if I knew of his mother and father. I said, "Why would I?" He asked if he could be my friend. I said, "Suit yourself." I don't know what became of him.

10 What happened next? What happened next happened. That's the one thing Pulau Bidong taught me—shut your mouth.

TWO

RAIN HAD FALLEN the night before, but today the sun lit the studio, and the clutter of wood, canvasses, paper, and the general debris that Tuyen considered to be the materials of her art. Tuyen looked out of her window facing the alleyway. Overflowing garbage cans and a broken chair rested against the wall of the building opposite hers. The graffiti crew who lived on the upper floors there had painted a large red grinning pig on the wall. She hadn't noticed the chair there before and examined it from above, thinking of what she could make with it.

She was still wearing the old oilskin coat, waiting for her brother Binh. She hadn't bothered to take it off when she got in. Carla had gone to her own place next door, and Oku had left them three stops before their own on the subway line. Just as she entered her door, Binh had called to say that he was coming over. That was an hour ago. "Be outside," he'd said in an irritated voice, "I'm coming right now." But Tuyen knew better than to trust his sense of time, and she knew he was only annoyed because he'd been sent to visit her by their father. Though she'd kept her coat on just to be ready.

She was contemplating the discarded chair when Binh's Beamer turned into the alleyway. He pulled up and immediately leaned on the horn, then he put his head out the car window and bellowed her name. She opened her window and

fixed him with an exaggeratedly bored stare. Binh leaned on the horn again, not letting up until she slammed the window shut and made her way down the stairs to the alleyway.

"That is so childish," she said to him when she got there.

"Well, you know I hate to come to this dump. Why do you live here anyway? Suffering for your art!" His tone was caustic and slightly envious at the same time.

"What's it to you?"

"Well, I wouldn't have to come here, would I?"

"I didn't ask you."

"No, you wouldn't know about obligations."

"Blah, blah, blah. You're so funny."

"Oh, take this!" he said distastefully, passing her two plastic bags from the passenger seat. "And here," he said, handing her a small envelope. "Money, I guess. Can't you get a job?"

"Thank you, sweet brother." Tuyen ignored the barb.

"Well, can't you? Why don't you go find work to do, huh? Or a husband?"

"As soon as you find one, you fag."

"You're the one with secrets, not me, okay." He waved a finger in her face.

"So, fine. Thank you very much. Goodbye." She turned to go back into the building.

"Hey," Binh said, stepping out of the car. "Hey, I want to talk to you." He was dressed immaculately, his hair long and groomed over his collar, a pair of expensive shades on his eyes.

"I don't want to talk to you. And don't we look fashionable? What d'you want anyway?"

"I'm going to Bangkok . . ."

"What for? A little child-sex tourism?"

"Don't be disgusting. Can you open the store for me?"

"Not in this life." Tuyen turned to go.

"Come on! I'll pay you."

"Are you for real?"

"It's not for me. It's for Ma, you know, and Bo. They can't leave here. They're . . . Ma's terrified . . ."

"When did you cook this up? Did they ask you? Are you leading Ma on again?"

"Forget it. Anyway, thanks."

"Stay out of things. Why don't you let them forget instead of encouraging them, eh?"

"Listen, I'm not encouraging them. I haven't even told them I'm going there, all right!" He removed the shades as if to underline his honesty.

"Just leave it alone. Don't go digging around and then it'll be more disappointment for them." Tuyen stepped closer to him, trying to be intimidating.

She was slightly shorter than he but in every other way as striking. The same thick black shoulder-length hair, the broad high cheekbones, the perfectly arched eyebrows—only she was dressed in a second-hand shirt and a baggy pair of paint-splattered pants she had made herself.

"You surprise me, Miss Great Artist. Aren't you curious? Don't you want to know what happened? Don't you wonder about him? With all your soul searching and finding yourself, don't you want to know?"

"It's not my stuff, it's theirs, and it's painful to them and I don't want you going digging around in it."

"And who are you to tell me what to do?"

"You asked me, so I'm telling you. Don't be selfish."

"Selfish? I'm going to try and find out what happened, what happened to him. How am I being selfish?"

"I don't know, but that's how you are."

"Okay, fine, never mind. *Chao chi!*"

Binh got into his car, and rolling up the window, he revved the engine and sped up the alleyway.

"*Chao anh* to you too!" Tuyen yelled at the car speeding away.

14

Tuyen received these visits from Binh every time her parents hadn't heard from her for a while. Her mother, Cam, would send food and her father, Tuan, would send a brown envelope with money. They never came themselves. Cam would have liked to visit her daughter, but Tuyen's father had forbidden it, thinking that they had to maintain a solid front in their objections to Tuyen moving out. The front always wavered though, as their anxiety made them send Binh to give Tuyen money. Binh refused to go up to the studio apartment because he said the staircase was filthy, so he would always lean on his car horn or scream her name up the alleyway until she came down. She was younger than Binh by eighteen months, but she felt she was much more mature, since he seemed to need their parents' approval far more than she. Here he was going on another fruitless search trying to get their attention again, she thought, as she made her way up the staircase.

Tuyen's studio apartment was a mess of wood rails and tree stumps, twigs and rope, debris, really, which she had picked up walking along the beaches, and lumber she'd bought, all of which she was making into a great figure, a *lubaio*, which, when she was finished, she said, would fill the entire studio apartment from ceiling to floor. She'd enlisted her friends, Carla, who lived across the hall, Oku, and Jackie, to help her stand one of two railway ties up on its end while she tied it to iron hooks she'd hammered in at

the four quadrants of the room. For months the railway ties had lain diagonally across the floor. Every now and again she bumped her toes trying to get by, until she decided that she would make a signpost.

Stolen is what they were, the railway ties, but "come by" is what she and Oku laughingly called it, recalling their nighttime raid on the railway yards. Tuyen had happened on the idea of the *lubaio* when she was cutting across the railway yards on one of her searches. She hadn't counted on the weight of the railway ties and the difficulty of moving them around at will. But Oku had used his father's old gas guzzler, a windowless sea scow of a Buick Plaza, and they'd harnessed the ties to the top of the car and driven home slowly and stealthily through alleyways. First the ties sat up the staircase for months, then, when they finally arrived in Tuyen's studio at the top, she got her friends to help her raise one to standing.

"Christ, this thing is fucking heavy," Jackie had screeched. "You must be out of your mind. If I get one single scratch, my fucking career is over."

"What '*fucking* career,' Jackie? Hold your *fucking* end up."

"Don't make me drop this on you, Oku."

"Drop it on me, girl. Just like you drop it on that German guy."

"Don't go there, man. Don't front. You couldn't handle it."

"Well, test me, girl, test me!"

"Stop, stop." Both Tuyen and Carla said this at the same time, laughing, the railway tie tilting precariously.

"Why the fuck do I bother with you guys?" Jackie said dismissively.

"Because we love you, sweetie." Tuyen finished tying off the pole.

15

"It's your Jones for me, baby." Oku wrapped his arm across Jackie's waist.

"Anyways—" Jackie gave Oku a freezing look, at which he dropped his arm limply, then turning to Tuyen—"And what the fuck are you making now? Is this some ancient Vietnamese shit or something?"

"I'm making a *fucking lubaio* . . ."

"Okay, honey, say no fucking more." Jackie examined her nails and her long legs. Jackie could use the word "fuck" as every part of speech, in every grammatical construction.

" . . . because I am not interested in the idea of life, death, fertility, hope, or anything, and because Dali's *Reclining Woman Wearing a Chemise* looks like a dead slaughtered doll, and I can see preying eagles, broken arrows, and jazz musicians in Jackson Pollock, and because I believe that Man Ray and Duchamp were lovers."

"Word!" Oku.

"And because there's some ancient Chinese-Vietnamese shit that's my shit and I'm taking it. Okay?"

"Oh Christ, turn her off." Carla. "But I thought you were Vietnamese?"

"How long have you known me?" The words sounded dangerous in Tuyen's throat. Carla had ventured into a sensitive place.

"Whatever," Jackie said, noticing the sudden disruption. "Maybe you're a fucking genius, but you're nuts is all I know, girl. This place is a fucking mess!"

"Okay, let me explain. You know those fake carved posts they've put in the middle of the road down on Spadina? In Chinatown? Well, they're kitsch down there, but they're supposed to be signposts. Like long ago people would pin messages against the government and shit like that on them. So

my installation is to reclaim . . . Of course, regular electric posts already have notices on them like flyers and stuff . . . Well, I still have to think it all through, but . . ."

Breaking off, she explained the plan to make a pulley with a seat so that she could move up and down the *lubaio*, engraving and encrusting figures and signs. At the planned installation, which was to be her most ambitious, she would have the audience post messages on the *lubaio*. Messages to the city.

Jackie began to make snoring sounds. "Anyways, very interesting honey, but . . ." she said, pausing pointedly, "catch you all later. Much. I got business."

Tuyen was devoted, as devoted as she could be to anyone, to Carla. That is, Carla reminded her of a painting she loved by Remedios Varo. *Madness of the Cat*. If you saw Remedios Varo's painting, you would see Carla—without the cats but with the electricity, all kinetic electricity, all the supernatural otherworldly energy. That was how Tuyen saw her, and indeed there was a striking resemblance to the girl in Remedios's painting. The wraithlike face, the high cheekbones, the reddish hair, kinked in Carla's case not by electricity but by her father's genealogy; and the dark hues of her skin put there also by him. But the surprise on her face, the startled, knowing look, was another alchemy altogether her own. Tuyen rightly saw that Carla inhabited a world of fantasy, of distance, of dreams. Her bicycle, like the wheeled apparatuses of Remedios's inventions, extending from her bones as she pedalled her way around the city, her winter sun-yellowed jacket and the courier's knapsack on her back ballooning out like a sail. And the city's smogged air around her seemed painted in decalomania. All that

was why Tuyen was attracted to Carla. The hidden energy, the little shocks secreted in inconspicuous places. The times she came upon Carla in her sparsely appointed apartment next door, standing still as if in the middle of a conversation with unseen people, she fell silent watching. If she were to paint Carla, and she had tried, it would be to copy every painting of Varo's.

In every one of Tuyen's installations—she'd had six now, and had a growing reputation in the avant-garde scene—there was the figure or some aspect of Carla. Sometimes her eyes with their luxuriant lashes, sometimes her mouth in that rich sombre pout. And in each installation her hand on Carla's figure had grown more erotic, painting the escarpment of Carla's cheek or her ankle or her back like a lover.

Tuyen had been drawn to her since the first day of high school. They were both intense, bright girls who kept quiet in class but always had a quirky yet correct answer when asked a question. As when Carla blurted out in class that *To Kill a Mockingbird* was maudlin and embarrassing and why did people need to feel pity in order to act right. Or when Tuyen in a small voice from the back of the history class, during what she thought was a tedious intonement by the teacher about Normandy, said that she was sick of the Second World War and it wasn't the world anyway, it was Europe, and asked what had happened in the rest of the world, did anybody else die? Was anybody else heroic?

Their friendship escalated and expanded to include Oku, a studious guy, when he told the phys. ed. teacher, Mr. Gordon, to eat shit when he invited him to run track. He was suspended for a week because he didn't apologize, and as a matter of principle, Tuyen and Carla, and even Jackie, who was different and odd all on her own, decided to take the

week off with him. It was a wonderful week. They played video games at Jackie's house, and Jackie's mother taught them how to play euchre. They ate pizza at Joe's on College, they got high on one tiny toke and giggled at everything and everyone they saw. That was grade eleven. Now that friendship of opposition to the state of things, and their common oddness, held all of them together.

They shared everything: money, clothes, food, ideas. Everything except family details. There was an assumption among them that their families were boring and uninteresting and a general pain, and best kept hidden, and that they couldn't wait for the end of high school to leave home. Only once in a while did they sigh in resignation at some ridiculous request from their families to fit in and stop making trouble.

"Yes, Ma. I'll get a blonde wig and fit in all right!" Tuyen once yelled at her mother. At which her mother looked wounded and told her to stop making jokes and try harder.

They had an unspoken collaboration on distancing themselves as far as possible from the unreasonableness, the ignorance, the secrets, and the madness of their parents. They carried around an air of harassment or impatience about matters at home. "Anyways!" was their signal for dismissing whatever had happened in the hours between going home and coming back to school.

Loners before they met, they were all skimming across high school, all bored with the adolescent prejudices of classrooms. They couldn't wait to get out of school, where they had very early realized, as early as grade three, that nothing there was about them. Their parents didn't understand anything. They abandoned them to the rough public terrain that they themselves couldn't handle but out of which they expected their children to emerge with good grades and well

adjusted. So they settled in as mainly spectators to the white kids in the class.

Tuyen noticed the scythe-like, limber, sharp blade of Carla's body, her strange whisper of a voice, and fell in love immediately. Carla would dream off in class—engrossed in a long-ago moment when she had heard a chair falling—Tuyen would nudge her when the teacher spoke to her. Because Tuyen saw a similarity. At home, she herself was caught by a kind of lapping shame. This is what drew them together. They each had the hip quietness of having seen; the feeling of living in two dimensions, the look of being on the brink, at the doorway listening for everything.

They all, Tuyen, Carla, Oku, and Jackie, felt as if they inhabited two countries—their parents' and their own—when they sat dutifully at their kitchen tables being regaled with how life used to be “back home,” and when they listened to inspired descriptions of other houses, other landscapes, other skies, other trees, they were bored. They thought that their parents had scales on their eyes. Sometimes they wanted to shout at them, “Well, you're not *there!*” But if any of them had the temerity to say this, they would be met by a slap to the face or a crestfallen look, and an awful, disappointed silence in the kitchen. Each left home in the morning as if making a long journey, untangling themselves from the seaweed of other shores wrapped around their parents. Breaking their doorways, they left the sleepwalk of their mothers and fathers and ran across the unobserved borders of the city, sliding across ice to arrive at their own birthplace—the city. They were born in the city from people born elsewhere.

Only once back then did Tuyen share a family detail with Carla. A letter written by her mother.

Dear My Phuong,

You do not know how my heart is open. You have seen my son, Quy? I am in hopes that he is safe with you. I will give any things I have to meet him. My days is nothing . . .

But before Carla could read more Tuyen had grabbed the letter, stuffing it back into her bag, saying, “Anyways . . . my mother's crazy, huh?” Carla had grinned uncomfortably, and they'd said nothing more about it. After that they acted as if the incident had never happened, yet for all its unfinished nature, it brought them protectively closer. When it came to their families they could only draw half conclusions, make half inferences, for fear of the real things that lay there.

Tuyen's father owned a restaurant on Elizabeth Street where most of the help and most of the customers spoke Vietnamese only. When she was little, Tuyen rebelled against the language, refusing to speak it. At five she went through a phase of calling herself Tracey because she didn't like anything Vietnamese. She used to sit at the cash register, her legs hanging from a stool, reprimanding people older than she to speak English. “English, English!” she would yell at them. As a teenager she cut her hair herself in jagged swaths, shaving the left side and having the rest fall to the right over her eyes. Her mother wept, bemoaning the good thick hair she said Tuyen had butchered. Even back then she disobeyed Bo's warnings to stay close to home, scouring the beaches, the railroads, and the construction sites at night for unattended wood. She said she was going to be an architect, and she actually spent two years in college learning draftsmanship. She dropped out before finishing and started doing sculpture at the college of art, but she dropped out of that too, saying that

the people there were vulgar, no-talent assholes who only wanted to suck up to teachers and do the conventional.

After she let the others in on her sorties to silent nighttime building sites and the railway tracks, she dragged them along with her. They all loved going to the railway tracks with a twelve-pack, some ganja, and a boombox.

22

She was the most daring of the friends. By eighteen Tuyen had already moved out, living above the store on College Street. She considered herself an avant-garde artist, sometimes doing art installations at the small galleries along Queen Street West. With her bright face, her dark, always-inquisitive eyes, her arms elegant with silver bracelets, she became a ubiquitous figure throughout the alternative art scene, dressed dramatically in her self-designed clothing. She wore embroidered sleeveless vests to show off the muscles in her shoulders, well developed from building her elaborate installations, on which she honed her skills of carpentry, carving, and painting. Tuyen was androgynous, a beautiful, perfect mix of the feminine and the masculine, her face sleek and planed. In the winters she wore the great oilskin coat, which she had found rummaging at the Goodwill store.

There were mice running across the ceiling of the apartments, day and night, but they didn't mind, anything was better than home. The landlord, a Mrs. Chou, didn't take care of the place, didn't sweep the hallway, and didn't paint. Anything that was broken Carla and Tuyen had to fix themselves, like the washers on every tap, the broken bathroom tiles, and the blown fuses. Mrs. Chou called the hovels she rented one-bedrooms, but they were little more than single rooms with a divider, the tiniest of galley kitchens, and a bathroom where you had to leave the door open to sit down on the toilet. Neither Carla nor Tuyen cared. Carla was only

too elated when the apartment beside Tuyen became available. The first thing she bought was a stereo so that she could play the Fugees, Missy Elliot, and Lil' Kim and dance. She slept on the bare floor for the first several months, the stereo booming her to sleep, the light brightly lit. Tuyen wondered how Carla could sleep in all that noise, in all that light.

Tuyen's and Carla's apartments became places of refuge, not just for their immediate circle but for all the people they picked up along the way to their twenties. Like the Graffiti Boys across the alleyway, Tuyen's friends from the gay ghetto, a few hip-hop poets, two girls who made jewellery and knit hats, and an assortment of twenty-somethings who did various things like music and waitering. The two rundown apartments were above a cheap clothing store. Mrs. Chou only made appearances to collect the rents and to say, "No parties," and other than those predictable visits Carla and Tuyen had free reign of the place. When they did have parties, both apartments and the hallway were full of smoke and music, beer bottles, and loud talk above even louder music. A cloud of smoke hung at the ceiling and blew its way down the staircase. People didn't go home for days on end until either Tuyen or Carla, mostly Carla, came off the friendly high of Ecstasy to find her face in the toilet or some asshole with his shoes on her bed and turned everybody out. Once, on magic mushrooms, Tuyen saw every detail in the wood on the staircase, she saw that beyond the wood there was a coal-orange glow, and the stairs felt hot and burning for a week after.

Carla had bouts of cleanliness, which could only be called violent, during which she scrubbed and scrubbed her apartment and threw out perfectly good things like plates and knives. Tuyen had no such inclinations. Tuyen's apartment doubled as an art gallery for her installations. Carla's

23

thrown-out objects would find themselves in an artistic creation of some kind.

Tuyen's own possessions, her clothes, her pots and dishes and such, were scattered in small piles around the growing *lubaio* in her apartment. These, her clothing, her dishes, spewed all over the floor, only hid smaller sharp-edged constructions of an earlier idea to build a *hutoung* in miniature, and an idea earlier still for mud terraces and a simultaneous one of ornamental *wenshou*—monsters and lions, horses and fish, phoenixes—all magical animals; some of which she gave to friends when their abundance threatened to clutter even her sense of space. These last she made of wood or soapstone or clay, and they were numerous scattered all around the room. Finally, and not unconnectedly, she had decided on the *lubaio*.

Tuyen had secreted one more letter from her mother's cache like a magical *wenshou*. She had memorized that one and replaced it—the only one in her father's handwriting—addressed to the director of the Chi Ma Wan Camp shortly after the family arrived in Toronto.

Dear Sir,

We have lost our child as you know. We were six months in Chi Ma Wan Camp. I am inquiring as to if you have a record of him there. Did he arrive after we left? In case he reaches the camp, here is some money for his passage, and a small amount to get him sweet milk. Also this hat which belongs to his Bo, he will know it. Please take care of him until he can be with us.

Respect to you, Vu Tuan

She had no idea what she would do with these letters, but she sought them out in her mother's room when she went on visits home and held them like ornate and curious figures of a time past.

She had surreptitiously broken down the wall between her bedroom and the kitchen, making one large room for her installations. One thing with Mrs. Chou's slum apartments—the ceilings were high. Tuyen's dark room was a thick black velvet curtain. The dishes were in the bathtub as the countless paintbrushes were in the sink. Chinese architecture, she said, dating way back, did not use walls for support. Columns were used, she said. She avoided the visits of Mrs. Chou, installed new locks, and made Carla her lookout for Mrs. Chou's possible raids. She had virtually destroyed the apartment. If she ever moved, she would have to do it late at night and very quickly and without a trace.

Still exasperated and a little disturbed by her brother, Tuyen knocked on Carla's door. Why, she wondered, did she find herself still waging that childish war with Binh?

"Look what I have," she said, when Carla opened.

"Oh, sweet!" Carla said, reaching for the two plastic bags of food Tuyen offered.

"Yeah? What do I get?"

"Hugs," Carla said, embracing her gratefully, "but really it's your brother who should get them."

"Don't even mention him. I'm so pissed with him."

"Why? I wish I had a brother like that."

"Oh, you do *not* know him. He is so manipulative . . ."

"Well, I'll exchange him for mine if you want." Carla's tone foreshadowed bad news.

"Sorry, what now?"

"Mimico again. Carjacking."

"Whoa! Christ!"

"Freaking carjacking. How am I going to fix that one?"

"Why do you have to fix it?"

"Because he's mine."

Tuyen had a peculiar feeling of self-betrayal. It was the word "mine." Binh had more or less asked her the same thing—didn't she want to know what had happened to their brother? Didn't she want that anomalous void in her life—in *their* life—charged with some specific substance or body? Did she not feel that sense of casualty, if not fatality, wrapped around their childhood?

Carla had moved to look out the window, and shaking off such thoughts, Tuyen walked across the room to her. She watched the thin muscle of Carla's neck quiver like a tulip's stem. She wanted to caress it, she wanted to put her lips on it. Then the mouth, turned down and sulking, she wanted to kiss it to the upturned suppleness she knew was there. Touching Carla's shoulder gently, as if afraid of breaking it with her desire, she said, "It'll be all right. Don't worry."

THREE

CARLA WOKE UP to the sound of the streetcar along College. The tiny apartment was hot already. She had slept late. She heard Tuyen still chipping away at her wooden *lubaio* next door, and she imagined Tuyen's intense face, the woodchips in her hair, battling her demons, hammering them out on the wooden pole, amidst the ever-present coffee smell enveloping the room.

Carla's eyes took some time to clear before she could see the clock. Ten A.M. Late. Shit. The thought alarmed her for the briefest second. The rest of the room came into its bare view. She heard the man downstairs rolling out the awning on the storefront. Her head felt woolly as if she'd been drinking—she remembered, yeah, but only one beer. Again the brief feeling of alarm. She was halfway off the futon, her head on the floor. This is how she woke up each morning, askew as if some great fight happened during her sleep. The awning downstairs squealed. The light from a clouded sun had already filled the apartment. She struggled to raise herself up, but a lassitude enveloped her. Not the lassitude of sleep but of consciousness. Slumping back onto the futon, she remembered yesterday.

Yesterday she'd come home exhausted, dragging her bike up the filthy stairs. She was streaming with sweat. She had ridden so fast, and she'd ridden, out of her way, all over the

city, burning off a white light on her body. First through the downscale suburb of Etobicoke, which looked like the badlands of some alienated city—the low seemingly unfinished buildings, the stretches of uncreative streets, the arid after-winter look of everything, the down-in-the-heel, stranded feel of the people.

She was riding away from the Mimico Correctional Institute, where she'd gone to visit her brother, Jamal. Her visit with him had only heightened the mixture of anger and fright she'd felt over the last few weeks. She didn't like this part of town, not only because of Jamal but because it seemed downtrodden somehow. A desolate outskirt—railway tracks, wedges of strip malls, and a prison kept like a secret. Gearing up on her bicycle she left the dreariness of it behind, heading downtown. When she made the intersection at Runnymede, the glow was still on her body, searing and damp. The afternoon light was sharp for spring. The sun coming west was dead angled at her head as she rode east, chipping between cars, crazily challenging red lights. The city was vivid. Each billboard screeching happiness and excitement. The cars, the crowds intense in the this-and-that of commerce, of buy this, get that, the minutiae of transient wants and needs. As fast as she was riding, she could still make out the particularity of each object or person she saw, so acute this searing light around her, tingling her skin. Could anyone see her? drenched in lightning?

There had been numbing sluggishness to the prison behind her; a dangerousness, a dangerousness that was both routine and petrifying. That same sluggishness was in Jamal's appearance at the visiting booth. It had been in the waiting room with the reception guard, who seemed chronically skeptical of all who entered; chronically hateful. Why Jamal

put her through this, she didn't know. Why, indeed, he put himself through it, let alone her.

She hurtled through the upscale region of High Park, the old British-style houses. The people who must inhabit these with their neat little lives made her sicker to her stomach than usual because she'd just left her brother. The cute expensive stores, the carapace of wealth, seemed unaffected by her lit body. The handlebars of the bike were like her own bones, and like her bones she bent the brace toward the park itself. Perhaps there she might burn off the pace of her legs up the inclines and through the trees. But she was out of the park before she knew it. The trees held nothing. The manicured circle of flowers, the false oasis of the park, only made her sicker. Before long she was out on Bloor Street again, speeding east toward the centre of the city, flinging herself through the lights at Keele and bending southward to the lake; the bellowing horn and pneumatic brake of an eighteen-wheeler flinched her sinuous back, but she didn't stop for the trucker yelling curses at her. She left the drama of the shocked driver and skewered traffic behind. If she could stop, she would have, but she was light and light moves.

Her stomach always made a knot when Jamal was near. He was eighteen, for God's sake. Why couldn't he take care of himself yet? Why did he expect her to come to his rescue always? And why was there this uncontrollable urge in her, this frantic nervousness where he was concerned, as if she had to prevent him from falling, to look out for him as one would a baby with a baby's recklessness?

She was suddenly aware of music. It confused her until she remembered that she had clamped the small earplugs of her CD player in her ears and turned it on as soon as she'd

left the building. Oku had lent her Dizzy Gillespie's "Take It as It Comes." The zephyrs of trumpets and saxophones streamed into her at Dundas Street. Out of the horns she sensed the lake and sped down to Roncesvalles. Ordinarily the bike would bump across the streetcar lines, but today she didn't feel them, she was slipping through the city on light. She rode along the shore, feeling translucent. The sun was on the lake, turning its usual muddiness to a pearly blue stretching south and wide. Carla raised her back from its hunch, felt a small hopeful breeze.

"How could you let other people handle you like that and run your life every minute of the day, Jamal?"

They'd been sitting uncomfortably across from each other, a Plexiglas wall separating them.

"Handle me? Nobody's not handling me." He had misunderstood her, thinking she'd meant sexually. "Ghost, them call me in here, you know, Carla! Ghost. You think me a batty man! Batty man in here 'fraid me, you know!"

He pulled the neck of his grey issue aside, showing her a rough, ugly branded G on his breast under his left shoulder blade. Not a tattoo, but a brand rising in an unhealed keloid. It was a furious-looking red, parts of it still oozing. She suppressed a gasp. His face formed the mask of the brother she did not know. The brother trying to be someone she could not recognize. She didn't know why he insisted on speaking in this accent. Something he'd picked up with his friends on the street. He did it to assume badness. She was angry whenever he used it on her, as if she didn't know him, as if she had not practically grown him.

"You don't get it, you don't get it at all, do you? What's the point?"

"Cho to blow!" he said, trying to impress the fellow prisoner in the booth beside him. "Me nah 'fraid nutten, Carla!"

All their conversations in the last few years were conversations of deliberate misunderstanding, it seemed. She couldn't speak to him clearly or reach him in any way, and he seemed to misunderstand her on purpose.

"Do you realize where you are again? And I can't get you out this time. Carjacking, Jamal! What's going to happen now? You tell me." She knew she was pronouncing every word, denying his newfound accent. She wanted to bring him back from the dreamworld he seemed to be in. "They won't let me bail you. And he's not answering his phone. So now what?"

"Him pussy! Me ask *he* for anything?"

"He" was how they both referred to their father outside of his presence, ever since they were small. "She" for Nadine, though Nadine had in effect been Jamal's mother. Carla referred to her as "she," and Jamal, as he grew older, reluctantly went along with it.

"Well, who else can I ask? It's me that's doing the asking. That's the position you leave me in. Who else, huh?"

He'd maintained his sullenness and so she'd said goodbye, promising to leave him some money at the desk outside. She couldn't wait to get to her bicycle and ride away from him. She'd left him standing there, his mouth in a babyish pout as usual. As she rode, she pictured him still standing there, waiting for her to turn around and come back, and all she could do was run, and all she could find was this well of heat and cold depth.

The muscles of highway and streets met down at the lake. All along the underpasses graffiti marred the concrete girders. She recognized the tags. The kids who lived across the alleyway from her apartment were graffiti artists. Kumaran's

grinning pig, Abel's "narc" initial, then Keeran's desert and Jericho's lightning bolt. She felt slightly comforted, though she had asked them often enough to paint something else if they were going to paint the whole city over. Something more. They had practically filled all the walls of the city with these four signs, and she would have liked them to paint a flowering jungle or a seaside, the places where her mother, Angie, had always dreamed of going but never went. But she loved the city. She loved riding through the neck of it, the triangulating girders now possessed by the graffiti crew. She loved the feeling of weight and balance it gave her.

Jamal didn't see the city as she did. His life was in his skin, in his mouth, in his eyes, in the closest physical encounters. He operated only on his senses as far as Carla was concerned. But she saw the city as a set of obstacles to be crossed and circled, avoided and let pass. He saw it as something to get tangled in. Why couldn't he see just one step ahead of himself, she wondered, one want ahead of itself, as she criss-crossed and floated under the highway bypasses. Everything was immediate for Jamal, everything in the moment. Well, he had to learn, just like she had. Against the flow of the rush-hour traffic making its way to the expressway taking cars out of the city, she pedalled at a demonic pace. Shit, shit, shit, shit. She had to stop thinking, just pedal, just go, go, go.

Her legs were leaden when she'd finally dragged the bicycle up the stairs. Her thighs were boulders. It was as if because she'd stopped she'd become leaden, as if the sluggish prison embraced her again. If she'd continued, she was sure she would fly. But her own weight and the thought of her brother at Mimico Correctional crushed her again. She'd showered in cold water until her fingers were numb, then wrapped

herself in a rough towel. Dripping and in between burning and freezing, she'd written something in her head. She thought she'd written it on paper, then searched for it wildly and didn't find it. Her hands were useless, numb and shrivelled from the prolonged shower. She'd tried putting on a shirt but couldn't find the neck. She'd sat naked by the window, freezing and thawing.

For six months she hadn't seen Jamal. She'd convinced herself that if she didn't see him, if she didn't hear from him, if he didn't call her, then things were fine. He was doing well wherever he was. She dreaded his phone calls, especially the phone calls late at night—why he always seemed to be in trouble late at night was beyond her. So six months had passed and she hadn't spoken to him directly. She had heard from him. He'd left two messages on her machine, one sounding sweet: "Carla, just want you to know, see, that I really love you and I appreciate everything you did. I'm fine. Calling because you know how, eh, you say I always call with trouble?" He giggled. "I wanted to tell you that I'm fine and, you know, just checkin' you . . ." The next time he sounded elated: "C, man, I'm really getting it together. Everything is cool, great." She was beginning to get comfortable but should've known, whenever he sounded elated some shit was going to happen.

The next time she heard, it was a legal-aid lawyer who called, asking her whether she could bail him. Then a sheepish collect call from him: "Ah, C, man, ah is like, ah, well, I think I'm in trouble, you know." She was silent, she refused to help him say what he wanted and she refused to play into it with him. Somehow, when he got himself in trouble, she always felt as if she was to blame. She would ask him some incredulous question like, "What the hell were you thinking,

Jamal?" And he would take offence as if he had a right and as if she were asking something unreasonable and as if she should know that it was not his fault, any of it. It just happened to him, he'd say, or it was really the guys he was hanging with. He was a fantasist. She didn't doubt that it *really* happened to him—he was, unlike her, open to things happening to him.

He told her convoluted stories about being in the wrong place at the wrong time, like, he and his friends were just hanging out in the park, chilling, smoking a joint, and some other guys from Flemingdon came along and for no reason started a fight about some girl and he didn't really want to get involved so he stood to the side and somehow the police got there and somehow they picked on him and his friends while the other guys ran off. Another story was that some guy owed him some money and he went to pick it up and just then the guy's girlfriend had called the police on him and they came and started questioning him, not the guy, and said there was a bench warrant out for him because he didn't show up to see his probation officer, "but that was bullshit, Carla," and on top of that the cops charged him with resisting, which everybody could tell was a false charge. "Carla," he'd say, "you know resisting is a false charge, anybody can tell you when you see a black person charged with resisting, it's the motherfucking cops who started it, right, right, Carla?"

It was hopeless trying to sift through to the real story with Jamal. Lurking in everything he said was a glimmer of it, but Carla knew that she never got the whole truth. For one thing, he was never to blame. So while it was true that the police were motherfuckers, Jamal was also troubled and she knew this, he was her brother. He was troubled and black and so the last two facts would outweigh the first when push came to

shove. She tried to make him understand this, but he just wouldn't listen. She didn't want him to end up dead or in prison for life, but God, he was wearing her out. How many times had she said to him, "Jamal you realize that you're black, right? You know what that means? You can't be in the wrong place at the wrong time." And he would answer, "C, you think I'm stupid or something? I wasn't doing nothing, C. For real."

This time she had waited for the saga. She had kept quiet on the other end of the phone, and when he'd heard her silence he'd said, "Ah, C, Carla, I was, um, implicated in a crime." He probably thought this sounded official and formal, and he probably thought it said that he was really not involved and that he knew the "runnings," as he called them, he knew the system and the lingo, and he wasn't asking for help just because he was her brother but because he had been falsely accused. *Implicated!* She'd wanted to scream at him. She'd wanted to tear him to pieces, to say to him, You little punk, you idiot. You couldn't stay in school long enough to pass grade twelve, but you can say you were "implicated" in a crime. But before she screamed at him all the rage that the word "implicated" made her feel, she'd put the phone down quietly.

The lawyer had called, asking her about bail and saying it was best if Jamal pled guilty because then he would probably get a judge who would only give him a light sentence or maybe probation, even though that was unlikely since he was on probation when he was implicated in the crime—that's where Jamal must have picked up "implicated." Would she at any rate visit her brother and convince him to plead, since if he asked for a jury trial and pleaded innocent and wasted the court's time, then the judge would definitely be annoyed and give him a longer sentence.

She hated talking to these patronizing lawyers. Their tone suggesting they knew something way beyond what she or Jamal knew, something generic, something unavoidable. So she found herself saying to him archly, "What if he isn't guilty? Should he just plead being black?" There was silence on the other end, to which she said, "I'll get back to you."

Her brother was a piece of work for sure, but she would defend him against that kind of presumption any day. Her father would have to bail him out this time. She didn't have a penny or a pot to piss in. The last time, at least, she had been able to say he could live at her place, but that had brought her only grief—unbearably what she liked about him as a child she couldn't take now. There was never a way to make a bargain with him—you do this and I'll do that. When he was younger she had seen it as cute—breaking stupid convention, being honest—but now she saw it as an inability to show loyalty or to see himself as connected to people. To her, really. She had loved him most, and she thought that he would see that and love her back—enough to . . . to what? Behave? Live quietly? What? She herself had no idea . . . to be safe, at least. But a carjacking, Christ! To get involved in a carjacking, what the hell would be his story this time? She could tell it herself—C, I didn't even know it wasn't the guy's car, he pulled up and said let's go for a ride. That would be the story. He was an innocent again, pulled unwittingly into a plot.

When she'd first got news of his charge, she'd called her father and got Nadine. "Oh my God. He's not here, but I'll tell him. Tell me where Jamal is, Carla, so I can go see him. My God."

"Mimico," Carla answered. "There are certain times you can go." She didn't want to prolong the conversation with Nadine. "You should call them."

"My God, my God, that boy."

She wanted to get off the phone quickly. She couldn't take Nadine's hysterics, nor did she want any assumption of friendship with her. There had always been awkwardness between them, even in her childhood, and Carla preferred that it should stay that way. Loyalty to her dead mother, Angie, dictated that. She never knew what to say to Nadine so she said "goodbye" and "see you" and dropped the phone before Nadine could say more.

Three hours later her father hadn't called back and she'd left another message, this time on the answering machine. When he still didn't answer that, she was so furious her head blazed into an ache. Who the fuck did he think he was? Did she ever call him for anything? Did she ever need him for anything? That was when her body had begun to feel this incandescence. Her face glowed at her in store windows for the next two days, and a nervous kinetic energy kept her awake. Finally she had decided to go and see Jamal and tell him that there was no bail. No bail out of anything any more.

Sitting at the window after the shower last evening, she'd had a smoke to warm her, lighting the cigarette as if all her fingers were thumbs. Ghost, my ass, she'd thought. His ghostliness didn't stop the police from finding him. That's what she had wanted to tell him yesterday. You're such a fucking ghost, every time you do some shit they find you. Or, Ghost, why don't you just disappear from my life. Not that, not that, she felt rotten when she thought that. The smoke hadn't calmed her. Smoking was an affectation she had started early, in high school, in the café across from Harbord Collegiate, in the park on Grace Street, where she and her friends would sit on the embankment, puffing and joking.

When the telephone rang, she hadn't answered. Her father? Not likely. Tuyen from next door or Oku, Jackie? Or was it Jamal calling again, collect? Whoever it was—she hadn't answered all evening. And it couldn't have been Jamal, she'd soon realized, if it was all night. He'd given that privilege up to the suits and the uniforms. Listening calmed her in an icy way. The more the phone had rung, the more distant she became. She looked out the window, blowing smoke into the air.

Tuyen had rapped on her door. Carla had heard her voice calling through the seam, asking her, "How was it, Carla? How is he? Come on, come talk to me." Tuyen's voice soft, then gruff, then giving up. Then she'd heard her go back to chipping away at the wooden *lubaio*. She didn't want to tell Tuyen about it right then. Tuyen was her best friend. They shared everything, but it was long understood that some things, for both of them, were unknowable, unshareable. It was usually Tuyen who pushed and pulled at the borders of these things. Tuyen's artist's curiosity getting the better of their restraint. Carla had ignored her, trying to warm her icy body with her cigarette.

Carla's place was sparse and grew even more sparse after every visit to Tuyen's. She had a futon and three cushions on the floor, a tiny fridge and stove that came with the rent, her stereo and a small television on a few red-and-blue milk crates, and her bicycle hung on the wall. Her clothes, which she kept to a minimum, were neatly, ascetically, hung in two closets. Her shoes she left in a military row outside her door. She didn't want to tread dirt into her rooms, and since she and Tuyen were the only tenants on the second floor, her shoes were safe. She was frightened by clutter.

The street below the window seemed distant, blurred, soft-lit last evening. She'd watched the street people haggling,

the store owner trying to move them along, the man who went to the Mars ten times a day for ice cream, the lottery ticket man, the café sitters, the trail of plastic-bag-laden people coming from the market. She watched and watched until the light went and the street lights came on and the crowd changed, with the exception of the regular homeless—the man who always told her, "Have a nice day, have a very nice day"; the chain-smoking woman who, on bad days, declaimed herself ugly to anyone within a few feet; the other woman who waited in the alley each day to tell the unsuspecting passerby that her dog had died; and the short, swollen, bare-foot man with black hair. Then she watched the sun set—not the actual setting but the way anyone in a city sees the sun set, taking it for granted that the pinkish orange hues enveloping the buildings reflect the sun's going light. So she had watched from her window, the undivided phalanx of buildings eat away the sun.

Much later, eaten away herself into the gaze of the ebbing street and the perennial clicking of the streetcars, she had fallen asleep below the window. When she woke at the still-open window, the air had gone a little cold, and the jaundiced light of the street lamp had hit her in the face, "blessed" her face, as her mother used to say. "When I blessed my eyes on you." Why had she remembered that? *Blessed, blessé*. When my eyes wounded you, when the sight of you wounded me, which one did it mean? She felt the stroke of light, which is why she must have awakened. The street was now a damp quiet. It must have been three or so, perhaps four, in the morning, the time of the morning when streets seem to be their own selves, reflective, breathing some other breath, going some other way without the complications of people.

She had awakened then with a clarity and thought, *If you expect that I could help you*. She reached for her notebook and wrote it down. She had been dreaming it, over and over again, this line of words said to someone in her dream. "If you expect . . ." echoing under the rest of the line, "that I could know you, that I could see the thing riding you, if you expect that I should . . . if you expect to see God in me . . ." Well, it was a little dramatic but not hard to figure out who her dream was talking to, she thought, throwing the notebook aside. She wished her dreams were more complicated. She always wrote them down thinking they might be, then read them in the mornings knowing they were not parables but just extensions of her day life. She wished they were more cunning, hiding some secret that she might discover there.

One of the arms of Tuyen's *lubaio* was closest to the wall against which Carla's bed lay on the floor. Carla had grown accustomed to Tuyen chiselling all through her sleep. Last night she had dreamed Tuyen asking, "What about that wall?" Meaning the one near Carla's head. Meaning could she take it down too, could she extend her sculpture through to Carla's place? Could she store the railway ties in Carla's apartment? Carla always dreams this when she is nervous.

Last night she'd wanted to lift her head and pound on the wall for Tuyen to stop chiselling. But she only turned, putting her foot to the wall, and dreamed, *If you expect that I should ease some ache in you . . .* She wrote it down in her sleep, as a bit of paper from Tuyen's wrecked room floated toward her. She grabbed at it and, in grabbing, woke up, got up, the feel of paper on her fingertips. She felt thirsty, went to the refrigerator, found a beer, and went back to her bed, closing the window and reaching for her notebook.

The chiselling stopped momentarily. Tuyen was listening to her move around the room now. Carla eased her body down quietly onto the bed—Tuyen had heard her, she was sure, and might come over, and she didn't want that. She sat quietly, her quiet and Tuyen's attention holding up the wall between them. She didn't want to talk. She waited stealthily until she was sure that Tuyen understood. She didn't want to tell her about sitting with Jamal in the Mimico prison. Her brother had sent her speeding through the city with the random logic of an element, and she felt she was unravelling. She wanted that heat in her brain to subside. She heard Tuyen chiselling again, and she put the beer to her lips, drinking it all at once like water, slaking the thirst that light gives you.

Waking up and finding herself halfway on the futon and halfway on the floor, and knowing she was late for work, Carla decided not to go. That decision made her spring to her feet, take a shower, and get dressed. She would call the Asshole—that's what she called him, the dispatcher at Allied Swift Packages. What would be the use of going to work anyway? It was Monday, and sometimes she liked to take Monday off just to go in the opposite direction of the world hustling past her with its Monday morning anxieties. No one wanted to be where they were, which made them all rude and unhappy. Monday was the day of mistakes, which is also why she was glad to be off the road, her bicycle weaving in and out of traffic, trying to negotiate opening car doors and being squeezed at right turns. Mondays, she preferred to walk. By Tuesday the city had calmed down in acceptance of the fact that it had to work, that it had no choice.

Today she herself would have been careless.

"I can't come to work today," she said, surprised at the strength of her voice.

"Why?"

"I just can't," not finding a plausible reason she could give him other than she was late and still so fresh from a dream that it was too disturbing to deal with the real world. He was at the beginning of a new sentence—"Look, Carla, it's Monday, we need"—when she cut him off—"I'll see you if I see you"—and hung up. She didn't care if he didn't give her good calls, she didn't care if tomorrow when she got in he made her wait longer than anyone else or gave her short runs. It was Monday, and she wanted to walk against the current of the city.

She washed her face compulsively again before leaving, trying to remove the phantom blessing of the lamppost from her forehead. She rubbed her face with the towel, still feeling the stroke of light on her, and left the apartment quickly, trying to ignore Tuyen's open door. Lately she'd found Tuyen's attentions too attuned to her, too burning, too difficult. Something was changing ever so slightly between them and she felt uncomfortable, uncertain about what it was.

Waving Tuyen away, she got a coffee at the Mars deli and drifted along College Street in the direction of Yonge.

FOUR

TUYEN'S DOOR HAD BEEN OPEN when Carla left. She was still knocking and chipping at the wood of the sculpture, but she was watching for Carla. The sculpture spread tall like a totem over her belongings. She was working on cutting small stick figures into the body of it. The figures were bending and standing in uneasy positions; some were headless in an extreme agony, or was it elation?

She knew that lately she'd been too intense with Carla. She couldn't help herself. She had done a slow muscular dance around Carla; at first she herself not knowing what it was in all its fullness. But now she'd felt a kind of urgency, a sense that Carla was opening to her. Yet it could all be her vanity, she thought, laughing at herself just as she glanced up, seeing Carla move quickly to the stairs. Tuyen almost said something, then changed her mind, seeing Carla's body flatten against the wall trying to avoid her. Carla passed, waving a defensive hand, declining the unspoken invitation. Despite herself, Tuyen came rushing to the door, calling to the bottom of the stairs.

"C, Jackie and Oku are coming for coffee, don't you want to stay?" Carla waved a hand. "Come on. How's Jamal? Okay?" she asked. "Check you later?" A little hope in her voice. "I have something to ask you. Can I come with you?" She couldn't help saying it. Carla shook her head, no. "Later," she heard Carla barely mumble.

Last night Tuyen had called Jackie and Oku to ask them if they'd talked to Carla. She'd said that she had a bad feeling and that Carla wasn't answering her phone or the door.

"So what's new?" Jackie answered. "You know how she is. Bipolar. But I'll try her, okay?"

Jackie was breezy about everything. It was her way of keeping things together. The breeziness was the surface; underneath Jackie was frantically setting all the disturbances in order. Tuyen knew she would just happen to drop by the next morning.

"Oh, Tuyen, what's the big deal?" Oku asked, when she finally got through his father's annoyance for calling so late.

"Well, I know she went to see Jamal, and you know how depressed she gets with that."

"Yeah, right." Carla had lain paralysed on her futon for a week the last time Jamal was in trouble.

"Give it till tomorrow. I'll come by before class." Oku rang off quickly, his father in the background grumbling about people calling at all hours.

Now they were all three in Tuyen's dilapidated apartment. They forgave the mess because she made great coffee. They had all become used to the mess anyway. It was useful—after visits to Tuyen, they usually went home and launched into vigorous cleaning. Oku and Jackie both headed for the shabby armchair in the corner. Jackie won out with her diva stare at Oku.

Jackie had dyed her hair red and now had a second-hand clothes store, calling herself "Diva," greeting customers effusively, and flattering them into scandalous excess buying. "Girl, you look good!" she would ooze, leading someone to buy the most improbable outfit. She had stayed home alone nights since she was nine years old, refusing to be babysat any

more at Liz Dorry's house while Jackie's mother and father went partying. She had watched late-night television, Fashion Television, MuchMusic, MuchMoreMusic, "Entertainment Tonight," "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous," "Trading Places," "Martha Stewart," "Emeril Live," and hip-hop videos on Black Entertainment Television. Her argot was one her mother and father could not decipher for all their own hipness. She spoke valley girl/baller, hip-hopper, Brit mod, and French from watching RDI. She had sat there night after night, absorbing the television's language and culture and getting familiar with its speakers and citizens, changing her face into the drawn profile of a supermodel, her smile large and petulant, her ever-present long polished fingernails, her attitude snap, worldly, and dismissive as Naomi Campbell's. She had a German boyfriend, Reiner-Maria, who dyed his hair dripping black and wore ominous leather and played second guitar in a band. They sounded like Ministry, Throbbing Gristle and Skinny Puppy. Jackie had found Reiner cruising the industrial scene that moved around the city from one ubiquitous dungeon-like club to another when she was in her black dress, black eyeshadow, multiple-pierced earlobe period. None of Jackie's friends ever remembered Reiner's name. They just called him the German boyfriend.

"What's the dillio?"

"Well, Jamal got caught for carjacking. You know that, Oku."

"I don't know anything."

"You hang around with him sometimes, don't you? Up there in the jungle?"

"I see him, but I don't know what he's into."

"Yeah, right." Jackie wasn't impressed.

"Now, you know I'm a grown man, I'm not into that shit. Those are young guys fucking around. I check for him 'cause he's Carla's brother, but you know, them young brothers are hard core, man."

"So you know about it, right?"

"Hell, they see me coming. I'm too cerebral for them. I just get some ganja up there, check some guys I know, older guys, man."

"But couldn't you have talked to him?"

"I did. But it's a man thing, know what I'm saying?"

"*Man thing?* What the fuck!"

"Yes, a man thing, Jackie."

"Well, it's a man thing to be in jail?"

"Rite of passage in this culture, girl. Rite of passage for a young black man."

"Well, your ass is not in jail, Oku."

"No, but you know what I mean, don't you? I can get jacked up any night by the cops just for walking in the wrong place. You know that, Jackie. Don't front like you don't. You talking in another language now? You forgotten how life is?"

Oku needled Jackie, every chance he got, about the German guy. He was jealous. He'd had a crush on Jackie since grade ten, but she paid him no mind except to send him on errands for pop and cigarettes. She was the reason Oku first hung out with Carla and Tuyen, thinking they were Jackie's best friends so they would lead him to Jackie somehow. They'd become close anyway, despite his lack of success so far. Oku was a poet. He lived in his parents' basement, listening for his father to leave so he could raid the refrigerator upstairs. His mother didn't mind, but his father had told him he would never deny him a roof, but he had to work to eat. Bring home

good grades from the university—that was his primary job. His father also meant work renovating houses like he did. Summers were hellish for Oku. Fitz, his father, always had a friend who could give Oku a job hauling gyproc or insulation. Oku couldn't bear coming home dusted in plaster and covered in paint and wounded by falling hammers. He listened instead to Miles, he investigated the futurist squeaks and honks of the Chicago Art Ensemble, he travelled the labyrinthine maze of Afro-jazz base and drum, jungle. He worked it all back to Monk's "Epistrophe." He thought his father an unfortunately small man, small in the mind, and one day he would maybe just tell him so. And he loved Jackie, though he knew he hadn't a hope.

None of them took each other home in those teenage years. The only place they went to once or twice was Jackie's because Jackie's mother and father were cool. Or so they all thought, except Jackie. In fact, they took nothing home, no joy and no trouble. Most days they smoked outside school together, planning and dreaming their own dreams of what they would be if only they could get out of school and leave home. No more stories of what might have been, no more diatribes on what would never happen back home, down east, down the islands, over the South China Sea, not another sentence that began in the past that had never been their past.

They'd never been able to join in what their parents called "regular Canadian life." The crucial piece, of course, was that they weren't the required race. Not that that guaranteed safe passage, and not that one couldn't twist oneself up into the requisite shape; act the brown-noser, act the fool; go on as if you didn't feel or sense the rejections, as if you couldn't feel the animus. They simply failed to see this as a possible way of being in the world.

They'd decided instinctively that this idea was scary. "They're freaks," Tuyen would scream, describing her father's outstretched hand telling her, "You get along, yes! Join up and get along!" Tuyen's imitations of Tuan would send them all into fits of laughter, though afterward Tuyen would feel slightly disloyal.

"Anyway"—Tuyen wanted to get back to Carla—"fine, fine, Jamal's in jail. What about Carla? What do we do?"

"What can we do, Tuyen? She's saddled with the little motherfucker."

"He's not a 'motherfucker,' Jackie, he's just a young black man-child who's fucked just like the rest of us. He's trying to find his way. But they won't fucking let him."

"Well, I'm just a young black woman trying to find my way, and I ain't in jail, all right? Who the hell is 'they'? Don't bring me that endangered-species shit 'cause I'm the most endangered species, all right?"

"Black men have no power, Jackie."

"Fuck! And I must be the queen of England. Oku, don't front that lame shit, man."

"Yeah, black women don't have to deal with this crap, you know. You're strong . . ."

"Oh fuck! Oh Christ! Spare my ass that bullshit, please! You mean like your mother? Like mine? You see any strong anything there?"

"Anyways"—Tuyen tried again to keep the morning on track—"guys! Carla, remember?"

"Well, you won't have that problem, will you? With Nazi boy."

"Oh, you did not go there, you did not fucking go there!"
"Fucking heterosexual dystopia."

The snarling stopped abruptly. Tuyen had finally gotten their attention.

"Heterosexual dystopia," she repeated. "God save me from heterosexuality. All that bullshit about men and women, all that raw hatred, all that mayhem, even jail, for what? And you two, why don't you just fuck and get it over with?"

They were both stunned, but as usual Jackie had the comeback.

"Don't get your shorts in a twist, honey, just because the love of your life, who doesn't notice you, by the way, is in shit."

Oku was quiet. Then, "Be serious, Tuyen. I'm talking about serious shit out there."

"So am I, Oku. Why do you guys have such a stake in keeping the bullshit going? Why don't you strike?"

"Strike?"

"Yeah, a 'fucking,' like Jackie would say here, a 'fucking' labour action. On . . . on . . . masculinity. If you don't like it, if it's so tortuous, why don't you strike? Like quit."

Jackie couldn't hold it, she sputtered, spraying her coffee, and breaking into her broad, rippling laugh.

"Girl, you're so funny, you're killing me," Oku said dryly. He looked at Jackie with a mix of jealousy, annoyance, and desire. "Funny as hell, you are."

"I'm serious," Tuyen laughed. And when the laughter subsided she asked, "Can you all stay till she comes back?"

"I gotta make money, girl. I'll check you later." Jackie was on her way to her afternoon shift at the store. "Look"—she stopped at the door—"that kid will always be in trouble. He'll never get it straight, and Carla has to figure that out and get on with her own shit. And you, you stop waiting for her to notice you. Talk about dystopia!" She raised an eyebrow at Tuyen, then smiled mischievously and left.

Oku leapt across the room, following Jackie out the door. "Yeah, Tuyen, I gotta go to class." Tuyen heard him plaintively calling after Jackie, "Hey, Jacks, wait up, I didn't mean . . ."

Jackie's last words struck Tuyen uncomfortably. Yes, she had been waiting for Carla to come around. She had humoured Carla's depressions, her faraway attention. All in hopes.

Carla had made it clear to Tuyen that she was straight, but Tuyen could not quite believe her. If she made herself useful enough, if she listened and coaxed enough, maybe Carla would come around. Straight women were never as straight as they put out, Tuyen figured. She had, after all, slept with numerous straight women. They merely had to be convinced. And there had been a few times, after one of their parties, when she had found herself in Carla's bed, cuddling on the pretext that they were both high and drunk. Which was pretext enough for Carla to pretend that nothing had happened and to pull herself away from Tuyen's sleeping body quickly in the morning. Tuyen was cautious with her, knowing that if she pushed too much, Carla would run scared. She was always afraid Carla would move, would cut her out completely. She knew Carla was capable of this. She had cut off her father and stepmother. She had preoccupied herself solely with her brother, leaving no room for other intimate relationships. They'd been friends, but there had always been a space of leave-taking when Carla would abandon their friendship to some region in her brain, which Tuyen found impossible and at the same time alluring.

Carla had abandoned Tuyen to her explorations of sex, telling her, "I'm not interested. I'm just not. It's not my thing, all right," when Tuyen tried to entice her to go to the clubs on Church. Innocently, Tuyen would say to her, "Fine, I'm talking about going dancing. Straight people dance, right? It's just

dancing." Tuyen also left books like *Rubyfruit Jungle* carelessly around Carla's apartment, hoping they would spark some latent interest in Carla, but so far her entreaties had been rebuffed and she'd had to settle for near-unconscious probings and feels when Carla could claim drunkenness or drug-induced forgetfulness.

Tuyen would try on these occasions to stay as alert as possible, as unimpaired as possible, so she could make note of and memorize the details of Carla's body, the responses to her touch, the meter of Carla's breathing, and the precise sounds of her murmurs. Carla always said her hands were lovely and begged her to massage away the knots in her back from riding all day long. Tuyen always regretted falling asleep, but couldn't help it, stroking Carla's back, her ears, having Carla respond to her with sleepy moaning. The next morning Carla would wake up earlier than she and wipe out their sexual intimacy with forgetfulness and distance. Tuyen was never sure how to press Carla; she didn't want to spoil the little understanding they had, nor quite frankly did she want to take on alone the obviously troubled terrain of Carla's life. She had her own "shit," as Jackie would have put it.

So yes, Jackie had a point, Tuyen thought. Carla had been more than plain to her after the last drunk. When in the morning Tuyen had playfully kissed her, held her as Carla tried to get up, Carla had pulled herself away abruptly, saying, "Shit, Tuyen, I told you I'm not into that."

And Tuyen, stung, had said to her, "Well, you coulda fooled me." She inferred more than actually had happened. She picked herself up from Carla's futon and left, slamming the door in a tantrum. Then, thinking that she was being childish, she returned to Carla's, finding her in the bathroom. "You think because it's not sex, it isn't desire," Tuyen told her.

Carla paused in brushing her teeth, stared at Tuyen, and then continued vigorously. "It is, you know."

"Look, I have no desire, okay? You have to have desire, don't you?"

"How can you have no desire?"

"I just don't. For anyone."

"Or you're afraid of it."

"Okay, Tuyen, think what you want." Carla rinsed her mouth out.

"I mean, having no desire might mean something deeper, you know. Like, who doesn't have desire? And if you have none, how do you know? How can you be sure? Like everybody has desire . . . so . . ."

"I know what I like and what I don't like . . ."

"Yeah, but you just said you have no desire, right?"

"Well . . . that's how it is, all right? It's not my thing."

Tuyen sensed that Carla felt trapped, so she let up. Trying to make the moment light, she said, "Okay, you breeder, I'll leave and let you get going to work."

Carla acknowledged that she was being let off the hook and pelted water from the running tap at Tuyen's face. Tuyen grabbed her, kissed her on the ear, letting her tongue linger there softly, and left for her place. That was the week before Jamal's lawyer called. Since then she had not had a chance to broach the conversation again, and now Carla had gone into a depressed cocoon. The doors to their apartments, which were adjacent, were usually left open, but in the last few days Carla had kept hers closed and had talked little to Tuyen about what was happening. Just when she thought she had a slight advantage, a glimmer, Jamal had grabbed all the attention from Tuyen by getting himself arrested.

FIVE

*A yellow mote of sand dreams in the polyp's eye;
the coral needs this pain.*

The poet Kamau Brathwaite wrote this. It could be this city's mantra. It could escape and mingle with the amplifying city, especially on Mondays.

*A yellow mote of sand dreams in the polyp's eye;
the coral needs this pain.*

Though it becomes more and more worrisome as it's repeated against the busyness, the sweat and nerves of Monday morning, when rheumy-eyed students blunder up St. George toward the university and workers stand outside the hospitals in cliques of two or three, smoking cigarettes, blowing gusts into the wide air of the avenue, breathing in the exhaust of six lanes of traffic before running back inside to children, cancer patients, and the fickleness of nature and fortune—broken bones, broken teeth, broken muscle, saturated livers, ill-fed brains, fatty hearts, and hungry blood. Meanwhile the crowds of people at the centre of the city itself feel like another kind of storm. There are men eagerly trying to catch the attention of other men. The air now filled with their voices saying "yeah, really" and "right, right" like the chorus of an "excellent, sir"