

ellipse

textes littéraires canadiens en traduction
Canadian writing in translation

Argentina—Canada



73

Inventory

I have nothing left of all that, not even in my memory. Clothes, photographs, clippings, nothing. Not as bad as when I was giving my testimony, writing things down—nobody could say it had never happened. But this whirlwind of images that gave birth to me—because I was born the day they released me—this jumble of screams, of smells, of terror, all this is diluted for me, has died on me. I live with the echoes, I even evoke them for fear they'll end up erasing themselves. And me with them—they're already dissolving. This everyday business of not letting my shadows escape must have something to do with what happened to me. The world out there doesn't want people to be distracted—the universe, the cosmos won't let you go around with your head in the clouds. If you insist on not paying attention to the hands-on, the universal order will find a way to get revenge.

For such a long time—a time so overwhelming I can't even measure it in calendar days—things have been going astray on me. Every time I move, some box always mysteriously disappears: There were six boxes but the fourth, the most treasured, the one that held the manuscripts or some special drawing, was missing; or documents I needed to renew other documents got left on some street corner and couldn't be rescued. The post office—which guarantees its services a hundred percent—doesn't understand why my package can't be located after three weeks of investigation. It's not worth it—I already know—for them to go on looking for their mistake: my package simply took it upon itself not to get there. For me, living has become an exercise in false steps. There's no way I can control the destination of things bound for a place beyond me. And on top of it all I have to let the know-besters take over, the ones who know the hows-where-and-whys, who wear me out with their kindnesses. Once a friend searched through every trash can in the neighbourhood before he'd finally admit that my purse was permanently lost, gone for good. The man at the bus company called every terminal along the route to find out why my suitcase hadn't gone where the passenger went. Hours of searching, energy spent along the way, all as useless as they are well-intentioned. Come back tomorrow, call this number, make a claim, notify, insist. Ladies and gentlemen, I know there's no point . . . let me go on as I am. What really exhausts me is to go on searching.

Bits and pieces remain—the shape of some scene which I absolutely must have in order to reconstruct a past that's left scraps of itself all over the place, that's gotten spilled, that refuses to go back to the uterus that gave birth to it. My own history. My life keeps getting dispersed; it keeps losing people, its tracks being erased—like a tree losing its leaves. My life is un-remembering itself. By now I've lost much more than I ever found. That's why I'm resigned to it.

In the comings and goings of this struggle to molt, so much has disappeared: clothes, bookcases, jewelry, letters, watches, radios, violins, record collections, books. Now that this sink-full of missing links has accumulated, I've begun an inventory so that at least I have proof of my drama. Today, for example, I write down: photo

of my husband, black and white, in a silver-plated embossed frame. This way I am registering things, so that someday there can be an investigation—a reckoning. First I was missing but then I came back. Then my husband was missing, and there was no getting him back (even after red tape and effort enough for a variety of lifetimes). Finally the keys were missing, then the luggage, then the papers. All the time a bigger and bigger emptiness. But I'm beginning to acquire a certain taste for the adventure of unexpected loss. I wake up imagining the surprise the new day holds in store for me, a new empty place among the collection of goodbyes. Because when you come right down to it, that's what passes the time, keeps me so busy that I have no time to remember. Not that I don't want to remember, but it hurts because there was no chance to say goodbye—they took him away without saying where. But I know where. I'm sure that, when it comes to him as opposed to the things, he would have liked to come back. That's why when things get lost, it's entertaining, a distraction to keep me going. When I have nothing left, then I'll have time to think of him, to think about Rubén.

Translated by Joan Lindgren