

Victoria

and a body to remember with

by Carmen Rodríguez (Arsenal Pulp Press, \$15.95)

Process can be so much more important than the product. In *and a body to remember with*, Vancouver writer Carmen Rodríguez has written stories that explore process: some characters are struggling with the process of living with memories of their torture in Chile, others are learning to live as exiles in

Canada, aching with homesickness as they process a new country's language and culture.

This is a tightly-drawn collection of stories. Rodríguez translated them herself from Spanish to English, and in the process, boiling each story down to its essence, making them potent and concentrated. The larger issues of fear, torture, and exile are woven into these vignettes of immigrants' lives. Rodríguez is at her best allowing the unresolved to be, rather than building her stories to a moralistic crescendo. Her characters' worlds are filled with ambivalence, and tough decisions.



Many of these stories portray parallels found in divergent lives. In "The Mirror", an actress and a torture victim share a commitment to life, as well as a separation from it, as they discuss their need to renounce family and friends to pursue their respective vocations. In "Trespass", two friends, one a revolutionary and one an immigrant to Canada, struggle to adapt to new identities. In "Accented Living", a 90-year-old German grandmother in her new home country of Argentina, watches her children leave, as she did, to find safety in a new country.

Many of the characters in these stories are fighting to forget their memories, and their bodies won't let them. *and a body to remember with* is a wide-angle look at the experience of immigrants, the longing of exile, the dislocation of families. This is a book that crosses borders.

—Beth Kope

Writer as Translator



Carmen Rodríguez' first short story collection has just been released in English, and earlier this year, a Chilean company published the book in Spanish. This belated recognition in her country is very important to Rodríguez. "In Chile, they practice collective amnesia, and I can see why," she says. "People want to forget. Chile is now a model of capitalism, everything is modern and

clean. It's over, but I believe it is very important to remember, mainly because there has been no resolution. The relatives of the disappeared still have no answers, or the people like us who were forced to leave the country."

Rodríguez was born and raised in Chile, but in 1973 she was forced to leave with her husband and two daughters because of their political activism. A year later, they came to Vancouver, beginning a 14-year exile. Rodríguez continued to speak out against the atrocities committed by the Pinochet regime, and her passport was confiscated by the Chilean government. In 1979, she became a Canadian citizen. Now she writes and teaches as a sessional lecturer at Simon Fraser University.

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and a body to remember with is partly a study in the process of translation; many of the stories were initially written in Rodríguez's mother tongue. "I didn't think I could do my own translation, I was hesitant at the beginning." But Rodríguez found that she was engaged in something more: moving back and forth between the languages. Carmen found herself reworking the text, until "I felt that both tips of my tongue and my two sets of ears were satisfied." Rodríguez believes the process of translating her stories helped her to arrive, to have a sense of belonging in both Chile and Canada.

The characters in her stories are caught in the contradictions of living in two cultures, trying to escape the phantoms that haunt them. Carmen has her own phantoms. "I wonder if I'd never left, what kind of person would I be, or would my kids be now. I'm envious of people who have extended family, Sunday dinners. I wasn't able to see my Dad before he died, and my mom has been haunted by two of her three children leaving the country, and being separate from her grandchildren." The book is dedicated to her brother. "He was in jail, and tortured, he never recovered from that. He came to Canada, became an alcoholic, and died at 55. I feel so fortunate, in spite of the pain, I've come to peace."

—Beth Kope