

salmonpoetry

Witness Trees



LORNA SHAUGHNESSY

Arpilleras

For Marjorie Agosin

They met in hospitals, morgues and courtrooms:
the women in search of their loved ones,
knocking at the soundproofed perspex windows
in wall after wall of lies.

There were no disappeared.
Only the unmarked graves in Santiago's cemetery
of those buried in the darkness of curfew.
No names to name and nothing to tell.

Stripped of their truths, like Philomena
they chose to tell each story with their hands –
rose early to put in an hour with scissors and thread
before readying the house for another working day;

met weekly in Churches, hands clammy
with the cold sweat of conspiracy and fear,
smuggling their stitched witness in closed umbrellas,
tucked under coats, folded up sleeves.

The vivid patch of grass in that garden scene
is the sleeve of a daughter's dress; the blue
of a son's favourite shirt gives innocence back to a sky
like the one where the sun shone the last time she saw him.

Their fingers craved knowledge of the missing –
the texture of the clothes they wore, the brush of their hair,
the way an infant needs an absent mother's smell
or the touch of her apron.

The women sewed and met and sewed.
They sewed and met and began to march,
wearing the same seasonless coats
since the moment of disappearance,

waiting to sew the last scrap of each life
firmly into place.

Anchored

Lorna Shaughnessy



Dogged

The injured past comes back like a mangy dog.
It hangs around, infecting my doorstep with its sores
and the smell of neglect, trips me up when I venture out,
circling my legs, ready for the next casual kick.

If I feed it, it'll never go away.
If I ignore it, it'll never leave
but press its scabby skin against the door-pane,
crouch in the corner of my eye, licking its paw,

or cower in the wing-mirror as I drive away
and limp out to meet me when I come back,
loyal and unwelcome as disease.

The Watched Phone

Her son is out there somewhere
the rain beats his jacket seeps through his jeans
runnels of water travel from nape to chin

somewhere out there her son in seeping jacket
beaten from nape to chin
travels through runnels of water

out there the rain seeps nape to chin
water runnels down jeans and jacket
her beaten son is travelling

he seeps through jeans and jacket
runnelling out somewhere
rain beats

water seeps and her son
travels rain-runnelled nape to chin
beaten out