

Restitution

by Attracta Fahy

The digging has begun in gardens
across the road, the road, where for five years
in the seventies, the bus took me from school.

Forensic experts walk a plot of land, digging.
They are gently digging a sewerage system,
they are only finding fragments on the site
where people have bought houses.

The bats are out of the attic, devouring midges
in the stench of obscure secrets.
One after another ghosts scramble from basements,
circle air thick with fear—
the truth of those babies torn from their mothers.

Crows caw, caw seven-hundred and ninety-six times.
We scroll through the list, seven-hundred and ninety six names.
Our names.

2.

Long demolished, the walled and forbidden building
still exists for those who lived there, families
seeking answers.
I watch from a window, roses torn up, fuchsia
lying on their side, as pall bearers carry scrapings
of bone, swaddling-cloths well-decayed.

Silence divides my local town,
some say in whispers, you shouldn't disturb the dead,
others speak of restitution.

The veil thin, dawn chorus lingers all day,
the wren's high pitched call, a robin feeding her young,
a blackbird singing to the gods—
men who shinny with shovels to lift the remains;
babies, children.

Blessed with a bright spell to lighten the work,
we know, rain will come.
This is the day of ascent, as a murmur of starlings
fly over our town.