





# MUSEUM

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## MUSEUM

### INVOCATION

As old houses harbour ghosts, so do words.  
Take museum which comes down from the Greek,  
a place to put things that please the Muses,  
a shrine or seat of the old goddesses.

What you find here might not be what you seek.  
Rich, poor, citizen, commoner, lady, lord:

mortal trace made immortal by design.  
Surrender as you enter through their door;  
know all are equal here: in Time's brute trust

we are held — the quick, the dead, the blest, the curst.  
Open heart and mind to those who've gone before,  
to honour the Muses — virgin, mother, crone,


and hope to glimpse them ninefold in this house,  
daughters of Memory, oracles of grace.

OF NATAL CHARTS AND END GAMES

Not the clock to measure time and tide, but the moon,  
her waxings, her wanings, her track across the star-  
spangled heavens, trining and sextiling planets  
to net and land another whole incarnate soul,  
to earth this karma in the shelter of the house.  
Cellular mirrors celestial, the spinning globe  
slows to rest with the mother's cries, the child's first breath;

while elsewhere in the house, a different room, a death,  
a last glimpse of ceiling as the light fails lobe by lobe.  
Upstairs someone dreams of walnuts, a new blouse,  
someone makes coddle, snuffs a candle, humps coal,  
sips Vartry water, tastes trace of phyllite, quartzite,  
greywacke, shale, slate — bedrock lithographies from far-  
off Wicklow — while Angelus bells ring out the noon.

to *Urania* — Muse of Astronomy



HER DIGNITY: A RESTORATION

Once it was simple and clear: the world a dreamspace  
when we were children and wrote in our copybooks  
an old penny, an old hat, an old watch, an old boot,  
an old house tells its story. An old woman tells hers  
now, walking backwards into the future, her eyes  
wide open, peering through the air so thick with trauma,  
to the girl she once was, skipping the shadowy world

into being with each thump of the rope, or curled  
to a foetal crouch under the bed, adult drama  
raging overhead. You, who write the histories,  
write her in, write her up, write her down, before she blurs,  
an image disturbed in a scrying bowl, that the brute  
erosions of a State helmed by liars, helmed by crooks,  
might not yet rob memory of her abiding grace.

to *Clio* — Muse of History

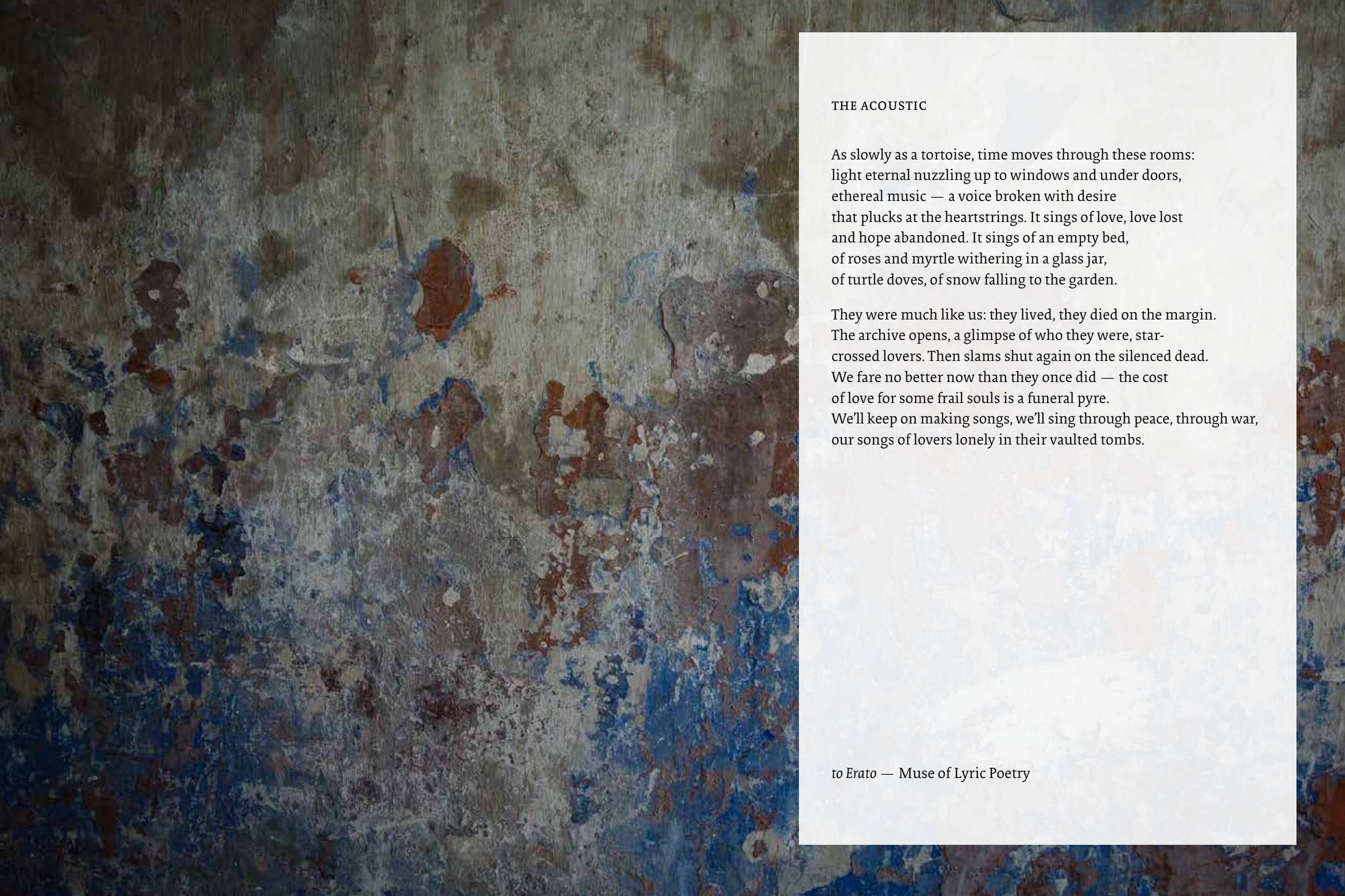


## CHILDREN OF THE WIND

Where are they now, the children of the house, who flocked like rooks at dusk, or gulls come in from stormy seas, raucous through the rooms, from area up to attic to nest in cribs, to huddle in beds, to dream in cots, to rise again in the morning, to make the whole world up, over and over, their voices piping, puling, shrilling, in glorious cacophony?

They had no fear of time. Their ancient cartographies still scribed in the walls, their seeking, their hiding, their yo-yos, their piggy beds, their ludo, their ... goals! "I'm coming, ready or not, keep your place or you'll be caught". Their rhyming chants echo even yet. O my erratic stars, that wandered the face of the heavens, blown hither, blown thither, on cosmic currents rocked.

*to Euterpe — Muse of Song and Elegiac Poetry*



THE ACOUSTIC

As slowly as a tortoise, time moves through these rooms:  
light eternal nuzzling up to windows and under doors,  
ethereal music — a voice broken with desire  
that plucks at the heartstrings. It sings of love, love lost  
and hope abandoned. It sings of an empty bed,  
of roses and myrtle withering in a glass jar,  
of turtle doves, of snow falling to the garden.

They were much like us: they lived, they died on the margin.  
The archive opens, a glimpse of who they were, star-  
crossed lovers. Then slams shut again on the silenced dead.  
We fare no better now than they once did — the cost  
of love for some frail souls is a funeral pyre.  
We'll keep on making songs, we'll sing through peace, through war,  
our songs of lovers lonely in their vaulted tombs.

*to Erato — Muse of Lyric Poetry*



“STEP WE GAILY, ON WE GO”

Some nights when the moon is full the ghosts come out to dance:  
they reel and they jig and they jitter across the boards.  
They clasp each others’ spectral hands throughout the ages,  
Republican shimmies with Ascendancy lady,  
Militia Captain toe to toe with scullery maid.  
They swing their partners while spirit music blares;  
sage, fool, rich, poor, made equal in this Danse Macabre.

A rustle of silk, a rattle of tarnished sabre,  
their shadowy shindig teeming up the backstairs  
to trip the light fandango, beau and jade,  
skeletal revenants grieving the loss of body,  
remembering strong hearts pounding in rib cages,  
blood rising, pulsing with the music’s major chords  
to possess the frenzied dancers in ecstatic trance.

to *Terpsichore* — Muse of Dance

A photograph of a wooden surface, possibly a door or a piece of furniture, showing significant wear and tear. The wood is dark brown with a vertical grain. There are several areas where the paint has peeled away, revealing a lighter, possibly white or cream-colored, underlayer. In the lower-left quadrant, there is a faint, painted floral pattern in shades of brown and blue. The overall texture is rough and aged.

THIS BED, THIS RAFT ON STORMY SEAS

The start of her lying-in was the end of mornings  
at the pier glass, mouse-skin eyebrows, eyes outlined in jet,  
cheeks rouged, got from recipes in *The Art of Beauty*;  
gall-nuts, black lead, mercury, carmine, liquid pitch,  
her glued on beauty spots of taffeta and silk,  
her drapery, her napery, her blue, blue, walls.  
Birth the leveler pays no heed to class, to kind —

our crossing fraught with peril to body and to mind.  
In every generation there are stars that fall;  
a lost galaxy of nurture with our mother's milk;  
a miracle we make it here without a hitch.  
This buzzing hive of life, this golden bounty,  
honey of survival in our ancestors' sweat,  
salt tears for those who don't survive the quickening.

to *Melpomene* — Muse of Tragedy



OF ODYSSEYS AND OTHER RAMBLES

Yap yap! Ráiméis and rigmarole! If these walls could speak:  
Hentown blather clucked from threshold to attic room,  
fabrications, downright lies, home truths and lullabies.  
Story snagged from time, spun into the yarn of the house,  
the ghostly racket of the carriers of tales  
who lug their water buckets up and down the stairs,  
all gossip, all frittery bustle, their epic.

If musing on the ornamental frieze of oak,  
an iridescent bird through a canopy of air  
lets drop a feather to your hand, then use it as a quill  
to enumerate such fates, damned or auspicious;  
the census of this shelter might immortalize  
such vestige of lives endured through crash, through boom,  
flitting like some magpie, stolen trinket in her beak.

to Calliope — Muse of Epic Poetry




FUNNY HA HA AND FUNNY PECULIAR

Laughter, they say, is nature's best medicine:  
through thick and thin, through paucity and plenty,  
with your glass half empty, with your glass half full,  
if you have a glass, a pot to piss in, a jam jar,  
a fork when it's raining soup, when god slams one door  
in your face, then locks the other door and bars the window —  
you'd have to laugh, or else you'd break down and cry.

It's hard to take the cosmic joke when kids are hungry,  
when the cupboard is bare and the fuel's running low;  
sniggers, guffaws, snorts, pratfalls and gallows humour.  
Is it funny ha ha or funny peculiar  
when one by one neighbours take ill, are listless, eyes dull?  
Words like typhoid, diphtheria, rickets and dysentery  
wipe the smile off your face, invite terror creep in.

to *Thalia* — Muse of Comedy



OUR LADY OF THE APOCALYPSE

Our Lady of the Apocalypse who never  
closed your heart to the dissolute, pray for us  
who gave shelter in broken down Georgian tenements,  
who kept the doors open to the demented ones,  
those who came in rags and miasmas of foul odour,  
in delirium tremens, the worn out old spunkers,  
the displaced relicts of imperial trauma.

O sweet daughter of Memory, veiled in enigma,  
who brought longed for oblivion to the meths drinkers,  
the dipsos, the alcos, the put down no hopers,  
those who came in from chaos, from cold, from winds, from rains,  
to sleep it all off in hallways, in stairwells, who rent  
the long night with sobs, who cried out to you in the throes  
of their last agony, grant them eternal succour.

to *Polyhymnia* — Muse of Sacred Poetry



ENVOI

THE DAUGHTERS OF MEMORY

They're hanging out the sheets on the lines  
to catch a spring wind. The children dream  
of schooners under a cloud of sail  
and the ghosts are packing up their satchels.

They know it's time to leave, with the tide  
of history ebbing through the house.

Go you too, mortal, your fated road.  
May fixed stars guide you, until you reach  
safe harbour, a place you can call home.







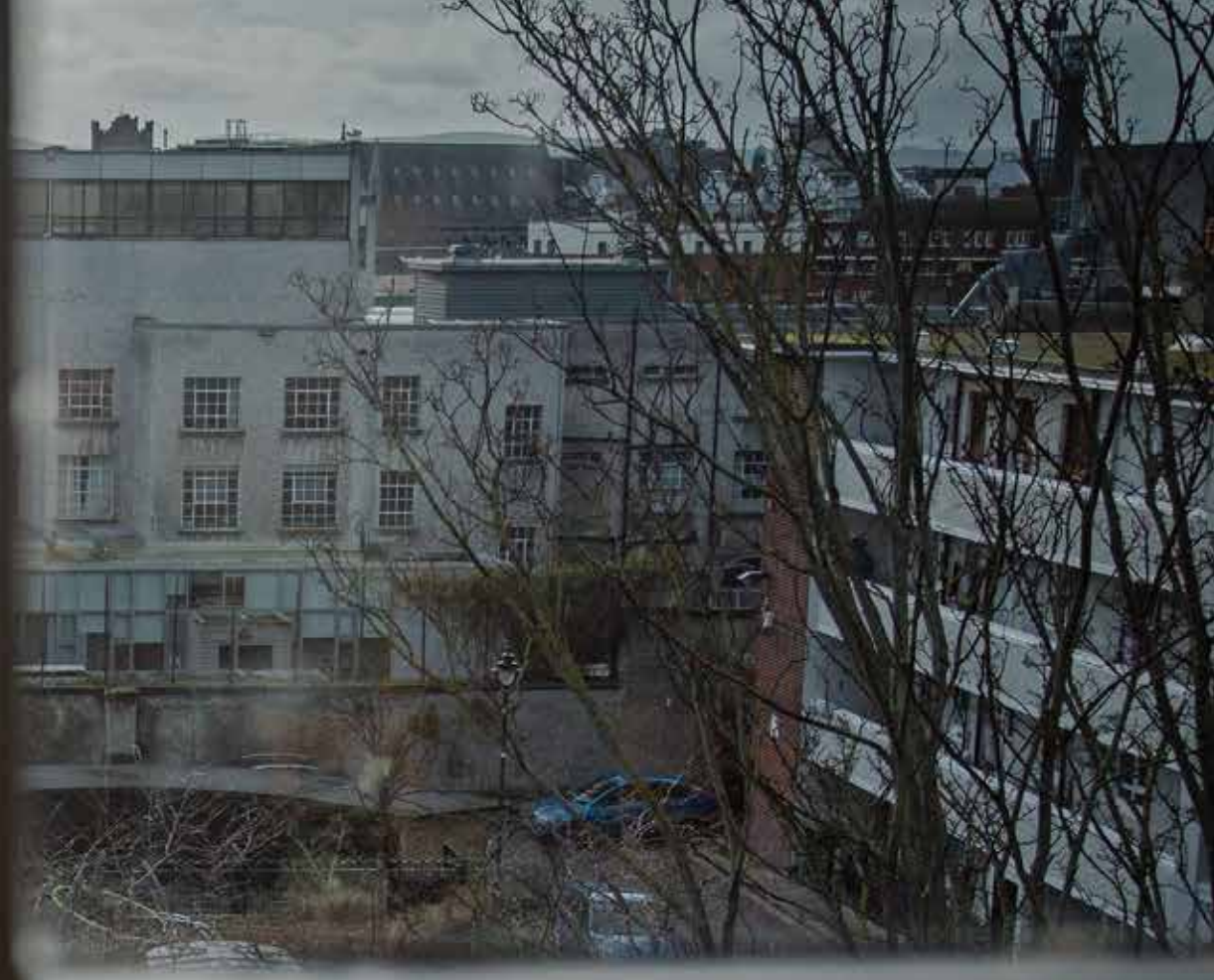








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Because I first got language as a child in the tenements of Dublin's North inner city; because I respect and admire the people I grew up amongst; because their spirit formed my moral and social compass; because 14 Henrietta Street and its hauntings gripped my imagination from the moment I first crossed the threshold; because the house itself outlasted the depredations of the eighteenth, the nineteenth, the twentieth centuries; because the stories of the people who made their homes in the house are stories of survival and courage and deserve to be enshrined; because the original architects, builders, and craftspeople of the Georgian era made a place suffused with classical iconography, built to elegant classical proportions in materials that endure; because I love making sonnets; because so many good and committed people worked incredibly hard to realise this project; because a museum is a dead space unless it speaks to the now; because we are suffering a crisis of homelessness in the city and this house is all about making homes, often in the direst of circumstances: For these reasons, I was privileged to be invited to respond to the house and to make this poetry sequence *Museum*.

PAULA MEEHAN / 2019

The DNA footprint of the people who lived in the house is impressed into the floors, stored beneath the floorboards, carved onto those walls. It's the walls that fascinated me the most. They were like secret maps inviting you to imagine the hundreds of destinies 14 Henrietta Street witnessed. And that light! Some days I just sat there, never taking my camera out of the bag, looking over the flats of Dublin's inner city, communing with it as it flooded the house from the rear windows. Sometimes the ghosts of children made me play with worn-out marbles; sometimes we brought out the dolls and toy guns and sat on the linoleum floor and I tried to conjure myself as having been born here, in the country that adopted me and is my home. Dublin, the city I always look forward to returning to, plunged yet again into a housing crisis that is pushing its artists out, the prohibitive rents making it near impossible to survive, and this house speaking of a similar past.

Working on this book with Paula Meehan – a magician of words – and all the people who brought 14 Henrietta Street back to life is an experience I will cherish forever.

DRAGANA JURJIĆ / 2019

*Museum*, a creative response to *14 Henrietta Street* in poetry and photography.

Our sincerest gratitude to both Paula Meehan and Dragana Jurišić for their unique creative responses to this special place.

*Museum*, Paula Meehan's new poetry sequence, was commissioned in 2017 by Dublin City Council as part of a creative development that was led by Róise Goan, Charles Duggan and Dr Ellen Rowley, working alongside Sonya Kelly and Shaun Dunne. In 2018, photographer Dragana Jurišić was invited to collaborate with and respond to Paula's *Museum* and *14 Henrietta Street* to produce this new photography.

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