

Peter Sirr

THE ROOMS



Gallery Books

The Rooms
is first published
simultaneously in paperback
and in a clothbound edition
on 30 October 2014.

The Gallery Press
Loughcrew
Oldcastle
County Meath
Ireland

www.gallerypress.com

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ISBN 978 1 85235 603 3 *paperback*
978 1 85235 604 0 *clothbound*

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

The Rooms receives financial assistance
from the Arts Council.

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The Mapmaker's Song

The mapmaker downed his tools.
I've caught it: every alley, every street,
every fanlight and window ledge,
the city fixed and framed.

Now I want everything else.
I want to be a historian of footsteps,
a cartographer of hemlines and eyelids,
I want to catch what the pavements say

when they sing to each other
in their deep laboratories, plotting
every journey since the place began.
I want the whole

unlosable database, the repeating place,
kings stalking the server farms,
tailbacks and looped alarms,
I want to be where

brushstrokes flicker on a bank of screens,
where graveyards tilt
and quiet populations crowd the air,
their quarters risen again,

their furniture
smashing through the floors.
I want to stand at the centre
of a great clutter

mapping ashes, mapping bones:
archivist, enumerator, hanger-on
signing the returns
of an infinite census.

I want to be,
beyond everything I've reached or drawn,
not much at all, or all there is,
a geographer of breath

a curator of hands.
I want to lie in the atrium
of the museum of the fingertip
and touch, touch, touch.

Sold

Imagine staying still,
rooted to the spot,
to the five-hundred-year-old
brick floor of a house
in a quiet valley, listening
to the bricks — *I feel them shifting*
under the rug, like living things —
to the years gather

in the darkening room.
Unchanging valley,
neighbourhoods of grass
but breath by breath
the bricks see out their owners,
there's nowhere
doesn't work its slow removal:
lean back

into yielding grass, the long
tree-lined avenues, take root
in the brick whisper, the flight
stored in the furniture,
the key as you turn it
slipping from hand to hand;
hesitate, linger, take what you can
from the opening door.

House for Sale

André Frénaud

So many have lived here, who loved
to love, to wake, dust, sweep the floor.
The moon's in the well and can't be seen.
The previous owners have disappeared
taking nothing with them.
The ivy swells in yesterday's sun.
The coffee stains and soot are staying put.
I fasten myself to mouldy dreams
and hug the grime of others' souls,
that mix of lace and plans gone wrong.
Concierge of failure, I'll buy the dump —
if it poisons me so be it, but never fear:
open the windows, put the sign on the lawn,
someone else will come in, sniff the air, begin again.

Whalefall

Every so often a windfall whale will blow through the depths
and where it lodges the pitchblack waters begin to stir,
specialists in their brilliant bodies to wake and move

towards their reward: a slow devouring, months of it,
the hagfish and rat-tails, crabs and sleeper sharks
picking the carcass clean until the bones collapse

but now the bone-world begins: *osedax*, the bone-eating worms
with their feathery plumes, blown like bubbles from the last
whalefall
lock on and feed, generation after generation

until the place is empty again, a sulphide nothingness
the eggs have already fled, riding the currents for the fall
where it all goes on, the endlessly resisting life, the whale pulse.