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SOLAS NUA

Irish Book Day
March 17, 2022

PRESENTS

HOLY

Dublin

SHOW'S

London

URBAN

Brussels

ODYSSEY

Bucharest

Holy Show is an annual Irish magazine that presents all flavors of life, society and culture through the eyes of Ireland's artists and writers. holyshow.ie

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DUBLIN



Ola Majekodunmi



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LONDON



Jill Crawford

Welcome to Holy Show's Urban Odyssey!

JAMES JOYCE'S *Ulysses* was first published on February 2nd 1922. Exactly one hundred years later, as part of Solas Nua's Irish Book Day, *Holy Show* sent four pairs of the best Irish writers & artists on their own urban voyage, in Dublin, London, Brussels and Bucharest. In cities that are thousands of miles apart, we created a simultaneous celebration of the ordinary. Get ready for a trip.

Ulysses is an over-flowing but often intimidating work. Joyce never intended it to be. He believed 'God was a shout in the street', that there was magic in the every day. With that in mind, we invited our voyagers to respond to his masterwork as closely or as loosely as they saw fit, to take a playful wander in the spirit of Leopold Bloom, to go out and see what shines. Joyce exiled himself from Ireland in 1904 – to evoke this aspect of the great Dubliner's story, our Urban Odyssey features Irish writers who are either creating a new home abroad or who are re-shaping the meaning of Irishness on the Emerald Isle. They each reflected on the idea of home in an increasingly migratory and multi-cultural world.

With descriptive prowess and biting wit, Philip Ó Ceallaigh takes a fresh look at the palatial glory and concrete gore of Bucharest, a city built of warring creativity. Jill Crawford reflects on the meaning of home in her adopted London, and visits those places where she first laid her head in the metropolis. Colin Walsh plunges back into the city he fled during the pandemic, and finds himself longing for the stones on which he already stands. And, to cast off our adventure, Ola Majekodunmi is embarking an Irish language odyssey across her own personal Dublin.

Tracing her journey with Gaeilge, Ola seeks the pulse of Ireland's native tongue in the Irish capital. Joyce agonised over whether he ought write in Irish or English. Thankfully for us, Ola can do both. For any especially intrepid readers, we even have a glossary – you might come away today with a new way of speaking as well as a new way of seeing.

Wherever you happen to be reading from, I hope you enjoy the company of these four urban wanderers. Happy travels!

– PETER McNAMARA

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BUCHAREST



Philip Ó Ceallaigh



BRUSSELS

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Colin Walsh



YOUR WAY INTO ANOTHER WORLD

DUBLIN

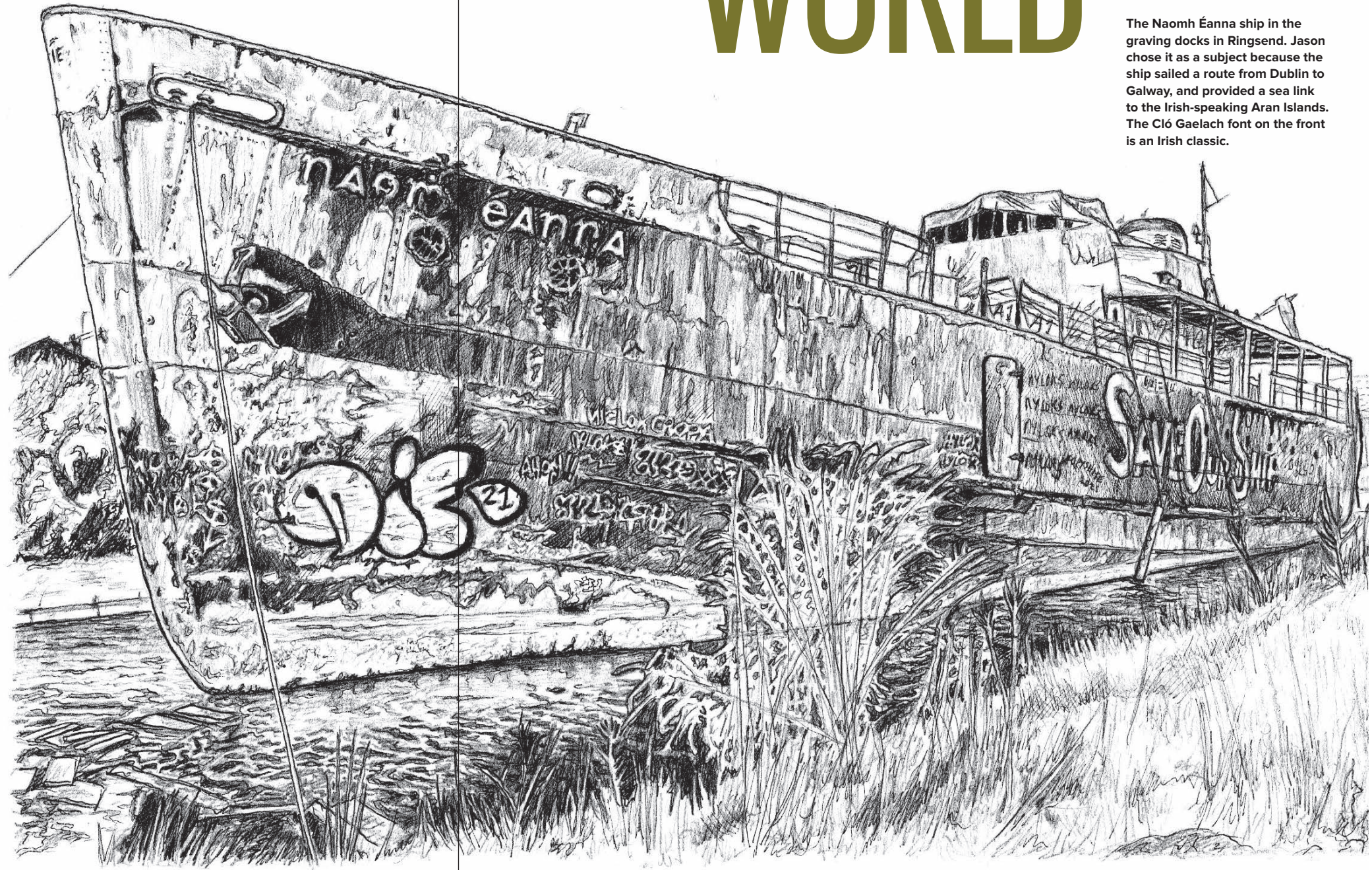
TEXT BY OLA MAJEKODUNMI

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JASON MCNERNEY

The Irish language is not just for classrooms. Ola Majekodunmi finds it all over Dublin. *Teanga* is how we communicate. *Ede* is what we speak. It can arise wherever there is life – in places you wouldn't expect. If you look for the Irish language, it will start looking for you.

I COUNT MYSELF LUCKY to live by the sea. The sea brings good energy. It relaxes me on *those* days. The town I live in, Dún Laoghaire, has so much history. It was formerly known as Kingstown, in honour of King George IV's 1821 visit. In 1920 it was given its present name – or given it back. *Dún* means fort and *Laoghaire* was a 5th century High King of Ireland, who chose the site as a sea base from which to carry out raids on Britain and Gaul. The Fort of Laoghaire. Some spell it in an anglicised version of *Dun Leary*. I love the pier. I've strolled, laughed,

The Naomh Éanna ship in the graving docks in Ringsend. Jason chose it as a subject because the ship sailed a route from Dublin to Galway, and provided a sea link to the Irish-speaking Aran Islands. The Cló Gaelach font on the front is an Irish classic.



danced and even filmed on its great flagstones, with the waves rolling about, and the lighthouse looking on. One of the best things about Dun Laoghaire town is that there are many Irish speakers like me around – you’d really be surprised. I hear the *fuaim* of Gaeilge wandering about. Whether it’s in the gigantic Lexicon library or at an early Sunday mass in St. Michael’s. Those mornings you always have *Gaelscoil* kids mucking around. *Gaelscoil* means Irish school: they’re places set up to pass on Irish to the next generation. On a given day, I’d often hear a mother speaking her tongue to her child – *tá Gaeilge thart timpeall orainn*.

In April 2016, nearly 40 per cent of people claimed to be able to speak the Irish language. The thing is, a lot of people seem to like the idea of Irish, but not many choose to actually chat in it. I’m starting to hope that’s changing.

I first found An Gaidhlig, Gaelainn, Gaeilge – whatever you want to call her – in rusty Cullenswood House on Oakley Road. Cullenswood is in Ranelagh, a suburb on the south side of the Irish capital. It was also the original site of St Enda’s, the progressive school set-up by Patrick Pearse, before he went on to lead the Irish rebellion of 1916. Before that, the building was home to St. Ita’s girls school, which was attended by Kitty Kiernan, the fiancé of another famous Irish rebel, Michael Collins. Today the place is home to a *Gaelscoil* called Lios na nÓg. *Gaelscoil ab ea anois*. A little leaflet came swinging through the front door of our home not far away, and *sin conas a thosaigh an turas leis an dteanga*. My mum always tells me how fast I settled in there. It was no bother. People find it hard to fathom how a person like me could take to the language so well. Cullenswood House was not just a safe space for Pádraig Pearse and Scoil Éanna, but it continued to be a safe space for generations to come to speak a tongue they wanted to keep.

That said, Gaeilge is not just about treasuring and protecting. It’s about breath and life. We should not just be taught it is important to keep her, but that she’s

GLOSSARY:

Teanga – Language

Ede – Language (Yoruba)

Baile Atha Cliath – Dublin

Tá Gaeilge thart timpeall orainn – Irish is around us

Gaelscoil ab ea anois – It’s a *Gaelscoil* now

Sin conas a thosaigh an turas leis an dteanga – That’s how the journey started with the language

Béarla – English

Fuinneamh – Energy

Ag labhairt as Gaeilge – Speaking in Irish

Gealgháireach as Gaeilge ná Béarla – Lively in Irish than English

Is breá liom ag obair i healaíon na Gaeilge – I love working in the Irish-language arts

Na healaíona – The arts

Gaeltacht – Irish-language speaking town

Gaelgeoirí – Irish speakers

Cúrsa scileanna sna meánchumarsáide – Media course skills

Domhain na Gaeilge – Irish-language world

Ní raibh cliú agam cad a raibh le teacht – I didn’t have a clue what was to come

Tá an teanga beo sa mhórchathair freisin – The language is alive in the big city

Cúpla focail – A few words

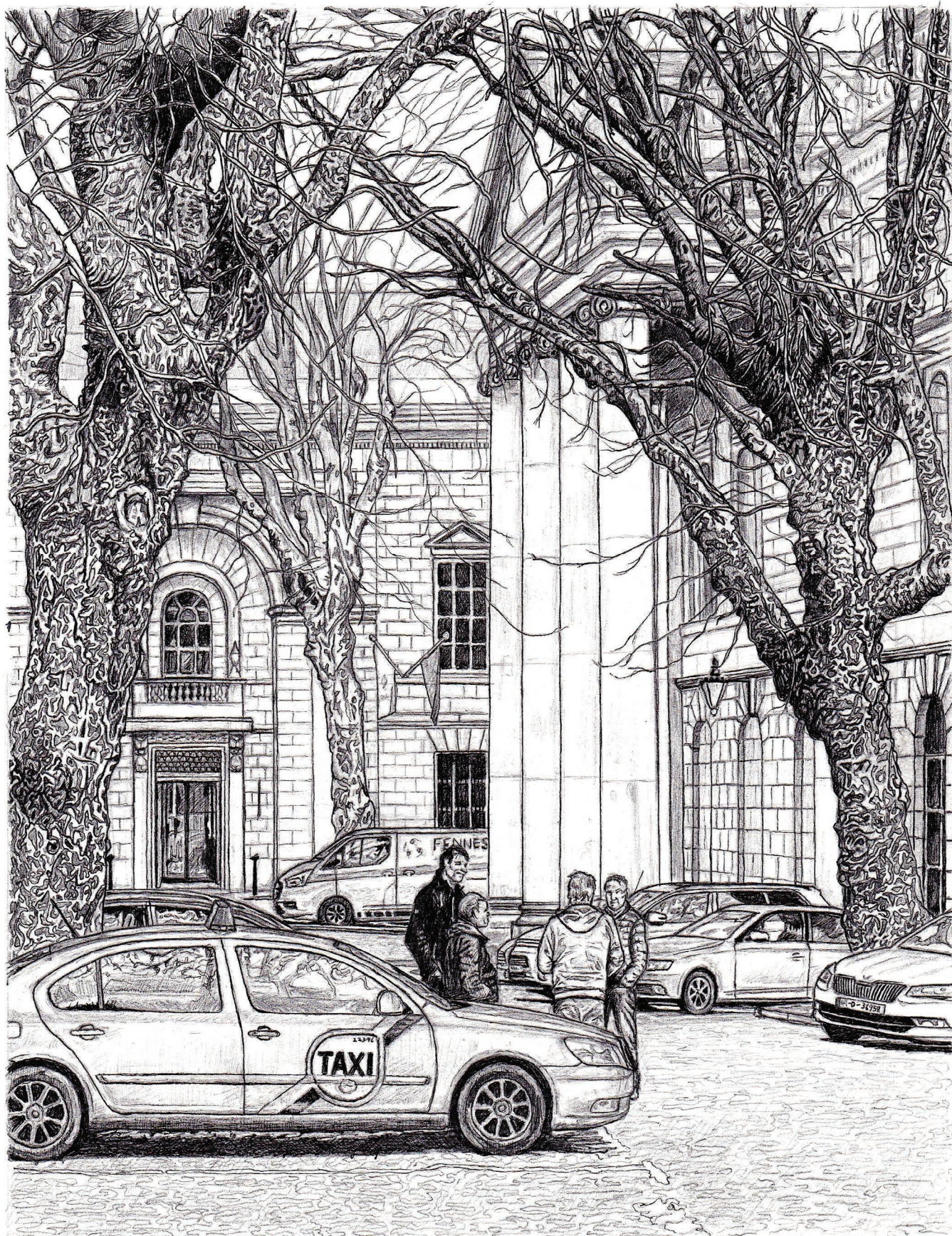
a pathway to another life, an alternative to *Béarla* in an English-speaking world. *Fuinneamh*. That’s what I immediately think when Irish comes to mind. Something mystical, that I cannot see but only feel. I cannot describe so well but when I’m *ag labhairt as Gaeilge*, there is a *fuinneamh* in me that does not appear when I speak English. I’ve been told I’m way more *gealgháireach as Gaeilge ná Béarla*.

There are those that dislike her. Some Irish people have a strange kind of hatred for the language. It might have something to do with rote-learning that everyone has to suffer through in school – the way it’s taught, another thing that needs to change. People don’t know how much they are losing. Because it’s kind of incalculable: *Gaeilge* can be anything you want it to be. *Is breá liom ag obair i healaíon na Gaeilge*.

Na healaíona is another path to Gaeilge and this is thriving in the Axis Theatre in Ballymun, on the north side of Dublin. Axis is a cultural emblem on that side of the Liffey, and Ballymun is like an unofficial



Nearly every Irish street sign comes with it’s Gaelic translation.



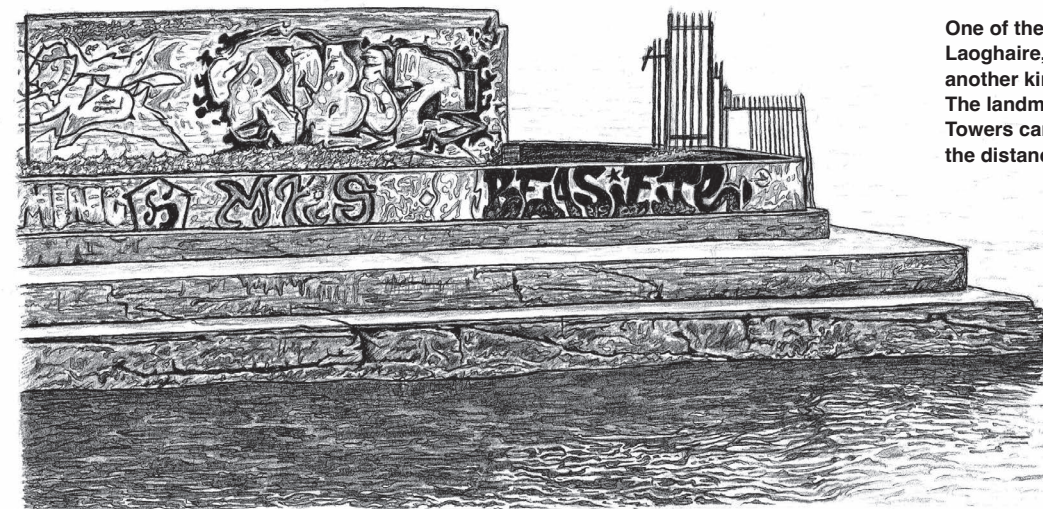
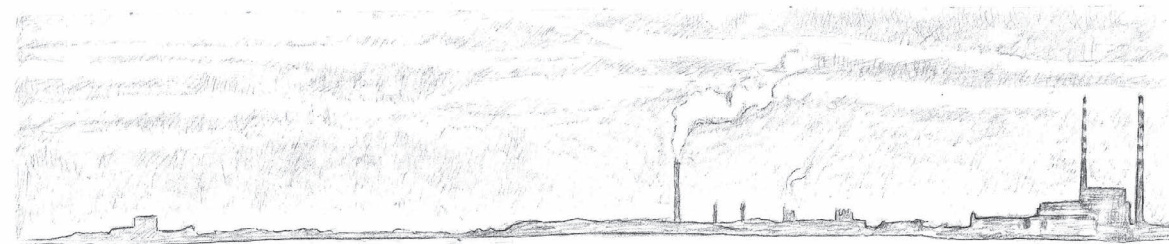
Dublin taxi drivers on Dame Street.

Gaeltacht. The official *Gaeltachtaí* are areas set up around Ireland in the 1920s that are devoted to speaking Irish every day; they can be found in Galway, Kerry, Donegal, Waterford, Mayo, Meath; and more places besides. As a Dubliner, I often find that it's the northside of the city that really holds the language dear. A great community of *Gaelgeoirí* there.

Through my teenage years, bit by bit, I realised that Irish didn't just belong in the classroom. At aged 14, I decided to do a one-week *cúrsa scileanna sna meánchumarsáide* with Gael Linn on Dame Street. Gael Linn is a non-profit and non-governmental organisation focused on the promotion of the Irish language and the arts. This is where I had first heard about Raidió na Life, the local Irish station in Dublin city centre, which would later launch my career and open me up properly to *domhain na Gaeilge*. *Ní raibh cliú agam cad a raibh le teacht!* I often find Dame Street looks a bit like New York from a certain angle, only much smaller and very Irish. *Tá an teanga beo sa*

mhórchathair freisin. A few years later, at 17, I came to realise that Irish was all around the city centre. Sure, it's on the street signs – we have *Lána Bus* instead of Bus Lane – but there's more than that. There are the institutions, like The Gingerman and An Chonradh pub. More and more there are pop-up *Gaeltachtaí*: casual nights where people come to talk or even just to hear their native language spoken. New words in unexpected places. Everyone is on a journey with the language, some people are farther along than others, but it's wonderful to see anyone take a chance and try to learn (or in the case of any former Irish school-child, try to remember) their *cupla focail*.

We all start somewhere. I remember being first shown into the radio studio, a shy young lady I was so lost on my first day, I'd no idea what this one little effort would lead to. Earlier that morning, wandering and sweating around Merrion Square, I nearly didn't find the place. I suppose this is it: look for *Gaeilge* and she will look for you. With a bit of effort of course! ■



One of the piers in Dun Laoghaire, decorated with another kind of language. The landmark Poolbeg Towers can be seen in the distance.

A WALK ON THE DOWNSIDE

BUCHAREST TEXT BY PHILIP Ó CEALLAIGH
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANA MARESCU

SET OFF FROM STRADA ARMENEASCA – “Armenian Street”, the heart of what used to be the Armenian quarter of Bucharest, in what to me is old Bucharest. The layout of the streets in this area is largely as it was a couple of centuries ago, though most of the city is mutilated by brutalist notions of modernity. Even after a couple

of decades here, I can become disoriented in these streets, which seem to have grown organically, chaotically, branching, bifurcating, mutating and unpredictable. Like a medieval medina. Nineteenth-century travellers from western Europe tended to describe the city as Oriental. As indeed it was. Until the middle of the 1800s Bucharest was the capital of Wallachia, a vassal state at the periphery of the Ottoman Empire. As well as Romanians, the city was home to Greeks and Jews and Slavs and Armenians and Gypsies; a mixed and cosmopolitan and linguistically fluid city, as were most cities then, almost everywhere.

Which was something that only began to radically alter – when? Around 1922, when *Ulysses* was published, after the First World War, when the empires of Europe had been dismembered and the ethnically homogenous nation-state declared the ideal. The war uprooted Joyce and his family from Trieste, the Austro-Hungarian Italian-Slavic Adriatic port that had been their home for fifteen years. The Habsburg Empire and the civilization that had sustained Trieste’s cosmopolitan identity was declared null. A man who had lived among its welter of languages had perhaps allowed it to fertilize his own not-quite-standard Irish-English, and perhaps to create Leopold Bloom, an (Austro-)Hungarian Irish Jew. Bloom’s politics – when faced with a nationalist



chauvinist in the Cyclops episode – can be summed up as the wish that people be left in peace to feel at home in the city they are born in. Or perhaps just in



the city where they find themselves. Joyce had moved to Zurich during the war, Paris after, and at this point must have felt the sting as well as the savour of his own uprooted life and surely too the trepidation of the Jews of Europe; a people, or peoples, with no national home, now viewed as outsiders everywhere on that continent.

During February in Bucharest the footpaths are usually under a sheet of ice and compacted snow and you watch the ground unless you want to end up on your ass. This is the first year I can remember it

being dry. I am able to look up and around. There is no stylistic homogeneity to these streets, as though no construction code has ever existed, just the maximum of creativity and diversity. A profusion of once-off art-deco buildings with the names of the architects inscribed on their facades like proud signatures. But also buildings facing off against each other at odd angles, or jostling promiscuously, or contradicting each other’s statements. Or those that bizarrely look sliced in half, leaving a steep, blank gable, as if a corresponding building was to be erected next



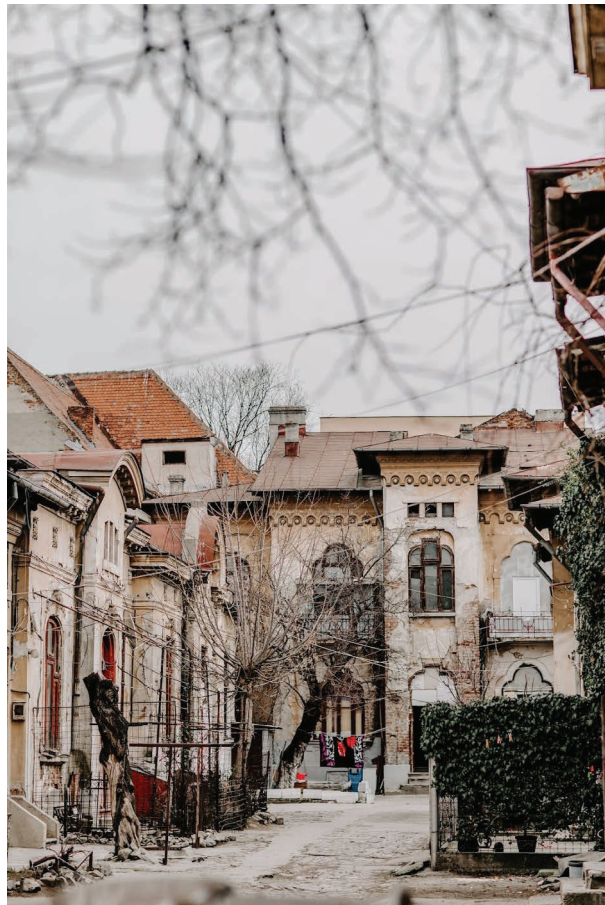
door, except that nobody has yet turned up. Blasts of creativity get along with degradation. You are assailed by the richness of strange and unexpected detail then get your senses blown by the dissolution of all that is fine and worthy, by decay, and by the petty vandalisms of poverty, bad taste or stupidity. White-plastic pvc windows, tacked-on a/c units, balconies walled-and-windowed by whatever was at hand, jumbles of aerials, gates like junkyard barricades, improvised extensions, shed-like add-ons, shoddy random renovations and plasterwork that can't stand the strain of hanging on... And then there are the cars parked freestyle, often making footpaths impassible, giving any open space the look of a parking lot, and the lacing of wires above the streets and along the facades (defunct past efforts at getting internet and cable TV, now decoration), then the chaos of commercial signage and billboards. Bucharest turns me on. I can gush. Other days I feel like an old whore; been fucked too hard, too often.

The character of this shifting city alters from street to street, and this is what happens as I meander south, into less boojwah territory. Within minutes, things turning ragged. The number of derelict or abandoned

buildings increases. Hard to say if this area is being gentrified or slipping deeper into decay. Such mixed signals. Houses like small palaces. Others like small palaces with their roofs caving in. But also shacks. Palaces and shacks and new apartment blocks – on the same street. A neighbourhood that never made up its mind. Under communism, property was nationalized, and any house of decent proportions subdivided. In the 1990s, after the revolution, the property was given back to the tenants. But how can the various occupants decide how to fix the roof? One tenant is nuts, another too old, another too poor,

and the sane and mobile just want to get out before the whole thing collapses. Or in some cases the building could be returned to the previous owner, or the descendants of the previous owners, who might be many and scattered abroad, and maybe they're locked in litigation since. Unless the whole thing is too damn confusing to begin to litigate. Same result – things fall apart. Even small palaces go to ruin and it becomes simpler to demolish them and start again. Again, it makes for a challenging visual field – a free peep at failure, at a polity that can't generate the order and goodwill to fix stuff. Babylon, when the irrigation canals silted up, and they started filching from each other, and drinking, and bitching about the Persians. Flaneurs, go flan yourselves elsewhere.

Speaking of dead empires, it was not long since the Pharaoh passed on. One of the reasons for the dereliction soon becomes plain. I reach the back of a row of 10-storey apartment blocks built after the demolitions in the 1980s. I pass through a passage-way like a tunnel and am transported into another dimension – eight lanes of traffic, pow! Like in the sci-fi films when they go into warp-speed, or through a wormhole, whatever, and in the next scene you're in another galaxy, trying to make sense of the visuals. This was where Ceausescu demolished old Bucharest, put a road through, the Avenue to his Palace, the House of the People. Yes, our ramshackle town has its Great Pyramid of Giza, billed as the second largest civic



building in the world (yawn), after the Pentagon. It looks like a piece of crap. And it's not even first biggest! The huge road is a straight 3km stretch so you really get to appreciate the rubbish at the end. A third of the old city, destroyed. Churches, synagogues, and 57,000 homes. They'd be told one afternoon to pack their bags, the bulldozers would be along in the morning to do their street.

The Boulevard of the Victory of Communism, that's what they called the road. Now it's called something else. It's always a visual shock to cross this border from old walkable Bucharest into the new and to various degrees rebuilt zone of destruction. I think most people ignore it. Perhaps that's the way to live. Thinking about what it means has a downside. It can alienate you from your fellows, and you can lose the vitality that makes you want to get a flash set of wheels and zoom through, like a sexy young thug. One of the neighbourhoods to go was the centre of the Jewish quarter. No Leopold Bloom to recall it now. There was brutal pogrom in 1941, then the commies sold to Israel the Jews

who had survived the Holocaust. Then pounded the buildings to rubble. Joyce commented that if Dublin were destroyed it could be reconstructed from *Ulysses*. Quotable bombast. He no more imagined his city would be obliterated than that the Mediterranean would lose the landmarks that form the map of the Odyssey. But if you tried to follow a Bloom from Bucharest, you really would get lost. ■



EYE SCENE

LONDON

TEXT BY JILL CRAWFORD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DARRAN ANDERSON

WHY IS SHE DOUBLY IRRITATED TODAY? The fact of the animal, the animal, the raucous, the blighted animal who the man struck, struck out of life. A hammer. The lamentable fact – her coz told her it four days ago, it won't leave her mind. Surely not his doggy. A neighbour's? Might've been a dainty yapper or a solid rough dog with a deep perpetual bay. And why would a hammer be a surprise when you consider how the man himself had died, via a hit, having done all he did, himself a danger to lives. Overnight his grave sealed with concrete. A brutal being brutally ended.

She says to love – I lived here over half my life ago. Fuck!

Outside Stockwell Station she lingers while love goes in seek of a tuna sandwich. The other cause of irritation being love, who is to blame for something she's yet to recall.

The mosaic around the face of the Innocent is adorned with sunflowers, marigolds or perhaps coneflowers, mauvy lilies and small brown-petalled heads with a lemon centre; she can't guess at them. On a paving stone in front of a hatch, leading underground, is an X of mustard paint. An English voice of a patriot, singing the praises of – o no, a Union Jack flag rippling above his shoulder. An Indian English man – a veteran? – o, singing the praises of the National Health Service while marching along the double red lines. Outside The Swan, a girl in a green beret and a crop top, looking so Irish that she couldn't be.

She and love cross, love dawdling because he likes to wait for the light to turn. She came here after the ivory of university, craving real life and different

people. Not long in the city, she was caught short and nowhere to go.

– Sorry, the TFL guy had said. No public loo.

What was a body meant to do? The panic and indignation. A place to go ought to be a human right! She swerved down that side road and crouched in the shadows between two cars, cursing this uncivilised country. What of the homeless? She smiles at her young old/old young self, new to metropolitan ways. Now she's aware that even something as simple as a public loo can be a complicated thing to maintain.

She says to love – I used to get off the night bus from Soho and walk home this way. I never had any trouble myself.

But, like others, she would read about trouble in The Evening Standard on the way to work, and one early morning she was coming home as usual at 4:30 am. It was very quiet. She got to thinking how inconvenient it would be if her bag got stolen and she lost her keys, so she dropped them down her knee-high boot. Her Nokia went up her sleeve. That fixed, she asked herself what on earth she'd

HOLY
SHOW'S
URBAN
ODYSSEY





do without money and slid her purse into the waistband of her skirt. Her foundation was also dear. Everything, including rent, was a struggle at the time. It went down the other boot, with her Black Honey lip balm, mascara, and eye liner. By the time she reached her door, apart from lash curlers and chewing gum, the handbag was vacant, its contents secreted about her in bulges. Yet no one had even come near her. What a wally, letting

herself be scared by an inflammatory rag.

In fact, triply irritated today, due to the, please universe, soon-to-be brief leader, so careless, so damaging to her land, clearly planning to brazen it out. He probably will. And the next one won't care about home either. Never thought less than two decades would carry her to this spare faith in certain people. Cultivate your garden, she and love keep telling each other, so as not to go sour or get disconsolate.

Here they are: Robsart Street. Funny how she'd never heeded the parks around here, just behind her flat, her head in a bowl of glass. She thought she'd seen ample nature. She was here for city life. Didn't that wear off?

She says to love – We lived at the very end, above some shops. The passengers on the upper deck of the buses on Brixton Road used to stare into our living room. Aw, look at the pup, peeing in the flower bed.

My bedroom looked out back. See up there?

She points.

– See where that man is? Do you see?

Love says – Aye.

– Either that one with the scrappy curtain or the one beside.

To decorate she'd blu-tacked wrapping paper on the walls, black with hot pink blossoms. She'd deemed it Japanesey.

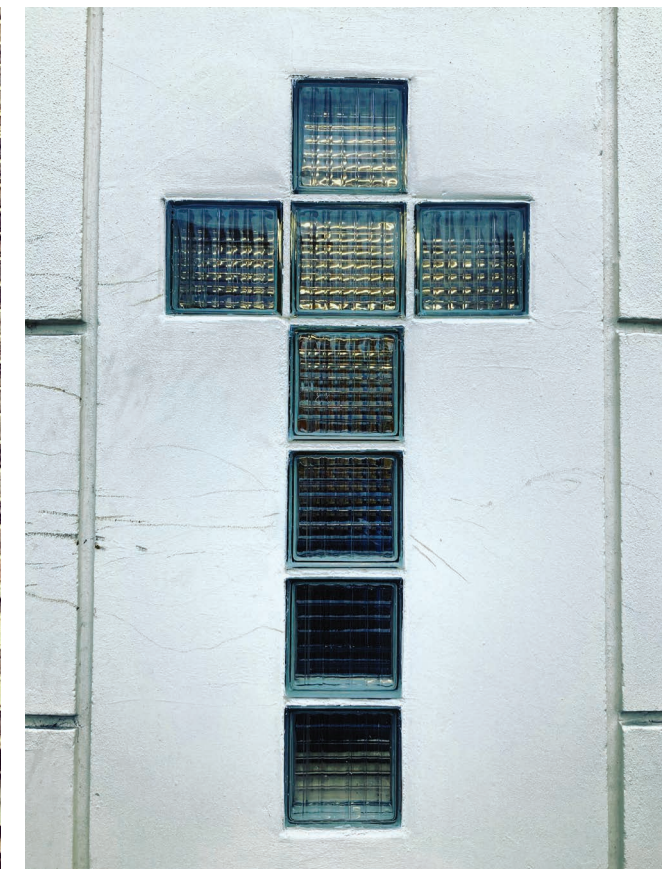


Love crosses the street to take a photo of the single door in the gable wall. It was a shared door. She'll never forget what a stranger posted through that door into their cage for the mail, had never seen anything so sleazy up close. Too real. She and Lulu were a bit frightened. They'd considered phoning the police. A woman passes, giving love a funny look. On either side of the door, a jade-green halo floats above each graffiti tag. And still the sense she's in a world she can't truly understand.

She left because Lulu's boyfriend moved back in. She left because she didn't want to look every day at the crazed man, doing martial arts outside the milk and

cereal shop that reeked of cannabis. It had dawned on her that this wasn't just a matter of psychology. He was, no doubt, in thrall to a very mighty drug. She'd never seen someone so far away. It hurt to see him daily. What could anybody do?

She never forgot that wild face and saw it again, to her amazement, years later, when she moved back south to a much changed and changing Brixton. As she crossed Coldharbour Lane on the way to Rushcroft Road, she saw him, begging along the outside tables of what's now a Satay bar. His beard more grizzled. He'd survived that long. ■



ARE YOU HOME YET?

BRUSSELS

TEXT BY COLIN WALSH

ILLUSTRATIONS BY REIN DE WILDE

I WANTED TO CAPTURE THE bombardment of impressions this city wallops you with on any given day. The plan was to give you a walking tour of Brussels, Joyce-does-Dublin style: I'd pinball between the various addresses I've had here, and this would take me and you on a psychic tour of Brussels' mercurial, jittery voltage.

So there I was, wandering about the place on a rainy Wednesday, tapping into my Nokia. Stuff like *sheen of smoke shadow windows squint the drizzle up the hillclimb and drillshock of the builders puts a strange ache to these steps or belly blades of longing and—*

That kind of thing.

I was gonna serve up a relentless flood of run-on images, unmediated by any overarching narrative, because I wanted to evoke Brussels' sense of teetering, who's-holding-the-steering-wheel? chaos.



The city – and I don't think anyone who lives there would argue differently – is a fucking mess; if architecture is 'frozen music,' Brussels is the music of an

experimental jazz band being kicked up and down the road by an even more experimental jazz band. Nothing about the place coheres. Politically, culturally, linguistically, it's a hodge-podge of Balkanised communities living past one another. Most locals native to the centre are second generation immigrants, largely locked out of the city's civic and cultural life by a racist government and an impenetrable bureaucracy. The enormous expat community contains multitudes: international dance students and painters chatting on café terraces; French tax exiles drunkenly wheeling Chihuahuas about in prams; rootless diplomats and NGO folk anonymously tucked away outside town behind the glassy sheen of the EU quarter; hundreds of homeless migrants, denied papers and constantly hassled by the cops; the relentless churn of tourists looking confused by how many statues in Brussels depict things taking a piss.

If this all sounds squalid, I'm talking about a city that a local politician recently described as "an old whore... nice in its ugliness, ugly in its niceness." It is very, *very* 'Brussels' that he meant this affectionately. (His comments caused controversy but, deep down, I think everyone in Brussels knew exactly what he meant.)

Anyway, I wanted to write about the place in a stream-of-consciousness style, to capture the idiosyncratic charge of what it is to live there.



But the fact is, I no longer live in Brussels.

I was there for six turbulent years – helicopters hovering above my first flat during the manhunt for the Bataclan jihadists in Molenbeek, the suicide bombing of my local subway stop a few months later, armed soldiers a mainstay on almost every street – but in late 2020, I left for a tiny village on the Flanders-Wallonia border. With the plague raging, etc., I hadn't

really visited much since.

As a result, I was completely unprepared for the emotional punch that my wandering would have. I was in the midst of typing things like *rainflash centipede of ghostly eyes gliding from passing trams* when I had the vivid, realisation:

"I miss this place."

Thing is, I'd never recognised Brussels as 'my home'



while living here. This is largely because I was too attached to a fundamentally reactionary conception of home as a site of rest, of being ‘at one’ with a place. This is Home in the properly mythological sense, a symbolic coordinate we all psychically carry in some form or other: Home as the zone of nourishment and reconciliation, origin and coherence; Home as the undifferentiated womb-space we yearn for as we

negotiate a daily world that’s often not so much about blissful belonging as dealing with one bloody thing after another; Home as wherever the striving stops. But what struck me as I walked around Brussels that rainy Wednesday, taking new and familiar routes, retreading steps I’d unthinkingly taken thousands of times, was a richer dimension of Home; Home not as a comforting idea towards which we project

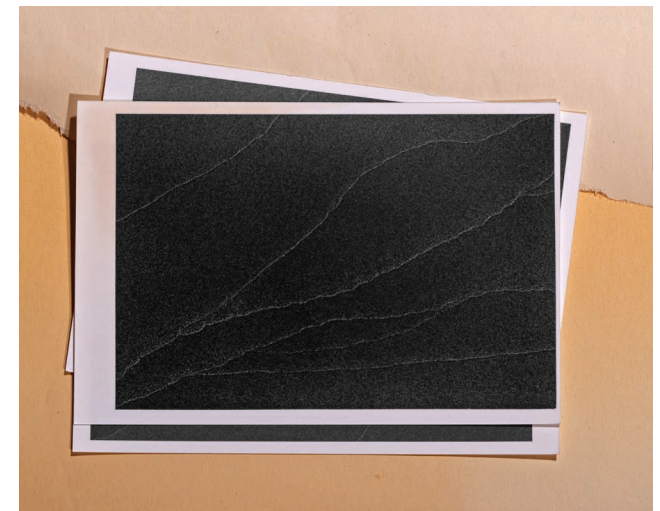
ourselves, but as a turning element in which we are always already steeped, a level of life that quietly conjures itself into being in the background of all our mundane days.

Revisiting my old neighbourhoods, I got the unique bellythrob feeling of specific periods in my life. I wasn’t recollecting distinct moments or thresholds. This was not a ‘remember-that-time-when?’ kind of remembering. It was remembering of a different, deeper dimension: the reawakening of the sort of energies that might quietly settle in your belly some Thursday afternoon, thanks to a particular slant of sunlight on a familiar set of cobblestones, while your conscious mind is elsewhere, preoccupied with some more immediate task.

There’s a moment in night storms where lightning flashes and illuminates the landscape that was already there in the dark, beyond your vision. That’s what this



felt like. I was getting glimpses of affective knots and patterns that Brussels and I had been quietly weaving into one another over the years, unbeknownst to me. The voices in my former neighbourhoods, calling to one another in Arabic. The flash of wild colour from the fruit displays on the street corners. The old



Moroccan guys arguing in grins over mint tea, huddled together beneath rain-raw gazebos. It felt like the city was winking at me and saying, ‘Remember, though? Remember the vibe we made together?’

None of which is to say that I was truly ‘seeing’ Brussels. There is no one-true-Brussels there to be seen – only overlapping, interweaving, multiplying Brusselses that are forever clashing and harmonising in new ways, like the shifting geometric patterns of a kaleidoscope.

Walking about Brussels, I was aware that, for a time, the city and I had actually met and held one another. I thought of how it’s hard to recognise a constellation from the inside, how it’s only when a moment is over that you first glimpse its contours and begin to confer it with some kind of shape. The noise and the rush and the mess of the place. I felt weirdly welcomed and cradled by it. Then I began to laugh at myself, at my ridiculous longing for where I already was. ■

DUBLIN

Writer: Ola Majekodunmi was born in Lagos, Nigeria and raised in Dublin, Ireland. She is a broadcaster, journalist, Gaeilgeoir, and a co-founder of Beyond Representation. She also serves on the Board of Directors of Foras na Gaeilge and the Dublin Film Festival, and is a member of Galway Film Centre's National Talent Academy Steering Committee. She has won numerous awards for her film and media work.

Artist: Jason McNerney is a Dublin-based artist and optician. He is originally from North Longford. You can find him on Twitter: @jaseomcn

LONDON

Writer: Jill Crawford is from Northern Ireland, and based in London. Her writing has appeared in America (n+1 magazine, Stranger's Guide), in Ireland (*The Stinging Fly*, *Winter Papers*), and in anthologies by Faber and New Island Books. At present, she's completing a novel, supported by Arts Council NI.

Artist: Darran Anderson is the author of *Imaginary Cities* and *Inventory*. He is currently working on a psychogeographic text and series of snapshots exploring lesser-known England.

BRUSSELS

Writer: Colin Walsh's short stories have won several awards, including the RTÉ Francis MacManus Short Story Prize and the Hennessy Literary Award. In 2019 he was named Hennessy New Irish Writer of the Year. His writing has been published in *The Stinging Fly*, *The Irish Times*, and various anthologies, and broadcast on RTE Radio 1 and BBC Radio 4. He is from Galway and lives in Belgium.

Artist: Rein De Wilde is a photographer based in Brussels. For over 15 years he has been exploring the medium in different contexts and roles. Currently he is working in the photo department of LUCA School of Arts.

BUCHAREST

Writer: Philip Ó Ceallaigh is a Bucharest-based writer and translator and winner of the Rooney Prize for Irish Literature. He has published over 50 stories and has been translated into a dozen languages. His most recent collection is *Trouble*, from the Stinging Fly Press.

Artist: Ana Maresescu is a Freelance photographer, based in Bucharest, Romania. She has worked for F64 Studio, as a coordinator of the training and events department. Her passion for photography helped her to develop a unique series of workshops, exhibitions, dedicated articles & online interviews for the photo-video community. https://www.instagram.com/lightland_photostories/

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