

Limerick

Extra Muros

Urbanity from the Outside

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*Urbs antiqua fuit, Tyrii tenuere coloni,
Karthago, Italiam contra Tiberinaque longe
ostia, dives opum studiisque asperrima belli;
quam Iuno fertur terris magis omnibus unam
posthabita coluisse Samo*
– Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book I, 12-16

The opening lines on Carthage in Virgil's epic poem (circa 13 BCE) could be read as one of the original examples of an 'urban narrative' in a 'European' context. Carthage as an urban *other*, as the adversary of the later imperial metropolis Rome, and, as a dynamic force to enter the narrative, has had a long history since then, but stands here at the beginning of a foundational text of classical literature as the figure of a redoubtable and well-endowed city, resistant to externally imposed narratives.¹ The celebrated English translation of Dryden as part of his *Works of Virgil* (1697) – itself a major contribution to the canon of a later imperial culture – renders these lines as follows:

*Against the Tiber's mouth, but far away,
An ancient town was seated on the sea;
A Tyrian colony; the people made
Stout for the war, and studious of their trade:
Carthage the name; belov'd by Juno more
Than her own Argos, or the Samian shore.*



Fig. 1. Civic signage near Treaty Stone featuring city arms and motto, Limerick City, March 2023. Photo: Michael G. Kelly.

Earlier in that final decade of the seventeenth century, a truncated version of Virgil's characterization of Carthage is said to have been in circulation concerning the city of Limerick. That formula – *Urbs Antiqua Fuit Studiisque Asperrima Belli* – has survived as the motto of the city to the present day. Usually translated as 'an ancient city well versed in the arts of war', it well conveys the city's self-understanding as an urban place defined by conflict and resistance, the possession of which equated to a stake in the broader historical narrative of Ireland and its place in the world. The representation of the city as a citadel on its coat of arms, which accompanies the motto, further reinforces this imaginary: it is a city, more than many others, defined by its walls and their effects, not only to those who would take possession of the urban space, but to those already there.

The historical 'walls of Limerick' are thus unsurprisingly a recurrent motif in textual treatments of the city and its specificity in both Irish and international contexts. The reference functions as a synecdoche for the city as a besieged place at key moments in the history of the island, notably the siege of 1691 at the concluding stages of the Williamite War in Ireland,



Fig. 2. Limerick, [1633]; size 30 x 37.5 cm (Pacata Hibernia 2) – showing the walls of Limerick and an early representation of the power structures within the city: the ‘otherness’ of Irishtown – extra muros – in relation to the garrison of Englishtown, connected by Baal’s bridge across the Abbey River. Permission: University of Limerick Library, Special Collections, Norton Collection B/1989.

a major part of the Nine Years’ War or War of the League of Augsburg (1688-1697), sometimes referenced as the first ‘global’ war. In this siege, the urban (walled) space of Limerick was the last bastion of resistance in Ireland against the Williamite order and the colonial regime it would subsequently (re-)enforce. The Virgilian motto is a key cultural trace of this event, while the (now ruined) walls today stand as a vestigial reminder, both of Limerick’s position within a fully European history and of its status as a major urban site of colonial and post-colonial interactions, hybridizations and developments.

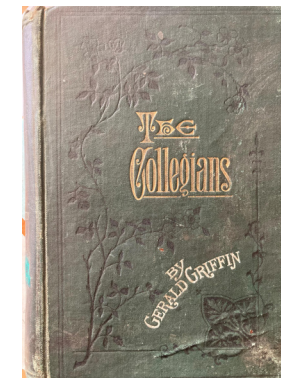
‘The Walls of Limerick’ is also, since the late nineteenth century, the name of the best-known Irish *Céilí* dance: an important participative, sociocultural practice in both Irish-based and diasporic Irish communities since then. The construction of a national narrative and cultural repertoire through the appropriation and configuration of elements of the past is a major feature of the 1800s in Ireland, with the traumatic caesura of the Great Famine in the 1840s marking both the nadir and a point of departure in modern Irish history. A decade prior to this event, in his *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (1837), Samuel Lewis offered a narrative of the successive waves of settlement and forms of cohabitation that characterized Limerick from its attested foundation early in the ninth century, as a result of the Danish incursion up the Shannon Estuary. This narrative mentions the Norman fortifications – including the castle still known as King John’s Castle – built in the early thirteenth century, and is striking in its grounding of the city as an intercultural (and often conflictual) complex:

A succession of intestine wars among the native princes was carried on until the landing of Henry II., who soon after obtained possession of it and placed a garrison there; but after his departure, Donald O’Brien, King of Thomond, regained possession of it. In 1175, Raymond le Gros, with the assistance of the King of Ossory, invested it, and by fording the river in the face of the enemy, so daunted them that he entered it without opposition,

obtained a great booty, and secured it by a garrison; but on the death of Earl Strongbow, it was again evacuated by the English and subsequently burned by order of Donald, who declared that it should no longer be a nest for foreigners. In 1179, Henry II. gave the kingdom of Limerick to Herebert Fitz-Herebert, who having resigned his claim to an inheritance so uncertain, it was granted to Philip de Braosa, and he, aided by Milo de Cogan and Robert Fitz-Stephen, advanced against the city, which the garrison set on fire. This so dispirited Braosa, that he immediately retreated, and so assured was Donald O'Brien afterwards of the security of his metropolis, that, in 1194, he founded the cathedral church of St. Mary, on the site of his palace. In 1195, the English appear to have regained possession of the city, for it was then governed by a provost; but Mac Arthy of Desmond forced them once more to abandon it.

King John afterwards renewed the grant to Philip de Braosa, with the exception of the city of Limerick, the cantred of the Ostmen, and the Holy Island, which he committed to the custody of William de Burgo, who formed a settlement there which from that period set at defiance all the efforts of the Irish. A strong castle and bridge were erected; and, encouraged by the privileges offered to them, English settlers flocked hither in great numbers, between whom and the inhabitants of the surrounding country amicable relations appear to to have been soon established, for, among the names of the chief magistrates for the ensuing century, besides those which appear to be English, Norman or Flemish, and Italian, there are several purely Irish. Money was coined here in the reign of John.²

The best-known literary offering from Limerick in the period of this historical account is Gerald Griffin's *The Collegians* (1829), a novel drawing on an infamous murder case from half a century earlier.³ The dramatic fate of 'Colleen Bawn' (the fair-haired girl) at the centre of this narrative was reworked in a celebrated play by Dion Boucicault and also live on in



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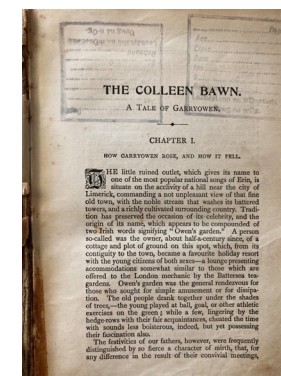


Fig. 3. Gerald Griffin. *The Collegians* [1829]. Dublin: J. Duffy & Co, 1857[?].

the journalistic pen-name of novelist Flann O'Brien (Brian O'Nolan, 1911-1966), 'Myles na gCopaleen', indicating the work's entry into collective cultural memory in a manner transcending its strictly literary fortunes.⁴ Griffin's novel opens with an evocation of life on the edge of the city at the time narrated – Garryowen (*Garraí Eoghan*, meaning 'Owen's Garden') is now a district within the city limits, forming part of what Cathal O'Connell describes as 'a "corridor of disadvantage" which runs from Moyross in the north west, through St Mary's Park in the city centre, to Garryowen, Prospect and Southill on the south-side'⁵ – but Griffin presents it in opposition to the city as such: 'The name of Garryowen was as well-known as that of the Irish Numantium, Limerick itself, and Owen's little garden became almost a synonym for Ireland.'⁶

On the one hand, this assertion confirms and develops the *topos* of Limerick as a resistant fortress in the face of a bigger empire, Numantium being the Celtiberian antithesis of Rome, which reframes the Carthaginian origins of the city motto in a 'Celtic' context. It echoes the 'Hibernian' motif of liminality: Ireland (*Hibernia*) as beyond an imperial wall, before becoming an object of imperial interest. Limerick's walls are thus deeply ambivalent, readable both as evidence of conquest and its related violence, but also as 'outside the Pale' (to employ another Irish phrase), resistant to a more dominant power. Yet Garryowen – both part of and other to the city – is presented in terms of equality with the *urbs* and this equality has something to do with the not-fully-enclosed quality of the 'Irish' aspect in the construction, somehow at odds with the urban principle itself. Referring to his heroine as a 'suburban beauty' and 'this flower of the suburbs', Griffin's impersonal narrator assures us that 'her education in the outskirts of the city had not impaired the natural tenderness of her character'.⁷

Griffin's motif of peripherality is one that cuts deep as far as thinking about the specific meaning(s) of Limerick in an Irish and European context is concerned, but it is not a simple indicator of position. Peripherality here



Fig. 4. View of the Shannon at Limerick – including Thomond Bridge, King John's Castle, St Mary's Cathedral, and Potato Market (site of original Danish settlement) – from Arthur's Quay Ferris Wheel, March 2023. Photo: Michael G. Kelly.

could be argued to be embraced rather than endured, and thus seen as key to the emotional disposition and directionality of the subject. Developing from the earlier association with motifs of resilience and resistance, the civic 'psyche' emerges as Romantic in a sense quite different from the landscapes of the Irish West Coast (rebranded in recent years as the 'Wild Atlantic Way') that are not all that physically distant. It is an internally ambivalent civic romance, founded on motifs of conflict, separation, exclusion and a communal sublime to which the River Shannon can act as a living metaphor – too vast a presence to be simply picturesque, since, on occasion, it almost overwhelms the urban landscape that it moves through, structures or unmakes, connoting as much an inescapability of place, its dogged hold on the subjects who inhabit it, as a majestic persistence or resilience thereof.

While the figure of the wall thus summons up a considerable centrality of Limerick as a modest (mid-size) 'regional' European urban place, there is a parallel sense in which Limerick has, over many decades of modern Irish history, been cast in the role of an urban 'other' within the social and economic politics of the independent Irish state. The city of which the walls are a foregrounded signifier is indeed one that experiences itself consistently as occurring *extra muros*, which is a particular way of inhabiting peripherality in a modern and contemporary context. Associations of urban deprivation, impoverishment and dysfunctionality have frequently been mobilized in a national context to make of Limerick a kind of counterexample, a city, as it were, 'beyond the Pale' of improving governmental action (situated in Dublin, in this political imaginary), as far as national political agency and intentions are or were concerned.

Long before contemporary debates on the economic and structural regeneration of city centres, themselves preceded by national government-led regeneration initiatives in respect of the city's most disadvantaged, enclaved communities, the city (*urbs*) emerges in these reflections as

de-centred, not in the sense of being without a centre, but of the 'centre' no longer being unquestionably located there where the walls appear to say it is. This imaginary of an urban reality being paradoxically *extra muros* entrenches Limerick in the role of the underdog, the outsider, disrupting the metropolitan order (latterly represented by Dublin as a prolongation of imperial figures such as Rome and London) and which is hence also a residually colonial one. Such imperial hierarchies do not validate the city's symbolic sense of itself, which has a resolutely diasporic or deterritorialized quality, while its representatives who make their own way into the wider world often present as mavericks, even as they enter an externally-validated cultural canon. Hence the resonance of figures such as Richard Harris (in cinema), Kate O'Brien and Frank McCourt (in literature), Dolores O'Riordan (in rock music), as well as an array of sports heroes, since engagement with sports is an especially prominent oral narrative form in the city and its surrounds.

This de-centring remains also a function of time as well as space, and this is at least in part a function of urban scale. While it is a frequent observation of economists and planners that Limerick's urban area (long divided between municipality and county governance) has the potential to host a population that is a multiple of the current one, Limerick is 'mid-size' as an urban reality in the persistence of at least a notion of complete impersonality. In his story 'Who's-Dead McCarthy' (2020), Kevin Barry offers what can be read as a partial rewriting of Poe's *Man of the Crowd* – that parable of the modern metropolis – in the context of the undead ghost of direct community. The question of scale is here inseparable not only from that of community, but from that of memory as well. The text presents a certain Con McCarthy, 'our connoisseur of death',⁸ purveyor of the currency that is the news of recent deaths in a city not yet big enough for these to become a matter of pure indifference:



Fig. 5. Limerick actor Richard Harris facing Monica Vitti in *Il Deserto rosso* (dir. Michelangelo Antonioni, 1964) – an exterior filmed in Ravenna.



Fig. 6. Mural of singer Dolores O'Riordan, King's Island, March 2023. Photo: Michael G. Kelly.

I became morbidly fascinated by Con McCarthy. I asked around the town about him. I came to understand that in many ways he was a mysterious figure. Some said he came from Hyde Road, others from Ballynanty. The city was just about big enough to afford a measure of anonymity. You could be a great familiar of O'Connell Street but relatively unknown beyond the normal hours of the day and night. We might know broadly of your standing, your people and their afflictions, but the view would be fuzzy, the detail blurred . . . One night on William Street, I spotted him sitting late and alone in the Burgerland there over a paper cup of tea. That cup of tea was the saddest thing I ever saw. I sat in a few tables from him and watched carefully. As he sat alone his lips again moved and I have no doubt that it was a litany of names he was reciting, the names of the dead, just a whisper enough to hoist those names that they might float above the lamps of the city.⁹

The figure of McCarthy adrift around the streets of the contemporary centre suggests a place where memory is as much a matter of its inscriptions in the urban space as in the minds of those who refuse to let go. The cityscape becomes a partial 'chronotope', to use Bakhtin's term, where features both recall a transcendent civic fact and somehow suggest the elusiveness of that fact to the busy regime of contemporary individuality. As if the old walls themselves were both spectral invitations to pay attention to each other and reminders of the cruelty and indifference that also inhabit the social nexus.

The idea of urban space as chronotope can be extended to consider how the time and space of a city appear in its cartographic representations, in the dynamic visions for its future(s). These documents are texts in themselves. One such prospect for the city is palpable in the drawing made by engineer Christopher Colles in 1769. Commissioned by Edmund Sexton Pery as a design for a 'New Town' on Pery's lands in the south liberties of the city, this now iconic drawing sets out a strong ambition, a bold structure for a new urban form beyond the original walls, a grid-form alien to the dense weave of the streetscape of the earlier city.



Fig. 7. Christopher Colles, Plan of the City and Suburbs of Limerick, 1769, 54 x 74 cm, © British Library Board.

With this grid, the concept – and experience – of walls in the city becomes inverted. The original stone walls formed the enclosure of the city, a physical boundary intended as both physical and metaphorical ‘safety’. Following the direction of Colles’ plan, Pery’s New Town was developed during Limerick’s highly prosperous nineteenth century. The grid was infilled, plot by plot, through speculative building, each individual landowner following a set of broad rules for its construction, including dimensions of approximate heights and widths, and material choices. This new streetscape, formed by the brick façades of the Georgian townhouses, turned the city inside-out. The walls of the city were no longer about enclosure and protection: these new, red-hued walls were a confident expression of its merchant expansion, where the city presented itself to itself, its life and activity framed by large windows on each *piano nobile* looking over the broad streets. In her novel of 1931, *Without My Cloak*, set in 1860s Mellick (a very lightly disguised Limerick, and an almost-anagram), Kate O’Brien captures this lived experience of her city through the eyes of her character Anthony:

Charles Street and his direction along it now went parallel with the seaward flow of the river. At the crossings, where short streets cut the New Town symmetrically from east to west, he could glimpse the great stream to the right of him down a short hill and observe the regular hurry of its course past the unhurrying docks; carts and ships and cargoes he noted, his own and other men’s, and all he saw refreshed his knowledge of the town’s business life and kept the surface of his mind in motion with trade affairs. When he looked eastward up the wide crossing streets, he snatched, one block away, a fragment of the life of King’s Street, where the shops were gay at this hour, and where broughams and phaetons splashed arrogantly through the mud, bearing wives and daughters of the town to and fro between the tall brown houses at the southern end and all the fripperies and agitations of their social habit.¹⁰

The scale and grandeur of the main thoroughfare of O'Connell Street stretched from the boundary of the original Irishtown and rose gently up the slope to the urban set-piece of The Crescent. Below this new brick city sat another network of newly constructed walls: the Georgian city was built one storey above the natural ground-level. A series of arches held up brick-vaulted cellars, basement 'areas' for coal and for servants, and culverts for waste – an arrangement of walls of the city concealed belowground, enabling the city above to function in both its public and private guises.¹¹ The upper-most street of the grid in Colles's plan was named William Street, an axis in the city that has, from its eighteenth-century origin, acted as a boundary between the two parts of the city, a metaphorical wall of sorts between a tangled network of mediaeval streetscape and the rational performance of grid city. In a transference from O'Connell Street – the street referred to as King's Street in O'Brien's Mellick – it is today, and since the mid-twentieth-century, William Street that instead occupies this place of trade and exchange. Many of its businesses are long-standing family affairs, shopfronts with names handed down over generations, giving it the presence of scale and familiarity of an Irish town as opposed to the anonymity of city. Kevin Barry (again) aptly captures this in his short story 'A Pirate, Dreaming', set in 1983. Barry gives an account of his home city through the eyes of the story's narrator, the presenter of an early-morning show on an illegal pirate radio station. Broadcast from the attic space of a Georgian building in the Newtown Pery brick core of the city, the 'pirate' simultaneously watches the city and talks to the city, the narrator acting as both the voice of the city fabric itself and of its people, communicating an accumulated lived knowledge of place:

The town below and beyond him was approaching its full throttle. The town had the lungs cleared on itself and a bit of colour slapped into its face. The old rooftops leaned into one and other, as though to confide. How-we-now, they enquired, but gently. He put the footstool directly under the velux and stood on it – the height would give the broader view – and he let his



Fig. 8. The new brick walls of the city turn a corner, showing the inversion of the experience of wall in the newly expanded city. These new walls are punctured by large windows, revealing a generous proportional relationship between opening and solid.

busy, enquiring head emerge to the city, poked it this way and that and back again. Swallows darted back and forth and drew out their invisible threads and held the world together. He saw Billy Mac heading down towards William Street, was it Boyds he was working in, the hardware? Billy Mac stopped up in his stride, went to his haunches beside a puddle, took a comb out of his pocket, ran it through the puddled water, and then ran it through what was left of the hair on the top of his head. That was Billy for you. Smooth operator. Here and then gone again... Along by the Glentworth came a big, softly padding guard, beef to the heels, a countryish sort of lad he did not recognize – he knew most of the guards on a first-name basis. This fella looked as if he was straight in from the like of Askeaton or Knocklong. God help us.¹²

Here again, Barry's narrative of the city – through the eyes of one of its inhabitants – exemplifies the scale of the mid-size city, where citizens become known intimately to one another through a weave of repeated patterns of behaviour. Furthermore, Barry's narrative emphasizes the complexity of the role and experience of the mid-size European city in Ireland specifically, where the relationship or tension between urban and rural is integral to any account of the Irish city, and to how one acts or performs the city and its meaning. Forty years on from that imagined scene, William Street today remains the commercial centre of Limerick's urban core, its character formed by its role as the main location of bus stops in the city, surrounded by a motley collection of shoe shops, pharmacies, clothing shops, chippers, bargain shops, charity shops, shops selling vaping equipment and wheelie suitcases, and a side-entrance to a branch of Ireland's most exclusive department store – an odd assortment of uses, vibrantly enjoyable in this eccentricity and centrality, and a reflection of the city's now multicultural population. It is a microcosm of the city within the length of one street, a street that gathers itself like a town.

This collage of street inhabitation was already captured very well by Limerick writer Michael Curtin in the early 1990s. In *A Plastic Tomato Cutter*, set in Limerick in the mid-twentieth century, the narrator, Mr Yendall, describes how a fellow character – Simpson, a shop boy who had climbed up to become a shop assistant – left the fictional Montague's tailors to establish his own drapery business in what was formerly the fictional Mayhew's Medical Hall. On making this announcement, his boss in Montague's, Mr Sloan, decries the location of his new shop:

'It's not a good street, Simpson.' Mr Sloan was emphatic. Simpson had no answer. How could he? A pawnbroker's offal and spare rib merchants, hucksters of balloons and holy pictures, an Italian chip shop, low pubs, betting shops, the promenade of the poor on their way to the dispensary for free cod liver oil, the wonder was that they had not bankrupt Mr Mayhew, a decent man but undoubtedly eccentric to prosper in such a community. It was not a street I would have strolled through after dark.¹³

The urban river edge here offers another porously *mural* narrative of the city. The Shannon is the longest, widest river in Ireland, and Limerick is located at the most inland point of its tidal reach. Charles Mills's *View of Arthur's Quay* (circa 1860) offers a nineteenth-century prospect on how the city meets this material edge. The painting captures the energy and busyness of the river edge at a time where the river had a central role in the trade activities of the then-growing city. We see the hills of Clare offering their protective backdrop to the city, while the north shore of the river is populated by only a handful of large houses and their demesnes. Thomond Bridge reaches across to Englishtown and King John's Castle, where a red flag flies from one turret. Below it, the white water of the Curragower Falls rushes over the rocky riverbed at low tide. Smoke billows from the chimney of the distillery, while other industrial buildings jostle for space along the constructed urban edge, reclaimed from the river. The top of the



Fig. 9. View of Arthur's Quay c. 1860 by Charles Mills, oil on canvas (Dr Matthew Potter, Limerick Museum, Limerick), size 100 x 176 cm. Compare with the contemporary aerial view from the same position, in Figure 4 above.

stone tower of St Mary's Cathedral is presented as the city's high point, while the terrace of red-brick Georgian townhouses at Arthur's Quay closes the frame. In the foreground, the riverbed is a hive of activity, where mid-size merchant sailboats find mooring along a busy quayside filled with piles of materials, horses and carts, dogs, hens, while a mixture of well-dressed merchants and poorer workers carry out their business of conversation, exchange and labour.

As trade moved from water to rail to road, the river wall as a place of exchange and commerce lost its centrality in the life of the city. Ireland's towns and villages have a morphological tradition of turning their backs on their waters, whether river or sea. And through the twentieth century, Limerick was no exception: the narrative of the river in the city began to highlight it as a challenging presence, an untameable power. In *My Ireland*, a literary text that lies between autobiography and travel writing, Kate O'Brien describes the river of her city in a way that, over 100 years later, resonates with the description of Samuel Lewis, cited earlier:

*The Shannon is a formidable water; nothing parochial about it, nothing of prattle or girlish dream. It sweeps in and out of the ocean and the world according to the rules of far-out tides, and in association with dangerous distances. So its harbour has been long accustomed to news and trouble in and out, and in the general movement of time Limerick has been shaped as much by invasions and sieges as by acts of God and the usual weatherings. It is for Ireland therefore a representative city: whatever happened to Ireland happened also here – and some things happened to Ireland because of things that happened here.*¹⁴

Through the twentieth century, the river edge was, for many, a metaphorical wall, a neglected and cyclically shifting natural feature that became a symbol of the city's difficulties and poverty. Frank McCourt's globally successful memoir, *Angela's Ashes*, traces his childhood in the city from his

birth in the 1930s, and the opening scene uses the river to set its narrative as the harbinger of ill-health:

*Out in the Atlantic great sheets of rain gathered to drift slowly up the River Shannon and settle forever in Limerick. The rain dampened the city from the Feast of the Circumcision to New Year's Eve. It created a cacophony of hacking coughs, bronchial rattles, asthmatic wheezes, consumptive croaks. It turned noses into fountains, lungs into bacterial sponges.*¹⁵

One location along these walls stood as an exception to that predominantly oppressive narrative construction of the river: the place known as 'Poor Man's Kilkee'. Here, on the limestone quayside, its depth laid to lawn, city dwelling families who could not afford the train fare to the famous West Clare watering hole favoured by their wealthier fellow citizens would holiday and swim at low tide, enjoying the pleasures of the river.

An entire lifetime later, and since the mid-2010s in particular, the river has enjoyed a significant renaissance inside the city. With swimming, kayaking, rowing and stand-up paddleboarding, the stone-wall built edges between cityscape and waterway have been physically and metaphorically breached at every point. Moving across these boundaries and embracing the river has now become a symbol of health, vigour and prosperity, a narrative now recognized and promoted by the municipality. Walkers and runners circle the loop of the three city bridges (Thomond, Sarsfield, Condell). The presence of the river pulses through this stretch of the city, demanding attention. The city sees itself through new eyes, encircling its river, its people gathering to linger and socialize along the quaysides, looking west into a setting sun, as the quay walls stretch towards the softening edges of the river and its mudflats as it heads to the breadth of its estuary and the sea.

As with Virgil's narrative glimpse of Carthage, given at the outset of this essay – a city resistant to externally imposed narratives – Limerick, too, through the first century of Ireland's post-independence history, has resisted the narrative repeatedly assigned to it: its role as peripheral *other* in the network of Irish urban centres. This resistance relied on the generation and maintenance of a particular civic psyche, as mentioned earlier. This psyche of resistance can be seen much earlier, too, in the distancing, the *othering*, of the Irish native people from the garrison of Englishtown, as seen in contemporary cartographic representations, such as 'Pacata Hibernia' above. However, the city's darker history of these past hundred years lies in its own internal creation of a set of invisible walls around parts of the city – the walls of social segregation, of *othering*.

In the early to mid-twentieth-century, the generations of people living in dire conditions in the tenements of the Georgian red-brick houses (such as those depicted at Arthur's Quay in Mills's painting above) and in the network of laneways of the city (such as those recounted by McCourt in *Angela's Ashes*) were moved, wholesale, into newly constructed public housing estates at the far reaches of the city's boundaries. Each of the three new suburbs – Moyross, Southill and King's Island – were at a significant physical remove from the core of the city and, more importantly, were located in places of which the physical attributes rendered them even more invisible – a marsh, a hill, an island – and were further separated by poor public transport links and little services. This act effectively ghettoized a swathe of Limerick's people through the construction of these invisible but highly palpable walls, generating social divides. In the twenty-first century, various governmental efforts, national and local, have been made to regenerate and renew these areas, but it is the foundational act of physical segregation – placing city people wholeheartedly outside the walls – that has ensured this lived reality remains an immensely challenging one for Limerick's urban present, and central to the question of urban futures in its case. Drawing on the

social research of Des McCafferty, Trutz Haase and Jonathan Pratschke, historian John Logan writes:

*Using national census and other official data, they [McCafferty et al.] show how in the large public housing estates, a disproportionate number live lives of economic precariousness. These zones coexist with others where high levels of property ownership, secure, well-paid employment, educational success, and accumulated social capital is general. Though sometimes physically close, the zones are as culturally separate as if encircled by the impermeable walls of earlier times.*¹⁶

The clarity and commitment of vision in Colles's 1769 proposal for the expansion of the city – the creation of a formal cityscape of grand, inhabitable brick walls – is in sharp contrast to the creeping urban and suburban sprawl of twentieth- and twenty-first century Limerick, and the complex social, political and legal realities that have enabled this ongoing mutation. Recent and current powers of local governance have tended to favour policies of economic investment and physical development *extra muros*, driving processes of dispersal: motorway networks circling the city, new schools built on the edges, and intermediary tracts of land between centre and suburbs left to signify an urban potential both present and unrealized, as wasteland. Within the ruins of its earliest walls, the older centre of Limerick – this mid-size European city – continues to remind us of its value and its lessons, even as it calls for and awaits new narrative(s).

- 1 Flaubert's *Salammbô* (1862) comes to mind, for example.
- 2 Taken from the lemma on Limerick in Samuel Lewis' *A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland* (1837). See: Library Ireland, 'Limerick City', libraryireland.com/topog/L/Limerick-City.php, accessed 13 February 2023.
- 3 Gerald Griffin, *The Collegians: A Tale of Garryowen* (Dublin: J. Duffy & Co, 1857).
- 4 Dion Boucicault's *The Colleen Bawn, or The Brides of Garryowen* (1860) is a play written and first produced in New York, where the emigrant Irish playwright had discovered the Irish novel by chance. The incident exemplifies the interporosity of Irish and Irish-American cultural production and imaginaries – factors that play an important role in Irish cultural self-consciousness and production to this day. The most impactful literary 'memoir' of Limerick, for example, *Angela's Ashes* (1996), was authored in New York by Frank McCourt more than a century later.
- 5 Cathal O'Connell, 'City, Citizenship, Social Exclusion in Limerick', in: Niamh Hourigan (ed.), *Understanding Limerick: Social Exclusion and Change* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2011), 230–44: 233.
- 6 Griffin, *The Collegians*, op. cit. (note 3), 6.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 9, 11, 9.
- 8 Kevin Barry, 'Who's-Dead McCarthy', in: Kevin Barry, *That Old Country Music* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2020), 109-118: 109.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 116-117.
- 10 Kate O'Brien, *Without My Cloak* (London: William Heinemann, 1931), 10.
- 11 For more on this, see: Peter Carroll, 'Fundamental Base: Thinking of the City from the Ground Up', in: *Architecture Ireland* 313 (2020), 13-17.
- 12 Kevin Barry, 'A Pirate, Dreaming', in: Tim Groenland et al. (eds.), *The Ogham Stone* (Limerick: The University of Limerick, 2022), 69-76: 73-74.
- 13 Michael Curtin, *The Plastic Tomato Cutter* (London: Thistle Publishing, 2015 [1991]), 114-115.
- 14 Kate O'Brien, *My Ireland* (London: Batsford, 1962), 22.
- 15 Frank McCourt, *Angela's Ashes* (New York: Scribner, 1996), 11-12.
- 16 John Logan, 'Settlement, Building, Segregation: A History of Limerick City', in: *Architecture Ireland* 313 (2020), 7-12: 11.