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McCourt's masterpiece 'as Gaeilge'

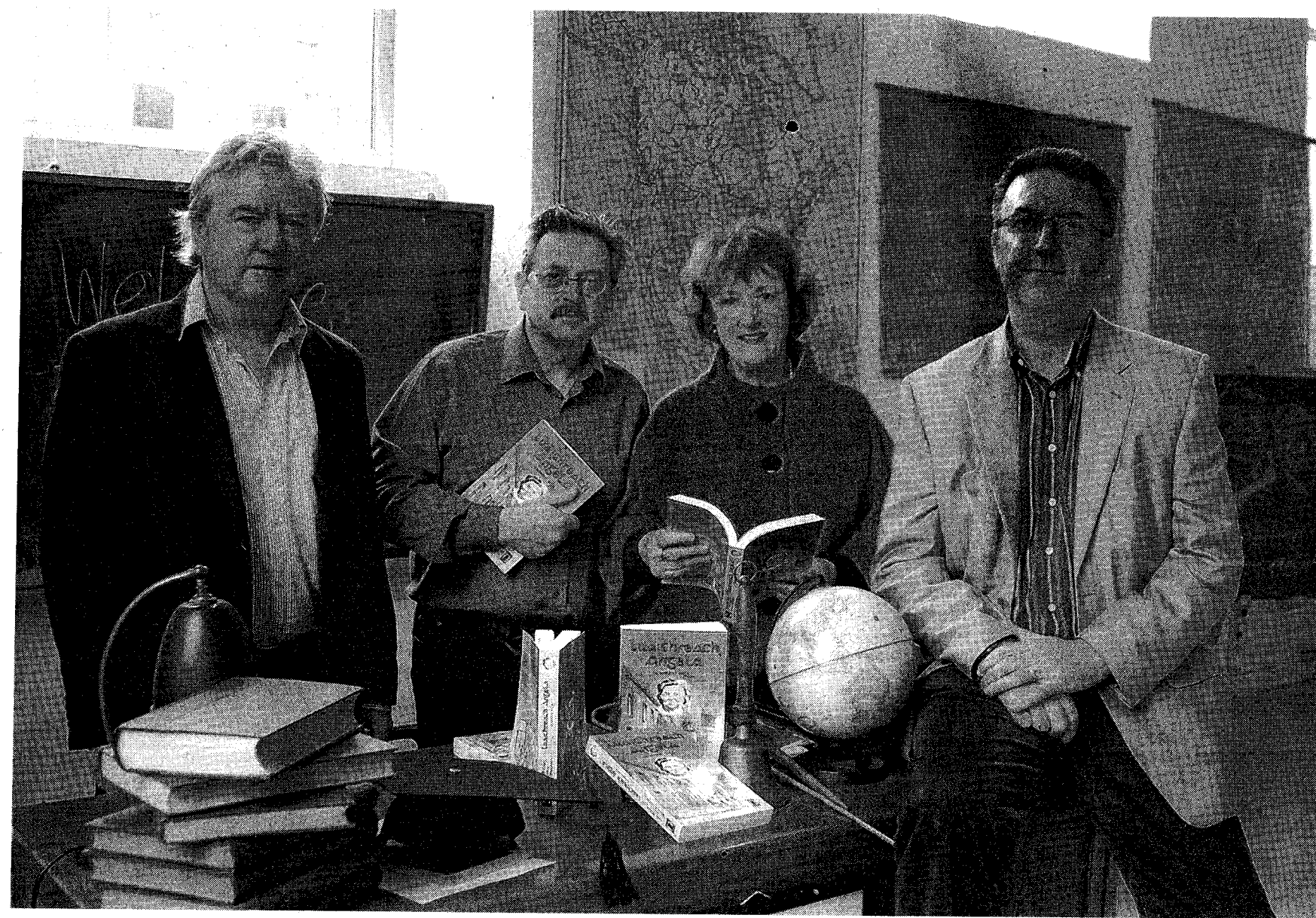
The Irish translation of Frank McCourt's Angela's Ashes will be launched next week. **John Rainsford** discovers why the Limerick Writers' Centre took on a project which ended up taking two years to complete

IT has been translated into around 25 languages, but up until now Frank McCourt's best selling memoir Angela's Ashes has not been available in Irish. On Monday, that will be put to rights when Limerick Writers' Centre completes a two-year project and launches the new edition, entitled 'Luaithreach Angela'. It has been a long but rewarding journey. The limited edition Irish translation of the Pulitzer

Prize winning author's biographical account of growing up in Limerick was commissioned by the LWC, with board member Dominic Taylor acting as the project editor, and working alongside writer and translator Pádraic Breathnach. It is hoped that the Irish edition will encourage more people to read books in the Irish language. The Limerick Writers' Centre is a non-profit organisation established

to nurture and support writers and the project is helping to advance its role in promoting the artistic and educational life of the Mid-West. Dominic Taylor established the centre three years ago along with three others - Dermott Petty, Mike Finn and Mark Lloyd - in an effort to mentor and support Limerick-based writers. Its headquarters are on Barrington Street

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Derry McGrath, Dominic Taylor, Dorothy Cantrell and Pat Nolan thumb through the pages of "Luaithreach Angela" at the Frank McCourt Museum and Leamy Art Gallery on Hartstonge Street

PICTURE: OWEN SOUTH

Features

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Writers translate Frank's 'scéal'

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and the members run it solely on a voluntary basis.

Dominic explains: "Two years ago the Writers' Centre took on one publishing project called 'Kemmy's Limerick Miscellany'. Last year we secured the rights to translate Angela's Ashes into Gaelic, which was a huge boost. The project has taken two years to complete and we intend that the book should stand up, in its own right, as a piece of Gaelic literature.

"Our reasons for taking on this project were, first of all, that such a famous book, by an Irish author, should be available to read in Gaelic and secondly, as Frank McCourt was a proud Limerick man, we want to publish the book in Limerick as a tribute to him."

Frank McCourt was born in Brooklyn, New York. His parents were Malachy McCourt from Antrim and Angela Sheehan who was born in Limerick. With the depression looming the family returned to Limerick in 1934 but almost immediately began a descent into poverty. His twin brothers, Oliver and Eugene and a sister Margaret, all died within a short period of time.

Dominic adds: "There is a huge demand in Limerick for a Writers' Centre. Indeed, we have started a series of creative writing workshops that are aimed at both beginners and advanced writers.

"The workshops are held in the Leamy Art Gallery and School on Hartstonge Street. The owner of Leamys, Una Heaton, expressed a wish that a literary connection be formed as part of her plans to turn the premises into an art and cultural centre in honour of the late Frank McCourt. He was a past pupil of the original school. We were only too happy to oblige, in this regard, as Frank McCourt had been a supporter of our efforts at the Centre also."

Frank McCourt was



Frank McCourt pointing out a place of interest on Windmill Street during an Angela's Ashes tour in the summer of 2008

PICTURE: OWEN SOUTH

diagnosed with malignant melanoma in May 2009. He subsequently died in a hospice in Manhattan on July 19, 2009.

The translator of his book, Pádraic Breathnach, was born in Moycullen, overlooking Lough Corrib, in County Galway but came to Limerick in 1969 to take up a position as lecturer in Irish at Mary Immaculate College. He continued to lecture at Mary Immaculate College until 2007 when he retired.

"My father was by far my greatest influence although he was not literate in any way," he says. "He made us work very hard on our small family farm but we also knew that he loved us. Although it seems

like an obvious thing to say, a writer is a person who writes. I also write because I must. For me life would have little meaning otherwise. To quote Frank McCourt: "Things don't happen unless you make them happen. Nothing is significant unless you make it significant." It pains me if I experience something beautiful but fail to capture it in print.

"I have no idea what else I could do with my life. Writing is what I want to do. Riches or fame do not matter much to me. Writing in Irish is always going to be low profile but that does not bother me either. It is less difficult to be a writer than not to be. You must persist and overcome those rejections and

frustrations."

He added: "In the end, it really is a matter of life and death. One chooses life. One has to fight, all of the way, forever. Although I would like to think that I produce 'art' I do not go about thinking that I must produce 'art'. I try to write what I wish to write and to write it as well as possible. Generally you know in a flash what you want to produce but producing it can be difficult. Try to satisfy yourself first and foremost. You might, then, be in a position to satisfy others!"

Dominic Taylor agrees: "We have a stream of people coming here. We want to get moving on developing other projects also. Currently we

run the 'On the Nail' reading series on the first Thursday of every month which caters for all types of creative writing including poetry, fiction, short stories and so on. We also hold various workshops on poetry, children's writing, a non-fiction workshop and a series of creative writing workshops aimed at both beginners and advanced writers.

"Our long-term goal is to find a permanent residence for the Writers' Centre in Limerick City. Currently our residence has been given to us by a private individual who graciously allows us to use it as a Writers' Centre."

Dominic acknowledges that there is currently an absence

of money for acquiring such a permanent residence but believes, given the level of public interest, that they must persist with the project. More and more people today have time on their hands and want to spend it creatively in the arts, he feels. A fully functioning Writers' Centre could play a vital part in this.

"Money is clearly diminishing at present and everything is being cut back. We sell some books to raise funds and we get the odd bit of support from the city council. We need nurturing and every bit of funding helps, even if it is only a hundred euros, given by a benefactor.

"We are naturally creative beings and through literature and other artistic pursuits we can change our world for the better. It is an alternative to the 'rat race' if you like. I mean new venues are buzzing with literature each month. A crop of new writers is being groomed and some are beginning to get acknowledgement outside of the country. It pleases me to see new people coming through the ranks."

Although there is little money in the arts currently and the LWC is surviving on a shoestring budget Dominic is not downbeat. He says: "I do not get discouraged as obstacles are there to be overcome. It was never going to be easy. Once you get over those initial obstacles and start achieving your objectives everything becomes easier. In the beginning you do not have to get it right, you just have to get it going."

The launch of 'Luathreach Angela' takes place 15 years after the publication of the original book in New York, in 1996. The Irish translation will be launched in Limerick on Monday and at the Irish Consulate in New York, on November 15.

For further information about the launch see: www.limerick-writerscentre.com/ and www.frankmccourt-museum.com.

Limerick man's account of writer's honour

John Liddy

CASTILIAN hospitality was everywhere to be seen for the naming of the Kate O'Brien Street in the city of Ávila on September 27.

Kate wrote about this abulense trait and I had visited Ávila many times, so it did not come as a surprise to many people. But it was clear from the warmth of initial greetings from Miguel Ángel García Nieto, Mayor of Ávila and Montserrat Sánchez García, the Culture and Education Officer, that this was going to be a day to remember.

On entering the Mayor's office with the Irish Ambassador to Spain, Justin Harmon, I thought of what Kate O'Brien had started all those years ago when she first came to this walled city. For here, seated around the room, was the Mayor of Limerick, Jim Long beside Sheila Deegan of Limerick Arts, along with various representatives of enterprise and education. She would have enjoyed the moment.

At midday the local band opened proceedings on a street in front of the train station. There was a purple cloth fluttering in the breeze covering the sign Calle Kate O'Brien and then the Mayor of Ávila stepped forward to say how Ávila was the motive for her predilection for Spain and the works of Saint Teresa, her favourite reading, and with the inauguration of a new street a debt is repaid to one of Ávila's most distinguished ambassadors the world over.

The Mayor of Limerick, Jim Long, spoke eloquently and with emotion about how proud he felt to be here in Ávila

unveiling of the street name and the band played the national anthems of Ireland and Spain, followed by a reading in Spanish and English of a poem Kate O'Brien in Ávila from myself, written after my first visit in 1982.

KATE O'BRIEN
IN ÁVILA

Here was the Spain she loved most.

The white light of her heart's content,

among market faces rooted

in a Limerick childhood,

the Encarnación her Laurel Hill.

High within the walled embrace

of Teresa's Castile,

its cathedral silence touching her like

fingertips in a candlelight

intimacy of friends.

During a walkabout I chatted to José Antonio Sierra, first director of the Cervantes Institute in Dublin and prime mover for making the inauguration of the Calle Kate O'Brien possible. I agreed with José Antonio that the street outside the train station was the ideal street to bear the name of Kate O'Brien, a much travelled lady, who arrived and left from here on numerous occasions. We both wondered what the taxi drivers would call it. Perhaps La Calle Miss Katie or La irlandesa?

During the course of the day plans for future cooperation were discussed regarding school exchanges, the Kate O'Brien Weekend Festival in Ávila and possible book translations. Interest in bringing these ideas forward is there in abundance from the respective mayors and arts officers. The Embassy

Mindra realises her African volunteering dream