

# Protesters stay away from UL on the day local boy came home

By EUGENE PHELAN

NO protests. No confrontations. Just standing ovations and tears. A family occasion of rejoicing in a romantic story of how a poor boy from the slums of Limerick in the 1940s

came good. That is perhaps the best way to sum up the rather emotional conferring of the degree of honorary doctorate to Angela's Ashes author, Frank McCourt at the University of Limerick on Tuesday. As a telegram boy Frank McCourt made deliveries to the White House at UL by

the back door, but on Tuesday it was red carpet treatment for the local boy made good through the grand front door entrance. "I am honoured beyond belief," he said. He broke down in tears as he went to mention Malachy and other members of the family who were present, along with his wife, Ellen.

Brother, Malachy, brought out the handkerchief. Frank did not spot him but followed along. "Don't laugh," he pleaded as he broke into tears and wiped them away. "My book is a memoir and impression of my life. I was not setting out to do an exact history. I am not qualified to do that."

"But here I am in Limerick receiving one, the highest honour I have ever received," he said to loud applause. "It is alright winning the Pulitzer Prize, but to come to Limerick to the university which did not exist in my day. I always thought it was a sad thing that the third city did not have a university."

It was an emotional occasion filled with pomp and ceremony. Plenty of colour, caps and gowns; speeches and parchments.

John A Daly, chairman of the governing body, made an impressive address of welcome quoting of the cuff Yeats, TS Elliott, Socrates, Heaney and many others.

"Socrates said an uninteresting life was not worth living. Nobody can say Frank McCourt has led an uninteresting life," he said. Mr Daly said that while

the author painted a painful scene for some people.

"If we were honest with ourselves the same poverty was in every town and village in Ireland, but it will never be described better or with such authority as in Frank McCourt's Angela's Ashes."

The author of Angela's Ashes was speaking off the cuff to the distinguished gathering at UL, including American Ambassador Jean Kennedy Smith, who attended the conferring of the degree of honorary doctorate.

Also, importantly, he named the families who he grew up with some of the young boys now adults like himself who were present: Eric Lynch, the Costelloes, Con Cleary, Billy Campbell, the Sheehans, Gerry Lillis, Sydney Egan, the sons of his teacher Thomas O'Halloran, and many more.

Prof Colin D Townsend, Dean of the College of Humanities in the citation for the conferring said that Frank McCourt had made the city of Limerick famous throughout the world.

"Angela's Ashes deals unflinchingly with the poverty, suffering and depression of the 1930s and 1940s Limerick, and creates from these unpromising materials, a parable of endurance, hope and achievement," he stated.

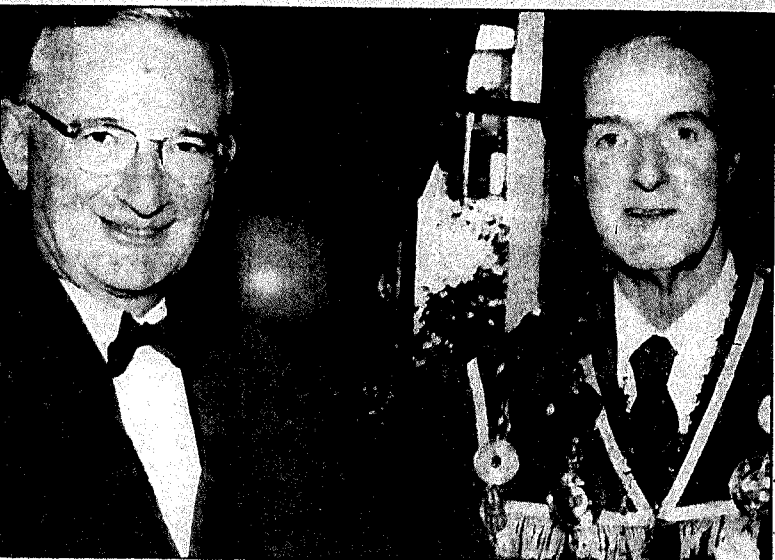
He said that Frank McCourt possessed a rare ability to speak directly of the most tender and painful moments in his life; to communicate sensations "felt in the blood and felt along the heart."



Happy days: Frank McCourt and his wife, Ellen, at the conferring of an honorary doctorate on the author at UL this week. (LL)



The brother: Frank McCourt with his brother, Malachy, at UL. (LL)



Mayor Frank Leddin at the conferring ceremony with Prof Noel Whelan, vice-president and Dean of UL. (LL)

## Cinderella finally gets to wear the gown!

By EUGENE PHELAN

I LEFT without an arse in my pants and I come back and they give you a gown to cover it—one of the delightful lyrical quotes from a pale looking Frank McCourt as we have a quick interview before he goes into the Jean Monnet Theatre at UL to be conferred with his honorary doctorate.

It is no more Frank from now on. It is Doctor McCourt. He speaks of his success; his new book; his film; his friends and the controversy surrounding his award-winning book.

He and his wife, Ellen, are just back from Australia where they received a huge welcome.

"Limerick popped up all over the place in the form of people who grew up with me. Mary Downes who lived right across the street from me on Rodent Lane on Barrack Hill. The woman in the book, Nurse O'Halloran who delivered practically everybody in Limerick, her two nieces I met. And the man who was our postman up in Rosbrien Road, Michael Griffin. I met his brother Turrough. Everywhere I go I meet someone from Limerick," he explained.

With two million copies of Angela's Ashes sold the draft for the film is being finished by Australian writer Laura Jones. What about big names.

"The most likely name for director is Mel Gibson. He was also interested in playing the part of the father, but I think he is too pretty," he said with a laugh.

"I also got a call from Pierce Brosnan. He was in Dublin. He had just finished filming the Nephew and he said he would be interested in producing it and doing the father role and I said he was too pretty too," he added.

River-dance newspaper, Bill Whelan at UL. (LL)

But some are annoyed at how he portrayed Limerick?

"I did not portray Limerick at all. I portrayed my experiences. I am not James Joyce doing a Ulysses tour of Dublin. It was my perspective."

But was there really that much poverty?

"That was my experience. If they say it wasn't they have a different experience. You can't get inside someone else's experience."

Was he glad there were no protests at UL.

"It is ridiculous. A book should be treated as a book. If people don't like it they should write about it. I don't mind I can take criticism. I have a whole bag filled with with I call negative stuff from all over," he said.

He stressed that he was not attacking the Church but just presenting what happened him.

But what about the city edition of the Limerick Leader last week and William Street shopkeeper Jack Brosnan pointing out that Frank McCourt worked for him in his bicycle shop for four years and never mentioned it.

The author noted how his former employer had mentioned in the Limerick Leader that he was a Walter Mitty character.

"I also went through my PM Woodhouse phase. I think, Jack, he might be getting things confused."