

Author Frank says 'tis now a grand city!

By **RON KIRWAN**

TIS over halfway finished, Frank McCourt has revealed in Limerick.

And Tis—the title of his second book, is the last word in Angela's Ashes—will show how his upbringing in Limerick impacted on the author after he arrived in New York.

"I was glad when Angela's Ashes was finished, said the Pulitzer-prize winner who was in Limerick to address the inaugural luncheon of the Marketing Institute

Mid-West Region.

"But I realised then that I had to write a second book to show what the effects of Limerick were," said the New York-born author who has been awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Limerick.

"I want to show my experiences, the effects of my inadequate education in all departments and the damage in some," he said.

Mr McCourt said that, knowing nothing at all about marketing, he and his wife Ellen, had embarked in 1996 on a three-week marketing tour of US cities to promote Angela's Ashes.

And despite knowing nothing about marketing, the first run of 27,000 copies sold out.

The phenomenon of

Angela's Ashes continues to astonish him and his publishers, he revealed, with the latest contract to publish in Estonia, worldwide sales of four million so far and production of a film now underway.

The book had grown out of storytelling in a series of New York classrooms, he told the lunch.

He said he was now looking forward to the release of the film of his book with some nervousness. Nervousness in particular of seeing his own life story on screen and of reliving his mother, Angela's, sadness and suffering.

"I didn't realise until she died in New York in 1981 that she had had six children in five-and-a-half years," said Mr McCourt.

"I didn't understand what it was like to have not one, but three children die. I didn't understand when she was alive what she had suffered. That's the saddest part of all," he said, revealing that Angela McCourt never wanted to go back to her own life in Limerick.

"She went to New York and would talk about Limerick only when it was funny, but she never wanted to go back into the Lanes, into the sordid details of her life."

"And that was the part I was a bit nervous about—the sordid details—because somewhere along the way, you have to draw the line", he stated.

"She wouldn't have liked the book. She would have

felt the shame—that's the word we all felt when we lived in Limerick, when we lived among the Lanes. So I don't know what it's going to be like next year when I see the film, but I'm glad, because what I wanted to do was show the face of poverty," said Mr McCourt.

Remarking that the Irish race memory of famine and hunger drives us to educate and contribute and devote ourselves to fighting need across the globe, the author said he was proud to come back to what President Clinton recently described as the "new" Limerick.

"I walk the streets; I see the children, rosy cheeked, happy. I suppose they are completely different from the Limerick of snotty nosed, scabby knees, bad skin and rotten teeth falling out," he said.

"That's all gone. And if they show the Limerick in the film that I wrote about, maybe it will remind you not of the Limerick that I described, but of the 'Limericks' in Africa and elsewhere around the world".

"I think we need an education—the Irish less than other people—in poverty and hunger. That's what I was writing about—poverty. I don't know if that's what will come across to the people who are watching the film next year, but for me it will be a strange



Guest speaker, Frank McCourt, centre, at the Castletroy Park Hotel for the inaugural luncheon of the Marketing Institute Mid-West Region, with, from left, Dermot Madigan, Castletroy Park Hotel; Fred McSweeney, Irish Multichannel; Ursula Cullen, Castletroy Park Hotel; Darragh O'Neill, general manager, Castletroy Park Hotel, and Anne O'Toole, sales manager Castletroy Park Hotel, and Institute chairwoman. (LL)



Deputy Mayor Alderman Sean Griffin with Frank McCourt and John Ryan, Telecom Eireann.



At the lunch, Eileen Quinn, Shannon Development; Willie Ryan, London, and Vera Murray, (LL)

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ty. I don't know if that's what will come across in the people who are watching the film next year, but for me it will be a strong experience. And I don't know what I have just said has to do with marketing," said Mr McCourt.

Commenting on his detractors who took exception to Angela's Ashe', the author said that they were few.

"I think that help is available for them," he said.

Turning to his next book, he said he had no intention whatsoever of attacking Limerick.

"But I have to show what the poverty does to a young man who goes to America, which is a very hard place to go to, ill-prepared and damaged by what I came from.

"The Limerick I grew up in was a very puritanical city. The only thing I remember the priests not attacking was the drink," he said.

"They attacked everything else—going out for a walk with a girl, dancing, the Hollywood films; Ginger Rogers dancing with Fred Astaire—that was a sin.

"I just want to show what it was like and how I think I struggled with it. I knew I wanted to get some education and I did, but my education took place mostly in the classroom as a teacher. I'm the one who benefited as a teacher," he revealed.

He told the Institute that the Irish were the darlings of the world at the moment and said to be Irish was to be "in"—especially now.

"We have a gusto and a lust for life, and an impatience with gloom. You and I can be gloomy but we don't want to parade it before the public. So we say, maybe we drank too much, which is fine. So then we sing, and we dance and we write more eloquently and more movingly than anyone else—not me—but the rest," he said.

On his vision for the future of Limerick, he suggested it become a centre for returning emigrants worldwide.

"Let the Wild Geese fly home to Limerick," he said.

"I'm a man of great vision—I should be in marketing."

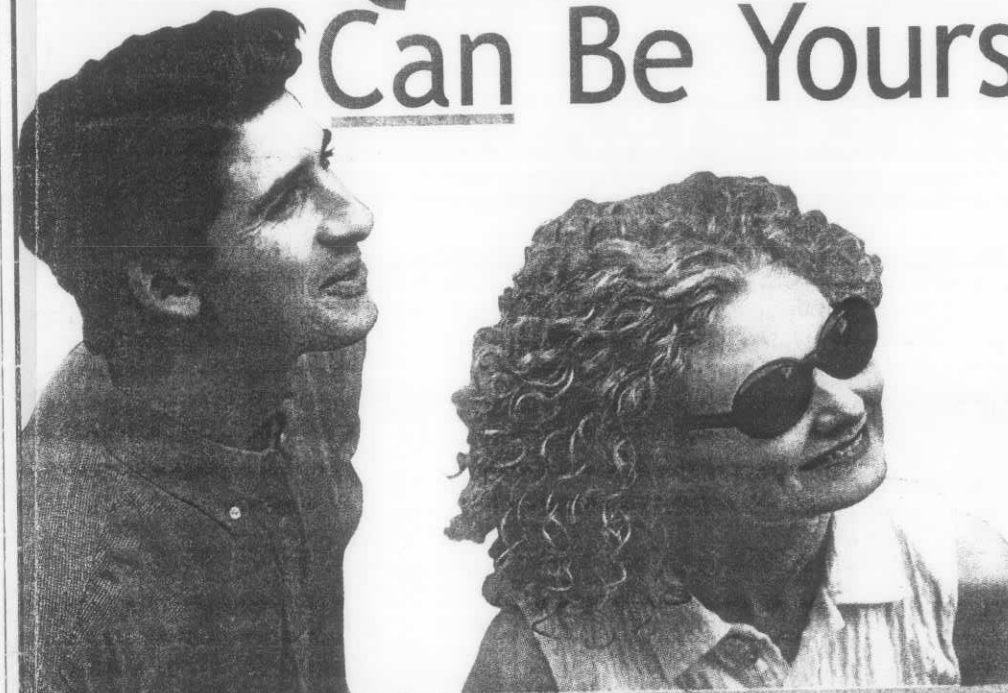
Mr McCourt was presented with a gift sponsored by the ESB of Limerick Lace, inscribed with an excerpt from Angela's Ashe: "I can come home for dinner, a cup of tea and a cut of fried bread".

At the lunch, Eileen Quinn, Shannon Development; Willie Ryan, London, and Vera Murray, Limerick. (LL)

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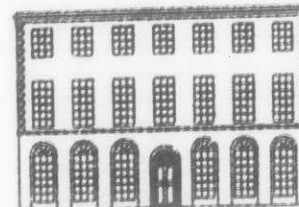
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