

Tis McCourt rising from his Ashes

THAT'S your dream out now—that's what Angela McCourt told her sons when one of their dreams came to pass.

The dream of America is more like a nightmare. Surely McCourt's first book Angela's Ashes, helped him offload all his venom for the city of Limerick. I am expecting in 'Tis that perhaps now the master will exercise his prizewinning literary genius to mesmerise his readers with new tales of excitement and adventures in the land of milk and honey, that will eventually lead to "and we all lived happy ever after".

'Tis is without question a magnificently written book that leaves the reader in no doubt whatsoever that Frank McCourt is a literary genius and a man of his talent touches us only very rarely in our lives.

I can only hope that he does not use this genius to unjustly punish Limerick yet again for its "crimes" against him. Page one sets the tone perfectly. The First Officer on the good ship Irish Oak, tells McCourt of Limerick (like Albany in upstate New York) ha ha ha, is a great place to die but not a place where you would want to get married or rear children.

McCourt's response: "Why should I care what anyone says about Limerick anyway? All I had there was misery." Off we go.

Everything that befalls the "miserable", McCourt is in some way related to his "miserable", days back on the "miserable", post-war lanes of "miserable" Limerick.

Within 48 hours on American soil the teenage McCourt falls victim to an alleged homosexual unnamed priest from Ireland and I am left wondering is this really true and, if so, why not name the priest? Hours later a "queer pervert" in a New

Author, GERARD HANNAN, one of Frank McCourt's most vocal Limerick critics, gives his impressions of the Pulitzer prizewinning author's new book, 'Tis.

McCourt wants to depict himself as the innocent little boy from Ireland facing the cruel world of New York.

The young McCourt comes across as an innocent Irish lad in New York.

In spite of his innocence he is willing to suffer the rough treatment often inflicted on him by the seemingly heartless people of the Big Apple.

But he never complains. Not like he did when it came to Limerick.

The bitterness and envy is very much present throughout the book but it is more acceptable because the matured McCourt seems to see things as they are rather than being personally against him.

One wonders if this is an act of charity to his loved people of New York.

If so, why did he not show the same charitable nature to the people of Limerick?

The storyline only slightly gains momentum when Frank joins the US army.

His experiences during his army days are only mildly amusing but it's unfortunate that the author resorts to heavy usage of obscene and foul language in an apparent effort to strengthen the piece and make it that bit more shocking.

McCourt's continuous reference to the "dark clouds, in his head" throughout the book becomes somewhat tedious and we are never quite clear as to what these "dark clouds" actually are.

The only time they seem to disappear is when he returns to Limerick.

It is interesting to see that McCourt does have some feelings for his mother when he physically attacks a fellow soldier for verbally abusing her and referring in a conde-

returns to New York and there are pages and pages of ramblings about life, love and living that seem to head nowhere and are no more than padding to get us to the next interesting story.

McCourt starts to elaborate on a deeply held desire to get into the academic life and gain educational qualifications.

Noble aspirations, indeed, for a man from the "miserable" lanes of Limerick.

He manages to impress the Dean of Admissions at NYU and is soon attending lectures.

After an uncomfortable

start into university life the young McCourt quickly settles in and it seems he has finally found his niche in life.

Perhaps now the misery, will vanish and be replaced with long awaited and well-earned happiness.

McCourt quickly becomes envious of his fellow students at NYU and is a complete loner lurking in the shadows of the canteens and cafeterias listening to them and jealous of their American style "white tooth, happiness".

But there is still plenty of bitterness, misery and envy to contend with.

A brief but amusing reference to his brother, Malachy's, New York success story and an hilarious essay in which he tells us about his poverty

stricken days when he had to plug a cord into an unwilling neighbour's flat to keep warm on bitter winter nights are real gems.

The final majestic chapters concentrate on McCourt's impressions of New York, his life and his unforgiving relationship with his mother.

'Tis is a much more aggressive book than Angela's Ashes. However, the continuous sour tone of complaint occasionally does not make for entertaining reading.

Although the text is enlivened by McCourt's incredible sense of humour, it does not possess the lyricism or poetic intimacy of his childhood account in Angela's Ashes.

Toward the end of 'Tis, Frank McCourt, not yet a

writer, wants a place on the wall of the famous Irish pub in Greenwich Village where dust jackets of the patrons' books are displayed.

That is the physical manifestation of the dream.

Angela's Ashes, is a hard act to follow, but McCourt has achieved the dream after years of incredible hardship, suffering and pain.

'Tis is more like a novel with the facts lending themselves to something straight out of a work of complete fiction. But perhaps this is an idle point because his book remains a stunning read.

It has little or no interest for the people of Limerick by comparison to Angela's Ashes but as a rags to riches story it is highly entertaining.



Gerard Hannan: 'Tis remain a stunning read.

(LL)

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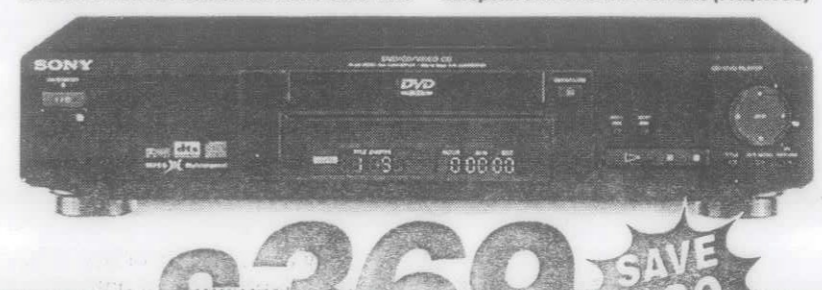
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him. The only common denominator is that Frank seems totally indifferent on both occasions. McCourt's apparent fixation with "interfering, with himself" comes to the fore as he tells us about his times locked into the toilet cubicle of his place of employment, the Palm Court Hotel, being quiet for fear of discovery, interfering with himself.

He is envious of the hotel guests, just like he was envious of his neighbours back in the lanes of Limerick.

We are quickly reminded for the first of too many times of "the way my own mother in Limerick carried on with her cousin, Laman Griffin".

By the end of Chapter Seven it is clear that



Frank McCourt: realising the American dream. (LL)

poverty. Critics may accuse him of being hypocritical to make an issue of this in his book in the aftermath of his bitter attacks on his mother.

McCourt shows tremendous humanity when he visits the ovens at Dachau and one is easily touched by his dilemma as to whether or not he should say a Hail Mary, or on Our Father.

However, it is not long before McCourt is back to true form, when he relates, with some unnecessary detail, his perverted sexual encounter with a young underfed and ailing refugee on the outskirts of Lenggries in Bavaria. (Remnants perhaps of his alleged encounter with the young ailing Limerick girl Treasa Carmody.)

This time he goes a step further when he describes his erotic fantasy about the refugee incident while in hospital and once again he is "interfering, with himself".

On his return visit to Limerick the young McCourt (now in his 20s) describes some of his fond memories of the city as he strolls around town meeting the people of his past.

He meets his mother at Colbert station and in a matter of minutes he is arguing with her because of her loyalty and love for her ailing brother Pat "Ab" Sheehan.

"Ever since I left Limerick there hasn't been a flea in my life."

After McCourt is discharged from the army he

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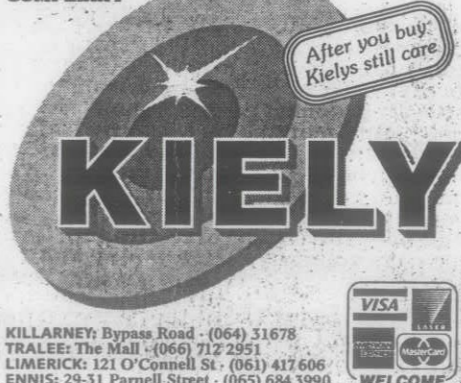
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