

Appendices:

Biography

Frank McCourt was born in Brooklyn, New York, to Irish immigrant parents. Unable to find work in the depths of the Depression, the McCourts returned to Ireland, where they sunk deeper into the poverty. McCourt's father, an alcoholic, was often without work, drank up what little money he earned and eventually abandoned the family altogether. Three of the seven children died of diseases aggravated by malnutrition and the squalor of their surroundings. Frank McCourt himself nearly died of typhoid fever when he was ten. After quitting school at 13, Frank McCourt alternated between odd jobs and petty crime in an effort to feed himself, his mother, and four surviving brothers and sisters. At 19, he returned to the United States and worked at odd jobs until he was drafted into the United States Army at the onset of the Korean War. McCourt spent the war stationed in Germany and on his return to civilian life was able to pursue a college education on the G.I. Bill. Although he had never attended high school, he was able to persuade the admissions office of New York University to accept him as a student. Although his childhood interest in language and storytelling were fed by creative writing classes and his own constant reading, he did not feel ready to pursue as career as a professional writer. On graduation, he went to work for the New York City Public School system, where he taught for the next 27 years. Although McCourt spent his summers working on a novel drawing on his youth in Ireland, he was unable to find his own voice until he retired from teaching. After years of teaching creative writing to young people, McCourt determined to write his own life story. His second book 'Tis picks up the story of his life where Angela's Ashes left off, with his arrival in America at age 19. It shot to the top of the best-seller lists as soon as it was published.

Synopsis

The main character, Frank, who was born in America, later moves to Ireland with his family. They are plagued by hunger, sickness and a general lack of money. Frank's father is consumed by his drinking habits which prevent him from getting and keeping jobs. At the time when the father is no longer become the breadwinner of the family, Frank takes a chance to get work to support his family financial. Once he works as the newspaper boy helping Uncle Pat, the main character's uncle, then he starts delivering coal with his next-door neighbor, Mr. Hannon, and finally he also experiences working as a telegram messenger.

As Frank matures, he starts to suffer from an overwhelming sense of guilt. He worries that by sinning; he has doomed himself and the people he cares about. It seems that Frank channels the disappointments of his hard life into self-recrimination. Frank escapes his fears and guilt by reading, watching movies, listening to the radio, and daydreaming. He also thinks optimistically about the future, gradually focusing not just on what he wants to do for his family, but what he wants to achieve for himself. Frank reconciles himself to the fact that in order to reach America, he will have to take risks, pass up safe jobs, and do ethically dubious things such as writing threatening letters for Mrs. Finucane and delivering Protestant newspapers.

The hardships in Limerick are so profound that starvation is a way of life. "Consumption," pneumonia, and typhoid are rampant; children go to school barefoot or in pieces of flopping rubber; stealing is a necessity. Frank's tiny sister and twin brothers die. Above all, there is "the drink"--the endemic disease of Irish fathers who spend their weeks' wages in the pub on Friday night. Frank leaves school to earn money for the family (his father had joined the war-time wave of work in England, but continued to drink his earnings away), and to save for a return to America.