

## NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND / OLLSCOIL na hÉIREANN

**TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS** delivered by **Dr Caroline Hussey**, Registrar, University College Dublin - National University of Ireland, Dublin on 10 April, 2003, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws *honoris causa*, on **Professor Brian Farrell**.

A Sheansailéir, agus a mhuintir na hOllscoile,

How do I introduce a graduand who needs no introduction, who is as familiar in our homes as any member of our families?

Brian Farrell has been an integral part of every RTE current affairs programme since the station's inception in 1961, from *Seven Days* to *Prime Time*. Brian Farrell has been the face and the voice of every election or referendum since 1965, the interpreter of every national event since John Kennedy's visit to Ireland in 1963. There is also Brian Farrell the academic, friend and colleague of those of us who have been fortunate to be contemporaries in UCD. I do not say "the other Brian Farrell" because there is a seamlessness in all Brian's enterprises, his writings, lectures or broadcasts, that is a measure of his integrity as a scholar. The same energy, enthusiasm and erudition inform a tutorial to evening students as an interview with Ronald Reagan.

Bernard Brendan Farrell was born in Manchester, but was sent to Ireland by his Irish-born parents in 1939 and, except for short periods of study in England and America, has lived here ever since. Brian probably acquired those essentials for a career in live broadcasting, survival skills and an ability to cope with the unexpected, when, still virtually a young Manchunian, he found himself enrolled in Coláiste Mhuire. After leaving school, a short period as a clerical student convinced him that his vocation was in the world and not the Church, and he started work as a commercial traveller but soon realised that to achieve the things he wanted, further education was essential. In 1955, finding that he would have to wait two years to enter UCD's cyclic evening BA programme, he took the courageous decision to register as a day student, supporting himself by a part-time job, a more unusual situation then than now.

Brian, almost accidentally, chose History as a First Arts subject. My colleagues in the School of History will forgive Brian for describing the fifties as the "golden age of History in UCD", when the Department starred Professors Aubrey Gwynn, Desmond Williams and Dudley Edwards. According to Brian, in an interview with Eileen Battersby, "many of the finest history teachers tend to be remembered as great eccentrics"- few of us would argue with that but would have difficulty with Brian's other proposition: "I don't think I was a good teacher because I didn't have enough eccentricity."

Be that as it may, Brian's love of history secured him a First Honours BA and the Micheál Ó'Cléirigh scholarship. Following his MA, a Smith-Munt Grant enabled him to spend a year in Harvard, which kindled his life-long passion for research and subtly shifted his focus from history to government.

Returning to Dublin, Brian joined the administrative staff of UCD, initially to manage Adult Education which he transformed from a very rigid, under-subscribed programme to a flexible, student-friendly enterprise with 2,000 enrollments. Brian suffered the fate of the successful administrator: he was given more to do. After ten years, he held the post of Assistant to the Bursar and the Registrar, responsible for a wide range of activities. I can recall, in the late fifties, diffidently approaching Mr Farrell for money for a DramSoc production; I was not to know about his murky past in Dramsoc, and was agreeably surprised by his generosity.

In 1965 Brian deserted the lush valleys of administration for the intellectual uplands of the newly formed Politics Department. Conor Martin, Brian and other distinguished colleagues soon developed Politics into a full degree subject and the fledgling Department into the vibrant, enterprising and creative Department it is today.

In 1965, there were few academic writings on Irish politics, not surprisingly as the scars of the Civil War were still suppurating, and personal sensitivities would have inhibited objective analysis of the period. However, the new democratic state was the ideal subject for a student of government. Brian Farrell's first book *Chairman or Chief* explored the developing role of Taoiseach and the evolving relationship between revolutionaries, politicians and public servants. Brian's academic writings, in eight books and more than fifty articles, demonstrate the breadth of his interests and the objectivity of his vision. His topics range in time from the foundation of the nation state to the rainbow coalition and in subject from constitutional law to the role of the media in electoral politics.

Brian's strong attachment to UCD has many strands, as scholar, graduate, administrator and teacher, but he acknowledges a further debt to the university for providing the opportunity to meet Marie Therese Dillon. Brian and Marie Therese became engaged before they graduated and were married while Brian was at Harvard. The completion of his career in UCD in 1994 – the term retirement would be inappropriate – has allowed Brian more time to devote to his other passions: broadcasting and his family, including his seven children and three grandchildren.

Brian's enduring status in Ireland's public and political life is illustrated by the story that at RTE training courses, would-be directors are asked what they would do if, an hour before going on air with a carefully prepared programme on European integration, a major political crisis were to erupt. The correct answer, it transpires, is *Phone Brian Farrell at home*.

*Praehonorabilis Cancellarie, totaque Universitas, Praesento vobis, hunc meum filium quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totique Academiae.*