

OLLSCOIL na hÉIREANN
NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS DELIVERED BY:

DR. MICHAEL B. MURPHY, President, University College Cork on
2 December 2014 in the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, on the
occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Literature, *honoris
causa*, on **PROFESSOR MICHAEL KENNEALLY**

A Sheansailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

In a global landscape, where Irish studies flourish from Japan to New Zealand, from Buenos Aires to St Petersburg, and all points in between, Professor Michael Kenneally of Concordia University, Montreal, is a towering figure. No brief accolade could encompass all or even most of his achievements: a stellar research and publication record, stewardship over many years of the Canadian Association for Irish Studies and of the International Association for the Study of Irish Literatures, service as Honorary Consul General of Ireland in Quebec, as advisor to the Irish Government on education, culture and economics, and as appointee by the Irish Government to the Global Irish Network: the list is long. However, here today, the National University of Ireland wishes especially to acknowledge and to celebrate the achievements of this remarkable scholar in deepening, strengthening and reimagining the discipline of Irish Studies not just in Canada and in North America generally but also in a wider context worldwide.

Dr. Michael Kenneally was born in Youghal, County Cork, Ireland and moved to Canada to pursue his post-secondary education. He studied English as an undergraduate student at the University of British Columbia, moved to Montreal to obtain his M.A. in English at McGill University, and later attained his PhD in English at the University of Toronto. Dr. Kenneally began teaching

Irish literature at Concordia in 1991, before being selected as the inaugural Chair in Canadian Irish Studies in 2003 as well as the Director of the Centre for Canadian Irish Studies.

Professor Kenneally's distinguished career as a researcher and academic has resulted in many significant accomplishments. These include:

- His publication of *Portraying the Self: Sean O'Casey and the Art of Autobiography* (1988) was the first full-length examination of the classic six-volume work of self-representation by the Irish playwright. He has edited various collections of essays such as *Cultural Contexts and Literary Idioms in Contemporary Irish Literature* (1988) and *Poetry in Contemporary Irish Literature*, (1995), both of which were important in helping to establish contemporary Irish writing as a subject of critical analysis separate from the literary traditions and contexts of modernist figures like Joyce, Yeats, and Beckett. Other essay collections edited by Kenneally include *Irish Literature and Culture* (1992), *From 'English Literature' to 'Literatures in English': International Perspectives* (2005) and *Literatures in English: Priorities of Research* (2008).

The dream of founding a pioneering Center for Canadian Irish Studies at Concordia University was translated into reality thanks to years of intense, focused work by Michael and his team in devising partnerships, galvanising alumni support and advancing fundraising especially in collaboration with the Canadian Irish Studies Foundation (a partnership which led to the establishment of a 7m dollar endowment to underpin the Center's growth). The approval last year by the Quebec Government for the establishment of a 42-credit major in Canadian Irish Studies at Concordia, means that the Center can now offer a full range of options including major, minor and certificate qualifications, making it unique in Canada.

To date, over 10,000 students have taken one or more of the courses on offer in the Center; average annual enrolment exceeds 800 students. They can select from a rich menu that include programmes on Irish literature, film studies, drama, politics, cultural geography, history, women's studies, food studies, and the Irish language. This cutting-edge scholarship is delivered by the Concordia team in collaboration with high profile international visiting faculty and luminaries who have included Mary Robinson and Seamus Heaney. Michael's wife, Rhona Richman Kenneally, Associate Professor in the Department of Design and Computation Arts, and a scholar in architecture and literature in her own right, is also a Fellow at the Center. All in all, the student-focused nature of the programmes on offer is enhanced by the generous availability of bursaries, scholarships, internships, international exchange and study initiatives all facilitated by the Center.

The long history of Irish emigration to Quebec is a rich, complex and often difficult one. The Irish community in Quebec and in Canada generally, it could be argued, has by now integrated successfully into the rich multicultural life of that great nation. Although Quebec has one of Canada's largest Irish populations and although 14% of Canada's population is of Irish descent, making the Irish the fourth largest ethnic group in all of Canada, it is nonetheless interesting to note that many of the current students of Canadian Irish studies in Concordia are not, in fact, of Irish origin: the pioneering nature of the courses on offer, with their keen focus not just on analysing what has gone by but on understanding the present and on shaping the future, is what attracts them in such impressive numbers. Michael himself has quoted the famous nineteenth century French traveller, Gustave de Beaumont, who noted that 'Ireland is a small country which raises all the great issues of politics, religion and culture'. In similar vein, Michael contends that a degree in Canadian Irish studies allows students to explore colonialism, nationalism,

war, religion and much more: as he says himself: 'Ireland presents a classic case study of these contentious issues. And its multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach prepares students for the complexity of our globalised world'. Thus, from his vantage point at the School of Canadian Irish Studies on the Boulevard de Maisonneuve Ouest in vibrant, cosmopolitan, downtown Montreal, this proud Corkman weaves the local into the global, using the prism of Irish studies to enable us to understand and to shape the world around us; in that way, teaching students about Ireland's complex and often difficult history can become a means of drawing lessons that can be relevant, evocative and useful to other diverse communities throughout the world.

Professor Kenneally was appointed Honorary Consul General for Ireland in Quebec by the Government of Ireland in 2003. He was chosen as Montreal's Irishman of the Year in 1997 for his role in helping to establish Canadian Irish Studies at Concordia and he has served as President of the Canadian Association for Irish Studies, President of Montreal's St. Patrick's Society and Chair of the International Association for the study of Irish Literatures.

For this, it is fitting that the National University of Ireland should salute Dr Michael Kenneally here today by bestowing on him the award of an Honorary Doctorate.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Presento vobis hunc meum filium, quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina, habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, *honoris causa*, ad gradum Doctoratus in Litteris, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo, totique Academiae.