

LES CENDRES D'ANGELA

de Alan PARKER

FICHE TECHNIQUE

Titre original : Angela's ashes

Pays : USA / GB

Durée (running time) : 2h28

Année (year) : 1999

Genre : Drame

Scénario (screenplay) : Alan PARKER, Laura JONES based on Frank McCOURT 1997 Pulitzer prize-winning novel

Directeur de la photographie : Michael SERESIN

Décors : Geoffrey KIRKLAND

Montage : Gerry HAMBLING

Musique (music) : John WILLIAMS

Coproduction : David Brown Productions / Dirty Hands Productions / Scott Rudin Productions / Universal International Pictures

Distribution : United International Pictures

Interprètes (cast) : Emily WATSON (Angela McCourt), Robert CARLYLE (Malachy McCourt Sr), Joe BREEN (Frank McCourt enfant), Ciaran OWENS (Frank McCourt adolescent), Michael LEGGE (Frank McCourt jeune homme), Shane Murray CORCORAN (Malachy McCourt Jr enfant), Devon MURRAY (Malachy McCourt Jr adolescent), Peter HALPIN (Malachy McCourt Jr jeune homme), Ronnie MASTERSON (Grand-mère Sheehan)

Sortie : 22 mars 2000

SYNOPSIS

In 1935, when it is more common for Irish families to leave their famine-stricken country for America, the impoverished McCourt family do the reverse. Following the sudden death of her 7-week-old daughter, Angela and her unemployable, alcoholic husband, Malachy Sr. set sail from New York Harbor to Cork with their 4 children – Frank, Malachy Jr. and twins Eugene and Oliver – to return to the land which a mystified young Frank had only heard of as "where there was no work and people were dying of the starvation and the damp."

A cold greeting awaits them in Limerick by Angela's Catholic family. Her mother, sister Aggie and brother Pat have never accepted Angela's marriage to a Protestant from Belfast. Grandma lends them some money for a small place on Windmill Street, and any hope of their luck changing soon disappears with Dad not being able to find employment and Oliver dying from malnourishment and the damp. Within months, Eugene dies from the same conditions, and Dad's spirits sink lower and lower – he not only drowns his sorrows in a pint of stout he cannot afford but shamelessly uses his son's coffin as a table in the pub.

Angela relentlessly ploughs on for the sake of her children. She pleads with the charitable St. Vincent de Paul Society to provide them with furniture and a new mattress that is not contaminated by "the consumption", and as she is cross-questioned about her husband's job prospects, Frank looks on at her enduring such humiliation to protect and care for her family.

A move to Roden Lane raises hopes of living in a better place, but as always, they are soon dashed. The lavatory for the entire street is outside their front door, and the ground floor, nicknamed "Ireland," is so wet the family can only live on the top floor, nicknamed "Italy," for most of the year. In Roden Lane, Angela gives birth to Michael.

Frank and Malachy attend Leamy's National School and are subjected to teasing by the other boys. Frank is introduced to the leather strap on his first day following a playground fight, and they are both taunted further for wearing shoes badly repaired by Dad with a bicycle tire.

Dad eventually gets a job at the Limerick Cement Factory. It lasts one day as he wastes his pay at the pub, comes home drunk and oversleeps the next day. Frank and Malachy, who witness his drunken homecoming, are beginning to tire of his irresponsible behavior.

Great anticipation surrounds Frank's First Communion. At school, the boys are taught how to receive communion, with strips of the 'Limerick Leader' newspaper acting as hosts, and making the collection (when communion boys collect money from neighbors) means a trip to the Lyric Cinema to see a Cagney movie with the proceeds. On the big day, a large breakfast at Grandma's prompts Frank to bring everything up, including his First Communion, causing Grandma to insist they return to the church to consult with the priest on her "having God in her backyard and what shall she do?" By now, Frank is too late to make the collection but slips into the Lyric with the help of his friend Mikey Molloy, who pretends to have a fit, diverting the attention of the ticket man.

With the arrival of another boy, Alphie, comes five pounds from Dad's family. Dad wastes no time in making a trip to the pub with the money. Mam dispatches Frank to the pub to tell the world that Dad is drinking the money for the new baby. Upon seeing his father drunkenly and pathetically singing to himself, Frank cannot bring himself to confront him, remembering all the nice times he has had with his Dad listening to his stories.

A stint in the hospital with typhoid brings Frank some unexpected new pleasures. Hot baths, a bed without fleas, his own lavatory and reading, particularly Shakespeare. He pays for this extended holiday by losing several months in school and returns to find himself in the same class as Malachy, though he is restored to his original class when he impresses the teachers with an essay entitled "Jesus and the Weather."

Fresh optimism comes along with Dad getting a job in England. Angela and her family are left on their own with the promise of a weekly telegram with a postal money order. Nothing arrives and Angela is forced to beg for food outside a priest's door. Frank is now old enough to seek work, but his first job as a coal-boy is short-lived as he gets the worst case of conjunctivitis from the coal dust the doctor has ever seen.

Christmas comes with promise of Dad's return. Consistent in his unreliability, Dad turns up a day later than expected, empty-handed and bruised from a brawl. The family makes do with a sheep's head for their Christmas dinner, and Dad departs the following day, this time forever.

Telegrams arrive sporadically, but not enough to stop Angela having to beg. Frank begins to focus on America for his better future, "where no one has bad teeth and everyone has a lavatory." Things take a further downward turn when the McCourts are evicted, Grandma dies and the family has to move in with their abusive cousin, Laman Griffin, who uses them all as slaves and expects sexual favors from Angela. Frank's schooldays end and he can take no more of Laman's behavior, fearful he will kill him if he stays, so he moves in with Uncle Pat.

Frank gets a job as a telegram boy and proudly goes to work in clothes kindly bought for him by Aunt Aggie. His new job leads him to the home of Theresa Carmody, a beautiful girl who has consumption, and he falls in love. Sadly, Theresa dies and Frank is wracked with guilt, convinced that her death is a punishment from God for their sexual acts.

A stroke of luck leads Frank to Mrs. Finucane, the local moneylender. She gives him extra money to write threatening letters to her debtors, an unpleasant job, but he is driven by his desire to get to America. One day, he arrives at Mrs. Finucane's home to find her dead and does not hesitate in taking enough money for his passage to New York and the ledger containing the records of her debtors, which he throws into the River Shannon.

When he returns from the pub one night in a drunken state and hits his mother, he is frightened that he could end up like his father and knows that if he stays in Ireland this may happen. His family are sorry to see Frank leave, but there is now no turning back. He departs for New York, and when the Statue of Liberty comes into sight, he knows he has done the right thing and that he is home again.

AUTOUR DU FILM

Paramount Pictures and Universal Pictures International present "Angela's Ashes," a David Brown/Scott Rudin/Dirty Hands production. Directed by Alan Parker, the film stars Emily Watson and Robert Carlyle. The film is executive produced by Adam Schroeder and Eric Steel. The line producer is David Wimbury. Based on the book by Frank McCourt, the screenplay is by Laura Jones and Alan Parker. Scott Rudin, David Brown and Alan Parker serve as producers. Paramount Pictures is part of the entertainment operations of Viacom Inc.

Cast:

- Emily Watson as Angela McCourt

Frank's "Mam" is not overbearing or complaining, despite her hard life, but humorous and loving. As Angela deals with her husband's alcoholism, the deaths of three of her children, and the necessity of begging for handouts from aid agencies, her expectations disintegrate. However, despite the painful thwarting of her own hopes, Angela thinks not of herself and her plight, but of her children and their welfare.

- Robert Carlisle as Dad/Malachy McCourt

Malachy is an alcoholic who spends his wages and dole money on drink while his children starve. However, McCourt's treatment of his father remains masterfully even-handed. Readers are shown not only the despair inflicted on the family by Malachy's drinking, but the obvious love between Malachy and his sons.

PISTES PÉDAGOGIQUES (CLASSROOM WORK – LYCEE)

Pre-viewing activities:

- Check what information students have on Ireland through a quiz.
- Give the main landmarks in Irish history:
 - see the timeline on the official web site
 - see *Anglais Lycée* by Alex Taylor
 - see p.162 in *Broad Ways 1^{ères}* sections L-ES-S (2002)
- Work on words related to poverty.

Homework:

On a map of Ireland, locate where Limerick is.

Classroom activities:

- A quiz about the movie:
 - 1/ Why does Angela's family initially view Frank's father with suspicion?
 - (A) The Sheehans are wary of Malachy's northern ways and "odd" manner.
 - (B) They think Malachy abuses Angela and is violent towards his children.
 - (C) Because Malachy insults them at every opportunity.
 - (D) It is apparent that Malachy cheats on his wife.
 - 2/ When he comes home drunk, what does Malachy tell his sons they must do?
 - (A) Show respect to their mother.
 - (B) Go out and earn money to pay for his drinking habit.
 - (C) Pray to the Virgin Mary.
 - (D) Die for Ireland.
 - 3/ What image strikes Frank when he finds his father in the pub on the day of Eugene's funeral?
 - (A) The sight of Malachy's pint of black Guinness resting on Eugene's white coffin.
 - (B) The ashen face of his father drinking his pint.
 - (C) The sight of his mother sobbing outside as his father drinks away the money for the burial.
 - (D) The sight of the barman crying in sympathy over Malachy's bereavement.

- 4/ Why does Angela think Frank is rejected from becoming an altar boy?
- (A) She puts it down to class distinction and social prejudice.
 - (B) She insists that Frank did not know enough Latin.
 - (C) She thinks Frank is too ugly.
 - (D) She thinks Malachy's reputation as an alcoholic has blighted Frank's prospects.
- 5/ What elements of his stay in hospital does Frank enjoy?
- (A) The wonderful view from the window.
 - (B) The fact that all the nurses treat him with respect.
 - (C) The opportunity to sleep all day and discuss his problems with Seamus.
 - (D) The clean sheets, good food and books.
- 6/ Why does Frank find it difficult to condemn his father for his drinking?
- (A) Frank remembers the cosy mornings he spends with his father in front of the fire.
 - (B) Frank realises that his mother can always beg for more money at the St Vincent de Paul Society.
 - (C) Malachy gives Frank a "Friday penny" every week, which buys Frank's silence.
 - (D) Frank understands that his father needs to drown his sorrows over the death of Oliver, Eugene and Margaret.
- 7/ What is Frank father's first and only Christmas present to his family?
- (A) New boots and coats for his sons.
 - (B) A book of Irish folktales.
 - (C) A turkey for their Christmas dinner.
 - (D) A half-eaten box of chocolates.
- 8/ Why are the McCourts evicted from their home in Roden lane?
- (A) For insulting the rent-collector.
 - (B) For owing 4 weeks' worth of rent and destroying an internal wall.
 - (C) For not cleaning the public lavatory next to their home.
 - (D) For trying to blackmail their landlord.
- 9/ Why does the protagonist leave Laman Griffin's house to stay with Ab Sheehan?
- (A) He is repelled by Laman's poor standards of hygiene.
 - (B) Angela throws Frank out of the house for being disrespectful.
 - (C) Frank is angry about being cheated out of the use of Laman's bicycle. Secretly, he is also disgusted by the fact that Laman is having sex with his mother.
 - (D) Michael tells Frank that Laman is stealing money from Angela.
- 10/ What does Frank do with Mrs Finucane's ledger of debts after his employer dies?
- (A) He hands it over to the police.
 - (B) He throws it in the trash.
 - (C) He takes it with him to America as a personal discouragement to becoming greedy.
 - (D) He throws it into the River Shannon.
- 11/ What does Frank observe on his last night in Limerick?
- (A) A lunar eclipse.
 - (B) A shooting star.
 - (C) A massive firework display celebrating his departure.
 - (D) A UFO.
- 12/ To what does Frank compare his arrival in New York?
- (A) A Shakespearean drama.
 - (B) A movie.
 - (C) An opera.
 - (D) A dream.

- Study Questions:
 - Literary study questions:
 1. Why does Frank rarely blame his father for the suffering Malachy's drinking inflicts upon his family? How does this lack of censure affect the moral tone of the movie?
 2. What role do women play in the movie, and is it fair to describe their characterization as stereotypical?
 3. What is Frank's relationship to Catholicism, and does this relationship change as the movie progresses?
 4. In what ways does the author use the protagonist's infancy in New York to foreshadow his experiences in Limerick?
 5. What role do Frank's and his friends' escapades play in establishing a sense of fun and vitality within the movie?
 6. Is it McCourt's intention for his readers to sympathize with his experiences, or to learn something from the way in which he recounts them?
 7. Does Frank's relationship to Ireland change during his childhood, and how does this affect his subsequent return to the United States?

- Study questions about Irish society and history:

8. Describe the Great Depression in Ireland as it is shown in the movie.
9. Describe the Irish educational system in the 1930s. Compare it with the French educational system nowadays.
10. Religion in Ireland: what do you learn in the movie about Irish piety and about antagonism between Catholics and Protestants?
11. Describe family values in Ireland.

- An interview with Frank McCourt about teaching
See p.39 in *Tracks Plus 1^{ères} séries technologiques* (2002).

- Studies of extracts from the novel *Angela's Ashes*
 - See p.101 in *Tracks Plus 1^{ères} séries technologiques* (2002): "A feast" (about hunger / starvation in Ireland in the 1930s)
 - See p. 38-40 in *XL excel 1^{ères}* (2002): "your mind is a palace" (a history lesson at school about the battle of Kinsale between the English and the Irish in 1601)

- Enlarging the study

- Study of an extract from the novel *Tis*, the continuation of Frank's story

See p.72-73 in *Voices 2^{ndes}* (2001): Frank's life in America (the discovery of Jazz music).

- Study of the wave of expatriated Irish who are returning to their homeland

See an article from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (June 25, 2000) p.105 in *Tracks Plus 1^{ères} séries technologiques* (2002).

It is possible to compare why McCourt's family came back to Ireland in the 1930s and why some Irish Americans do so now.

- Compare Irish/British and American english with the help of an extract from '*Tis*'

See p.85 in *Voices 2^{ndes}* (2001): Frank McCourt gives examples of differences between Irish/British and American english (trousers / pants...)

TESTS

- See p. 31-33 in *ABC BAC 2002 sujets non corrigés Anglais LV1 – LV2*
 - sujet 6 Inde, avril 2001, série L / LV1
 - sujet 45 National, septembre 1999, série L / LV2
- See p.22-24 in *Les sujets Nathan 99 BAC non corrigés Anglais LV1 – LV2*
 - sujet 3 Amérique du Nord, juin 1998, série L