

Angela's Ashes

US / UK : 1999 : dir. Alan Parker : Universal / Paramount / Dirty Hands : 140 min
 prod: David Brown, Scott Rudin & Alan Parker : scr: Laura Jones & Alan Parker
 : dir.ph.: Michael Seresin

[Joe Breen](#)
 Emily Watson; Robert Carlyle

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The bouquet of distant poverty – Alan Parker's evocation of Irish destitution in the 1930s isn't in the least harrowing to witness, and perhaps it ought to have been, but is richly-detailed and rewarding to watch for all that.

Videocassette - **Universal VHS 906 7853** – sleeve notes:

“Critically acclaimed box office smash based on the No. 1 best selling book, **"ANGELA'S ASHES"** tells a powerful, autobiographical story of one boy's upbringing in the 1930s. Born in Brooklyn to recent Irish immigrants, Frank grew up in Limerick after his parents (Robert Carlyle and Emily Watson) returned to Ireland disillusioned with future prospects in America. Based on Frank McCourt's 1997 Pulitzer Prize-winning novel of the same name. The film combines stories of hunger, poverty and social deprivation with laughter, kindness and the warmth of the human spirit.”

“Magnificent. A masterly, immensely impressive movie.” – **Daily Star**

“One of the year's most beautifully crafted films” – **Heat magazine**

“The film is beautifully shot... and the performances are uniformly excellent.”
– **Empire**

“The film is shot through with great humanity and a rich sense of humour.” – **Irish Times**

Indeterminate website:

“Out of the 15,000 young actors who auditioned for the three ages of Frank and his friends, 8-year old JOE BREEN won the role of Young Frank, having never acted before. A farmer's son from County Wexford, Joe responded to a casting ad in The Irish Times and was singled out for the role by Alan Parker from the thousands who turned up to audition.”

Bijou's Boy Movie Retreat note:

“Joe is a farmer's son who had never acted before he auditioned for the role of the young Frank McCourt in *Angelas Ashes*.”

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

If the source novel were not autobiographical, critics might say it was larded with well-worn clichés about the indolent Irish – drunken workshy father, brutal Catholic schools and all. Author Frank McCourt and director Alan Parker employ the same distancing device of the ironic adult narrative to soften the impact of what is shown to us. Three of Frank's five siblings die in infancy. Deep-seated Limerick prejudice toward his father, who's "from the North", prevent him ever finding work, and Frank's mother is forced to beg assistance from family and church. The hovel they occupy adjoins the single common outdoor toilet for the whole street, and the ground floor is under an inch of water throughout the winter.

If this had been a Russian or Swedish film, no pity would be shown to the audience, and the bleak misery of poverty would cut us to the bone. Parker's film is neither uncomfortable nor depressing to watch (if a trifle over-long), and begs the question whether such distancing devices promote false nostalgia for a day safely distant from our centrally-heated double-glazed contemporary existence. The same technique of the ironic adult voice-over has been worked to death by American TV in thickly nostalgic series like **"The Wonder Years"** and **"Boy Meets World"**, both of which a great hit with audiences, and wholly dishonest in their "reconstruction" of the sensibilities and social manners of the 1960s.

"ANGELA'S ASHES" begs immediate comparison with **"THE BUTCHER BOY"**, made just X years before it, and also recounting a "difficult" rural Irish boyhood, this time in the 1960s. Where the central character of **"THE BUTCHER BOY"**, who ultimately hacks a neighbour to death and is committed to an asylum, defies our sympathy and compassion through his own

belligerent self-adulation, Parker's central character is far more engaging and human. Frank is no diamond in the dirt, for all his mysterious attachment to Shakespeare, and he engineers his own escape from the Limerick slums not by brilliance or good fortune, but by applying his literary gifts to penning threatening letters for the neighbourhood moneylender.

Finally, what the devil does that title mean? What ashes? Angela

No further information currently available

See also "**BADKONAK-E SEFID**" and "**BASHU**" - both recent Iranian films, and subject index under **ARAB WORLD / MIDDLE EAST**.