

# **BOOK REVIEW OF *ANGELA'S ASHES* NOVEL**

***BY FRANK MC COURT***

**Bimoseno Budi Wibowo**

**English Department, Faculty of Humanity, Diponegoro University**

## **Abstract**

This book review is written to find the strength and the weakness in *Angela's Ashes* which is written by Frank Mc Court. "The Book Review of *Angela's Ashes*" is focusing on the content of the novel finding the strength and the weakness. The strengths are theme, character setting, and moral value, the weakness is the end of the story. The plot conveys how the author describes all situations in this novel clearly and the main character shares readers about how to face the world and he shares lot of values in his life as poor boy. The weakness is the end of the story. Mc Court does not give explanation about how is the novel continuity. This novel conveys about how to be a person that always keeping strong for this life and there are so many moral values in this novel.

*Key Words; Book Review Strengths, Weakness, Angela's Ashes, Plot, Main Character, and The*

## **Intoduction**

The writer analyzed novel by its content in this paper. Novel is one of literary works that tells about the story. There are many novels with various genres in the world and people who love reading a book will always find out their favorite novel. There are some interpretations about definition of the novel. Sumardjo (1998: 29)

says that novel is a story with the prose form in long shape, this long shape means the story including the complex plot, many character and various setting.

In this paper the writer analyzed the novel entitled *Angela's Ashes*. The novel is based on autobiography. It describes how Frank Mc Court struggle to survive in his

childhood life. The author was thinking about how to make a very attractive story. The story of the book is about a child who was born in Ireland and gets some discrimination in his life. The condition of Frank McCourt was not like an ordinary people, he is different from another. He lived in poverty without any respect in his circumstances. He had to survive with learning in the school and find a job at the same time. He struggled not only for himself but also for his family.

### **Purpose of the Writing**

The following are the purposes of this project:

1. To find out the strength and weakness of the novel.
2. To get the message in the novel.

### **Scope of the Writing**

In this paper, the writer analyzed the novel entitled *Angela's Ashes* by its intrinsic elements in order to examine the content and then make a review of the book. A review of the book consists of analysis of intrinsic elements and also strength and weakness of the novel. The intrinsic elements analyzed by the writer are characters, theme, and setting. It includes in the review of the book with explanation about strength and weakness of the novel. This final project discover *Angela's Ashes* story by the contextual analysis in the form of review to explain the novel to the reader.

### **The Summary of The Novel**

The story begins when the narrator and also the author of the book, Frank McCourt, describes how his parents meet in Brooklyn, New York. After Frank's mother, Angela McCourt, becomes pregnant, she marries to Malachy, the father of Frank McCourt. Angela struggles to feed her

family, while Malachy spends all of his wages on alcohol instead of giving it to his family. Mc Court's family then decide to return to Ireland. More troubles appear when Mc Courts family live in Ireland, Angela got a miscarriage and makes Frank's two younger brothers, Oliver and Eugene Mc Court gone, and Malachy continues to carry away the family's money to drink.

Frank's childhood is described as a time of great deprivation of a beautiful childhood, but it includes good humor and wild adventure as well. Disaster comes when the first floor of the house floods during the winter, Angela and Malachy decide to bring the family up to the second floor and leave the cold damp room of the first floor, which they call "Ireland" and move to the warmer, cozy second floor, which they call "Italy". Although Malachy's alcoholism use all of the money for food, he earns Frank's love and affection by entertaining him with telling stories about

Irish heroes and the people who live on their land before.

Over the course of living in a few years in Ireland, Angela gives birth to her two sons, Michael and Alphonsus. Alphonsus is called "Alphie" as a character in the story. They are two brothers of Frank. As Frank grows older the story increasingly focuses on his exploitation at school. When Frank turns ten, he is confirmed (Confirmation is a ritual that makes one an official Christian or Catholic). Right after his confirmation, Frank falls ill with typhoid fever and he has to stay in the hospital for a month. There, Frank gets his first introduction to Shakespeare from Seamus. Frank finds comfort in stories of all kinds, from Shakespeare to movies to newspapers. By the time he returns to school, his love for language is obvious. In particular, Frank's talent for storytelling gets him noticed by his teacher.

With the fight during World War II, many fathers in Limerick went to England to find work and send money back to their families. Eventually, Malachy goes as well, but he fails to send money to his home and family. Then, Frank begins to work for Mr. Hannon. This is the first in a series of jobs. Frank continues and goes on to work for Mr. Timoney, Uncle Ab, the post office, Mrs. Finucane, and Mr. McCaffrey. Frank enjoys the feeling of his responsibility that he gets from working, and his dreams of saving enough to provide his family with food and clothes force him.

The Mc Court family get evicted from their house and had to move in with Angela's cousin Laman. There, Angela begins sleeping with Laman, an incident that makes Frank increasingly uncomfortable and angry with her. Frank also begins to feel guilty about his own sexual feelings. The priest strict orders to him against masturbation make Frank feel guilty when

he masturbates and he goes to church to mercy.

While working as a messenger boy, Frank begins a sexual relationship with his customer, Theresa Carmody, a girl who suddenly dies of consumption and leaving Frank. It makes Frank feels heartbroken. Frank then saves enough money to get to New York. On his first night there, he attends a party and sleeps with an American woman. Though he is sad to leaving behind Ireland and all of his family, Frank always has great expectations for the future.

### **Review of The Novel**

*Angela's Ashes*, one of Frank Mc Court's books which was published in 1996 and won the Pulitzer Prize for Biography or Autobiography in 1997 discussed in this project. This novel represents the life goal in a form of memoir of Frank Mc Court as the narrator and protagonist in the novel who was born in a poverty and low dignity. The

novel has some strengths and also weaknesses. It can be found at the theme, character, and setting of the novel. The book also has some moral values or messages. Therefore, the review which includes the strength and the weakness of the book is needed, because it can be useful for the readers to learn the content of the book and appraise it.

## **The Strengths of The Novel**

### **Theme**

There are many intrinsic aspects in the literature such as figurative language, setting, theme, and plot. In this paper, the writer analyzed *Angela's Ashes* novel by its intrinsic aspect to get the strength of the story. The writer decided to use a theme as the intrinsic aspect to analyze the story because theme becomes the main strength in the novel.

Theme is "a resource enabling the ideational construction of 'knowledge' organized into instantial ideational systems" (Matthiessen, 1995:20)

Theme is a meaning of story which especially explains a big part of its elements in the simple way. It is more or less synonymous the central idea and central purpose. Stanton and Kenny (Nurgiyantoro, 1965: 70)

*Angela's Ashes* novel has some lessons that can be learned by the reader from its theme. The most interesting theme in the novel is about living in a poor family. Mc Court's family have to struggle to fulfill their human needs in a difficult situation. There are many statements in the novel describing how Mc Court's family live in a bad situation.

There are many quotations in the novel related to human life especially in a childhood experience. It becomes the strength of the story that will be interesting for readers.

When I look back on my childhood I wonder how I survived at all. It was, of course, a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while. Worse than the ordinary miserable childhood is the miserable Irish childhood, and worse yet is the miserable Irish

Catholic childhood (Mc Court, 1996: 11).

According to this statement, Frank Mc Court tells how his childhood is. Like the other Irish childhood, Mc Court's childhood is the worse and miserable childhood. Frank Mc Court's feeling as an Irish Catholic childhood is even worst and it is the most miserable childhood.

### Character

It is another intrinsic elements used by the writer to analyze the story called character. Character is an intrinsic element of the literary work. It is appear in the story and delivered by each player. There are two kinds of character in the story, protagonist and antagonist character.

Abram (1981: 76) states that Character is people who are appeared in a narrative prose or novel and it is interpreted by the readers as a person who has moral quality and certain tendency such as being expressed in what they say and what they do.

The second strength of *Angela's Ashes* novel is in the character. Each

character has a different attitude and behavior that make the novel interesting.

There are three characters that will be analyze, They are Frank Mc Court, Angela Mc Court, and Malachy Mc Court.

The master says it's a glorious thing to die for the Faith and Dad says it's a glorious thing to die for Ireland and I wonder if there's anyone in the world who would like us to live. My brothers are dead and my sister is dead and I wonder if they died for Ireland or the Faith. Dad says they were too young to die for anything. Mam says it was disease and starvation and him never having a job. Dad says, Och, Angela, puts on his cap and goes for a long walk (Mc Court, 1996: 35)

The master refers to Frank's teacher in school. On the above quotation, McCourt points out about grieving of someone's death. When adults tell children to look forward to death, children will lose their ambition and omit their motivation. This quotation is the real conversation between characters, which reveals Frank's awareness of conflict between his parents. Angela feels

that Malachy has made a mistake. She blames that the death of her children because of Malachy's inability to hold his job and give money to his family. Malachy's behavior appeared in this quotation, he says "och" in response to difficult situation, and then he goes out to escape from the conflict rather than try to resolve it.

### **Frank Mc Court**

Frank is the son of Angela and also the man who becomes narrator of this novel. Although he and his family live in poverty and difficulty but he still has a big dream to be successful and rich. He never think that his poor family is the reason for not to have a bright future. Frank never gives up with the situation in his life. He is decided to leave from his school at age fourteen in order to get a job.

"You might be poor, your shoes might be broken, but your mind is a palace" (Mc Court, 1996: 23). One of Frank's

famous quotations describes his dream that always lives in his mind to be a successful person in the future. He will not stop dreaming in his life and fight for his family. Frank knows that he is poor and his broken shoes cannot be replaced with the new one. However, he has to change the situation and survive to be more valuable in a society.

I know when Dad does the bad thing. I know when he drinks the dole money and Mam is desperate and has to beg at the St Vincent de Paul Society and ask for credit at Hathleen O'Connell's shop but I don't want to back away from him and run to Mam. How can I do that when I'm up with him early every morning with the whole world asleep? (Mc Court, 1996: 59)

He always loves his parents even when he knows that his father does the bad thing and takes the dole money to drink. Frank always remember when his father reminder him and Malachy to struggle for their country. His father also order Frank and his brother to pray for her left sister.

You'll die for Ireland, won't you guys?  
We will, Dad

And we will meet your little sister in heaven, won't we, boys?

We will, Dad (Mc Court, 1996: 15)

The fact of the situation that his mother has to beg for the money to feed her children while his father cannot find a job does not make him hate his father. He still believes there are many things that his father does better than other people.

### **Angela Mc Court**

Despite living in constant poverty with her family, a criminal and irresponsible husband, and also the death of three of her children, Angela is still a loving mother who always maintains her sense of humor. Angela has to maintain her dignity and class in society to serve her children and husband and she will never lower her expectations for her sons. She raises them to be well-behaved, diligent, kind, and hardworking person.

You never know when you might come home and find Mam sitting by the fire chatting with a woman and a child, strangers.

Always a woman and child. Mam finds them wandering the streets and if they ask, Could you spare a few pennies, miss? her heart breaks. She never has money so she invites them home for tea and a bit of fried bread and if it's a bad night she'll let them sleep by the fire on a pile of rags in the corner. The bread she gives them always means less for us and if we complain she says there are always people worse off and we can surely spare a little from what we have. (Mc Court, 1996: 257)

This is the quotation from Angela that shows her humility and simplicity in life. Angela Mc Court is the main character in the *Angela's Ashes* novel. She plays as the protagonist in the story and the main focus in the novel.

According to Altenberd and Lewis (1966: 59) protagonist is a character who is admired by the readers, which always called as a hero because he always does ideal role and follows the rules and value in the society

Angela is described as the most patient person in Mc Court's family. She has a touchable heart when she realizes that many women and children did not have any money and house out there. Angela will give



anything she has and believes that her family is still fortunate compared to them.

### **Malachy Mc Court**

In some ways, Frank's father can be considered the antagonist in *Angela's Ashes*, because his actions keep the McCourts destitute. Luxemburg (1992: 145) states that antagonist is the opposite character of protagonist either physically and psychologically.

While his family suffers from crippling hunger, and his children contract diseases caused by weakness and malnutrition, Malachy drinks excessively and comes home roaring that his sons must be ready to die for Ireland.

He eats half a potato with the skin on and puts the other half back in the pot. He eats a small slice of the pig's cheek and a leaf of cabbage and leaves the rest on his plate for Malachy and me. He makes more tea and we have that with bread and jam so that no one can say we didn't have a sweet on Christmas Day. (Mc Court, 1996: 102)

In above quotation, he refers to Malachy Mc Court as father of Frank Mc Court and Malachy refers to Malachy as brother of Frank Mc Court. This is why Frank Mc Court has a big respect for his father. He knows that his father has a bad behavior but on the other side Malachy Mc Court actually loves his children and always sacrifices his happiness for them. Malachy Mc Court's action of taking the dole money for drink does not mean that he abandons his children and family. His bad behavior is the result of depression of poverty and the loss of his children.

Dad wants to go to another place for a pint but Uncle Pa says he has no more money. Dad says he'll tell everyone his sorrows and they'll give him pints. Uncle Pa says that's a disgraceful thing to do and Dad cries on his shoulder. You're a good friend, he tells Uncle Pa. He cries again till Uncle Pa pats him on the back. It's terrible, terrible, says Uncle Pa, but you'll get over this in time. Dad straightens up and looks at him. Never, he says. Never. (Mc Court, 1996: 131)

Uncle Pa is Frank's uncle and really cares of Mc Court's family. He always

encourages Frank and Malachy to find a job and be a successful person in the future. Malachy Mc Court often asks for help to Uncle Pa for the money but Uncle Pa wants him to find a job by himself and earns money for his family.

### **Setting**

*In the story, setting has an important role to support the atmosphere. It can make the reader vicarious the accident in the story. Setting refers to geographical location of the story, time period, daily lifestyle of the characters and climate of the story. Rene and Austin (1982: 131)*

*Angela's Ashes* starts in Brooklyn, New York, where Angela and Malachy Mc Court met at the early of 1990's. They have four children after their marriage and then came back to Limerick, Ireland in 1934. Their last view of New York is the Statue of Liberty. Frank's life story in the novel begins in New York, but most of the story in the novel

takes place in Limerick, Angela's hometown. Limerick town plays such a large part in Frank's memoir as the setting in the story. Frank's house in Limerick is narrow with rickety houses, St. Vincent De Paul charity, many of churches, and also pubs. There are many unemployed man, poor families struggling for the money, and boys playing in the street with ragged clothes. The River Shannon describes as one most famous place in Limerick. The story ends with Frank Mc Court's farewell with his family to go to New York and find a job.

### **Moral Value**

The main strength of *Angela's Ashes* book is in the moral value of the story. Some quotations in the novel describe the messages that Mc Court wants to say. The messages in the novel come not only come from Frank but also from another character. As an author and also the main character in the story, Frank tells his childhood experience and gives his opinion about his

life. He is retelling his life story in his own way. "It's lovely to know that the world can't interfere with the inside of your head." (Mc Court, 1996: 56) One of Frank's famous quotation that describes his opinion and messages about life.

Angela Mc Court also has an important role in the novel to deliver a moral value. The word "Ashes" in the title of the novel describes how Angela has to live in the difficult situation. Even she loses her four children and her husband cannot support the family with the job, she does not want to give up for her life. It means people never get into a trouble if they still believe in themselves.

### **The Weakness of *Angela's Ashes* by Frank Mc Court**

#### **End of the Story**

Besides its strength, there is also weakness in the *Angela's Ashes* story. The only one weakness is at the ending of the story. In the

last chapter of the novel, Frank Mc Court tells about parting with his parents and also his brother, Malachy. Frank leaves Limerick to go to America and find a job in New York. He has a dream to be a success person in the future and he will get it in New York. His father and mother give him farewell and expectation to get a better life in America. Frank promises to return after he has enough money and bring good news in Limerick someday.

The author as Frank Mc Court also tells what the expectation in the future of Frank. One thing that can be the weakness in the story is the continuance in Frank's life after going to New York. In *Angela's Ashes* novel, ending of the story is still not clear whether it will be happy ending or sad.

I stand on the deck with the Wireless Officer looking at the lights of America twinkling. He says, My God, that was a lovely night, Frank. Isn't this a great country altogether?

XIX

'Tis, (Mc Court, 1996: 368)

In above quotation there is a conversation between Frank Mc Court and Tim Boyle. It is the last part of the story in the novel. Word “Tis,” below chapter XIX refers to the next novel with the title *Tis: A Memoir* which continuing *Angela’s Ashes* novel.

### Conclusion

*Angela’s Ashes* is a novel written by Frank Mc Court. Frank Mc Court is a famous American writer and teacher. He writes many books and one of which is *Angela’s Ashes*. **The novel was** written and published in 1996. *Angela’s Ashes* novel has some strengths that come from the themes, the characters, the setting, and the moral value.

Besides, it is a really good and valuable novel. The novel has a strong moral value that can be learned by the reader because it talks about human life and family. The novel can inspire many people to understand about

love to the family no matter how the condition is. This novel also has many quotations that mean a lot. Sometimes people will face a bad and unexpected situation in life but they have to remember that there is always a way to go through it.

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