

THURSDAY, JANUARY 13, 2000

Parker 'fed up' with nation of begrudgers

By SENAN MOLONY

ALAN Parker is getting sick of people raking over the ashes. The director of the keenly-awaited movie version of Frank McCourt's childhood memoir, *Angela's Ashes*, is fed up to the back teeth of nit-pickers and ash-sifters with their catalogues of alleged inaccuracies.

"It is a storm in a tea cup," the celebrated British film-maker declared in Dublin last night at the Irish premiere of the controversial film.

"You're obsessed in this country with dissecting anything that has any success.

"Accuracy is a question that only Frank can answer. But it is a book, a childhood memoir, an impression. This author has won a Pulitzer prize and produced probably one of the best pieces of writing in the last 30 years.

"But instead of celebrating that achievement, you give credibility to some disc jockey down in Limerick who doesn't like it. I am amazed that you get so obsessed over here. The criticisms are so irrelevant it's not true.

WORK OF ART

"I happen to think it is very authentic. But you have to look at it as the work of art it is. And it is a work written by a very brilliant creative person."

Devastatingly, the director added: "I had the same complaints when I made a movie about Eva Peron (*Evita*) provoked riots in Argentina in 1996, and when I went to Mississippi (*Mississippi Burning*, 1988, about race murders). This movie is to do with Frank McCourt of Limerick!"

Joining Parker yesterday was actress Emily Watson who plays the Angela of the title, Frank's long-suffering mother, in a portrayal of sustained quality. When she read the script, she said, she realised she would be playing someone who in reality was probably clinically depressed for much of her life.

"*Angela* is a complicated and subtle film. The dialogue reads like poetry. For any English girl to be able to speak that way through the lines of the character was something very special for me. I really enjoyed it."

The movie will open in 700 cinemas across the US from next month in its first push for the Oscars, for which it will technically qualify with a late run. Paramount will give the film serious backing, but Parker was making no predictions about golden statuettes or even gilt-edged nominations.

"We concentrated on making the film. Paramount have been supportive and we're hoping to do well with it," said Mr Parker.

An undoubted star of both the movie and yesterday's meet-the-press was Joe Breen, the nine-year-old farmer's son, who



● *Angela's* heroes . . . Director Alan Parker and actress Emily Watson (*Angela*) are quizzed before the premier. Below are Ciaran Owens, Cavan, Joe Breen of Wexford and Michael Legge from Newry who play McCourt on screen Pictures: Reuters and K O'Halloran

wore a Wexford GAA jersey as he hammed it up for journalists and cameras.

Joe is an old hand at the game by now, having already appeared on Letterman show in the US. "He asked me was I married," said Joe of the US chat show host.

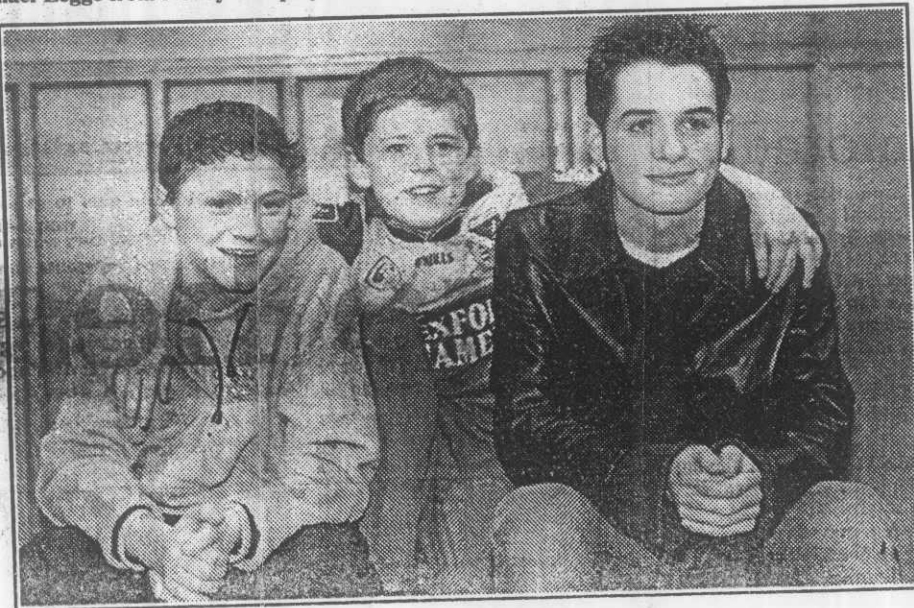
Joe, whose scowling features dominate promotional posters, said he had seen the film five times now and was "getting a bit bored with it."

Parker commented of her young star: "He is completely an utterly unspoilt, a very natural young boy with no pretensions about him and a very intelligent kid."

And Mr Parker revealed that he felt a bit like a schoolboy himself when he handed in the final screenplay to former schoolteacher Frank McCourt.

"It was like giving in an essay — I expected it to come back with a lot of red marks. Luckily he liked it."

Audiences can judge for themselves from tomorrow, when the film goes on general release.



Man (33) kicked woman to death, murder trial is told

By DIARMAID Mac DERMOTT

A MAN who kicked his girlfriend to death after a row over a £5 cannabis deal had sex with her dead body next morning, a Central Criminal Court murder trial jury heard yesterday.

Prosecuting counsel Sean Ryan said Dubliner Laurence Callaghan "savagely attacked" Janet Mooney after they had been drinking and smoking cannabis. She "suffered a multiplicity of injuries," including broken ribs and head injuries.

It was the opening day of the trial of Callaghan (33) of St Mary's Road, Crumlin who pleaded not guilty to murder but guilty to manslaughter of Ms Janet Mooney (29) between September 17 and 19 1996 at the Harrington Street, Dublin flat they shared.

Mr Ryan told the jury of seven women and five men the case was a retrial; there was a previous trial.

'SAVAGE'

The jury would have to decide whether Callaghan was guilty of murder or manslaughter and that would depend on whether he intended to kill or cause serious injury to Ms Mooney, said counsel.

The evidence would show Callaghan killed her by kicking her to death.

"She was on the ground had a good deal of drink taken and he attacked her savagely," added Mr Ryan. There was no question it was a brutal attack.

Next morning Callaghan had sex with Ms Mooney's body before realising she was dead. On the Thursday after the killing he went to an acquaintance in Rathmines and confessed to him he had "killed Janet."

Accused later told gardai in a question and answer session he had "kept kicking" Janet and "just couldn't stop," adding: "I had lost completely."