



BRANCHE	SECTION	ÉPREUVE ÉCRITE
Anglais (texte inconnu)	A	Durée de l'épreuve : 2 heures Date de l'épreuve : 30 mai 2018

(The following is an excerpt from Frank McCourt's autobiographical novel Angela's Ashes, published in 1996)

#### PART I

My father and mother should have stayed in New York where they met and married and where I was born. Instead, they returned to Ireland when I was four, my brother, Malachy, three, the twins, Oliver and Eugene, barely one, and my sister, Margaret, dead and gone.

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.

People everywhere brag and whimper about the woes of their early years, but nothing can compare with the Irish version: the poverty; the shiftless loquacious alcoholic father; the pious defeated mother moaning by the fire; pompous priests; bullying schoolmasters; the English and the terrible things they did to us for eight hundred long years.

Above all – we were wet.

Out in the Atlantic Ocean great sheets of rain gathered to drift slowly up the River Shannon and settle forever in Limerick. The rain dampened the city from the Feast of the Circumcision to New Year's Eve. It created a cacophony of hacking coughs, bronchial rattles, asthmatic wheezes, consumptive croaks. It turned noses into fountains, lungs into bacterial sponges. It provoked cures galore; to ease the catarrh you boiled onions in milk blackened with pepper; for the congested passages you made a paste of boiled flour and nettles, wrapped it in a rag, and slapped it, sizzling, on the chest.

From October to April the walls of Limerick glistened with the damp. Clothes never dried: tweed and woolen coats housed living things, sometimes sprouted mysterious vegetations. In pubs, steam rose from damp bodies and garments to be inhaled with cigarette and pipe smoke laced with the stale fumes of spilled stout and whiskey and tinged with the odor of piss wafting in from the outdoor **jakes** where many a man puked up his week's wages.

The rain drove us into the church – our refuge, our strength, our only dry place. At Mass, Benediction, **novenas**, we huddled in great damp clumps, dozing through priest drone, while steam rose again from our clothes to mingle with the sweetness of incense, flowers and candles.

Limerick gained a reputation for piety, but we knew it was only the rain.....

PART II (This part is *set in New York City, before the family moved back to Ireland.*)

..... I'm in the playground with Malachy. I'm four, he's three. He lets me push him on the swing because he's no good at swinging himself and Freddie Leibowitz is in school. We have to stay in the playground because the twins are sleeping and my mother says she's worn out. Go out and play, she says, and give me some rest. Dad is out looking for a job again and sometimes he comes home with the smell of whiskey, singing all the songs about suffering Ireland. Mam gets angry and says Ireland can kiss her arse. He says that's nice language to be using in front of the children and she says never mind the language, food on the table is what she wants, not suffering Ireland. She says it was a sad day **Prohibition** ended because Dad gets the drink going around to saloons offering to sweep out the bars and lifts barrels for a whiskey or a beer. Sometimes he brings home bits of the free lunch, rye bread, corned beef, pickles. He puts the food on the table and drinks tea himself. He says food is a shock to the system and he doesn't know where we get our appetites. Mam says, They get their appetites because they're starving half the time.....

(600 words)

**Glossary:**

**the jakes** = the toilet

**a novena** = a period of nine days of prayer and meditation

**Prohibition** = the period from 1920 to 1933 in the US when it was illegal to make or sell alcoholic drinks

**A) Analysis: (45 m)**

1. What exactly, according to the author, made his childhood even more miserable than an "ordinary miserable childhood"? (10 m)
2. How does the author manage to convey a strong sense of discomfort and lack of hygiene? (10 m)
3. How do the author's parents come across in Part II? What are the potential areas of conflict in their lives? (10 m)
4. What is the tone and the atmosphere evoked in these lines from Frank McCourt's autobiography? (5 m)
5. Analyse and comment on McCourt's style and its suitability for his subject. (5 m)
6. What does the above excerpt reveal about love of country or patriotism and the justification for it? (5 m)

**B) Personal Response: (15 m)**

7. "*It was, of course, a miserable childhood: the happy childhood is hardly worth your while.*" Frank McCourt seems to suggest that the recording of unhappy lives is a fitting subject for literature. Do you agree? Give examples from your reading experience to prove your point.