

# Symbolism of the red flapper dress in angela's ashes

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In Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*, the symbol of Angela's red flapper dress highlights the pain of lost dreams. This symbol is very important because it highlights Angela's youthful dreams, the beginning of Frank's dreams and also how Angela's dreams end. Frank uses Angela's red dress to make uniforms for a soccer game against the rich kids. During the game, Frank scores a goal to win the game.

This goal gives him hope that he will amount to something. Using Angela's dress for uniforms shows the sacrifice of her dreams to make new dreams for Frank. It opens his eyes to new hope and a new outlook on his dreams. In *Angela's Ashes*, the red dress represents Angela's youth and dancing days. The dress is kept locked away in a trunk with important papers from her life. Keeping the dress with passports, birth certificates and her marriage certificate shows how important the dress is to Angela. Frankie remembers the dress in the trunk as "...her bright red flapper dress with pgles and black frills she brought all the way from America.

She wants to keep that dress forever to remind herself she was young and dancing" (252). A flapper dress was worn during the Roaring Twenties. The Roaring Twenties were a time of fun, parties, dancing, jazz music and economic prosperity. Because Angela owned a flapper dress, she probably went to parties and enjoyed dancing before she went to America. Life was better for her than when she got older and was married with children. Mr. Clohessy tells Frankie "...I knew your mother well.

Danced with her...danced with her I did below in the Wembley Hall and a champion dancer she was too" (164). This tells you that Angela was once a

happy, carefree girl who enjoyed dancing. This time in her life was full of dreams and hope for the future. Saving the dress was a sign of those good times. Mr. Clohessy also makes Angela cry for her lost dreams when he says: “ We could have won competitions, Angela. Fred and Ginger would have been lookin’ over their shoulders but you had to run off to America.

Aw, Jesus” (167). These happy times contrast with the hungry, dark times in Ireland when she is on the dole and has no money to feed her children. It also is a contrast with the consumption that Mr. Clohessy and many others have and die from. During the story, Frankie talks about how bleak life is, how hungry and how poor they are. Putting the dress away in the trunk is also like locking her dreams away. Angela often stares into the fire and she is probably remembering better times and regretting what her life has become.

Frankie takes the dress out of the trunk and using it to make uniforms for his soccer team “ The Red Hearts of Limerick”. He destroys his mother’s dress, which is like destroying her dreams but is also symbolic of his dreams being set free. Frankie makes red hearts from part of the dress that the team pins to their uniforms even though they look like red rags. The boys play a soccer game against a team of rich boys and Frankie scores the winning goal. He goes from feeling doomed because when he finds his mom’s dress he also finds out from his friend Mikey that he was born a bastard, to feeling hope because God wouldn’t let him score a goal if he was doomed. It comes straight to my foot and all I have to do is swivel to the left and swing that ball straight into the goal. There’s a whiteness in my head and I feel like a boy in heaven.

and I keep thinking of the way the ball came to my foot and surely it was sent by God or the Blessed Virgin Mary who would never send such a blessing to one doomed for being born in half the time and I know as long as I live I'll never forget that ball coming from Billy Campbell, that goal. (256-257) This is a very important feeling for Frank. He feels like he has something to live for. He pauses after he scores the winning goal because he feels like he has been blessed by God. He thinks to himself that he can't be doomed if he was blessed enough to score the game winning goal. This sheds new light on Frank's hopes and dreams. He knows now that if he works hard, gets a job and saves up money that he will be able to return back to America.

As Frank's dreams continue to grow, his mother's dreams fade. She has given up all hope of her dreams for herself but still wants the best for her children. She loves her children even though she never comes right out and says it but you know she loves them because she will go on the dole and do without for herself so that her kids can eat. She even does distasteful things for Laman to keep a roof over their heads and some food on the table.

Angela's flapper dress is a strong symbol in the book. It illustrates that Angela was a young, carefree girl before she got pregnant and married Malachy. Little by little the poverty, Malachy's drinking, problems with her relatives about Malachy, and losing her children chipped away at her hopes and dreams until there was nothing left for her but to smoke cigarettes and stare into the fire.

The last of Angela's dreams, ashes dying away in the fireplace. At this same time, Frank takes his mother's dress and makes soccer uniforms with it.

When he scores the winning goal in a game against the rich kids his dreams take flight. He dares to dream of a better life and saves money to return to America. He often saves money by doing things that would upset his mother if she knew about them but Frank feels the end result will be worth it. He will make sure his dreams become a reality however he needs to do it. This is similar to how his mother keeps a roof over their heads and food on the table.

She does whatever she has to for her family, even if that means giving up her own dreams. She may not have realized that she was doing this but the red dress symbolically shows this.