IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER
Directed by Jim Sheridan.
Written by Terry George and Jim Sheridan.
Starring Daniel Day-Lewis, Emma Thompson, and Pete Postlethwaite.

By Scott Deskin
obscures art's terror

The opening scenes of In the Name of the Father seize the attention of the audience. It is a calm evening in 1974, where a Surrey, England pub welcomes a group of people. A second later, the building is leveled by a fiery explosion that claims the lives of three people. The hunt is on the English government to deal with the culprits—quickly and mercilessly.

Those who are arrested and convicted, namely Irishman Gerry Conlon (Daniel Day-Lewis), with his friends and family, receive moderately stiff sentences for the bombing of the pub. But the Conlons are innocent as revealed by Gerry Conlon's autobiography, Proved Innocent and most of the movie centers on the ordeal that Gerry and father Guiseppe (Pete Postlethwaite) face in prison while working to prove their innocence on the outside.

Part of the story is relayed in flashback via tape recorder to civil-rights lawyer Gareth Peacon (Emma Thompson). In Belfast, Gerry Conlon is a petty thief, stripping scrap metal from roofs and constantly incurring the wrath of both British soldiers patrolling the streets and IRA leaders in the community. Since this is a major concern to Gerry's family, Guiseppe sends Gerry to London so that he can find work and keep out of trouble. In Lon- don, Gerry runs into old friend Paul Hill (John Lynch), settles in with a love-in cooperative, and soon is up to his old, mischievous ways.

He and his friends are soon apprehended for the bombing, however, when the English convince the Conlons and others simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Under emotional duress from torture and threats by the police, Gerry eventually breaks down and signs a confession, as do his friends. This admission of guilt seals their fate, along with a slew of circumstantial evidence. The bulk of the story focuses on the relationship between Guiseppe and Gerry in prison, which is keenly effective, rather than the legal battles they have with the government. The shift of perspective on Gerry's part from seeing his father as weak-willed to acquiring a humble respect of Guiseppe's forthright morality is done expertly and ten- derly. Along the way, of course, Gerry rebels against his father's "weakness," only to equal- ly loathe the tactics of an IRA inmate (the, real culprit of the bombings) after taking him to be a surrogage father in the grim confines of prison.

This film is an all-around success. Daniel Day-Lewis gives an emotionally-charged performance as the naive teenager who grows in prison to a powerful example of strength and hope. Pete Postlethwaite gives an elegant and understated, though no less powerful, perfor- mance as the Conlons who dies in prison still proclaiming his innocence. And Emma Thompson is a reliable presence as the lawyer who brings the case to trial 15 years later with startling evidence that was covered up, never lacking in deb billed the validity of the case nor the stubbornness of the British government.

Directed by Jim Sheridan (My Left Foot) gives the film its pro-Irish bias, which attacks the notion of making Ireland a scapegoat for the crimes of a radical terrorist group. In fact, Sheridan's message of nonviolence serves to underscore the power of Conlon's plea in the movie that he wasn't guilty of anything. In the Name of the Father is as emotional and enthralling as movies get. Full of Oscar-cal-iber performances, it ranks as one of the best films of 1993.

Name of the Father: full of stellar performances