



universität
wien

DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

“Cross-Cultural Encounters in Frank McCourt’s *Angela’s Ashes*, *‘Tis* and *Teacher Man*“

Verfasserin

Sonja Schöntag

angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag.phil.)

Wien, 2012

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 343

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

Anglistik und Amerikanistik

Betreuer:

Ao.Univ.-Prof. Mag. Dr. Franz-Karl Wöhrer

Declaration of Authenticity

I confirm to have conceived and written this thesis in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors are clearly marked and acknowledged in the bibliographical references either in footnotes or within the text. Any ideas borrowed and / or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors are truthfully acknowledged and identified in the footnotes.

Sonja Schöntag

Hinweis

Diese Diplomarbeit hat nachgewiesen, dass die betreffende Kandidatin oder der betreffende Kandidat befähigt ist, wissenschaftliche Themen selbstständig sowie inhaltlich und methodisch vertretbar zu bearbeiten. Da die Korrekturen der/des Beurteilenden nicht eingetragen sind und das Gutachten nicht beiliegt, ist daher nicht erkenntlich mit welcher Note diese Arbeit abgeschlossen wurde. Das Spektrum reicht von sehr gut bis genügend. Die Habilitierten des Instituts für Anglistik und Amerikanistik bitten diesen Hinweis bei der Lektüre zu beachten.

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. FRANK MCCOURT AND THE GENRE OF THE MEMOIR	3
3. HYBRIDITY, STEREOTYPING AND IDENTITY	5
3.1. POSTCOLONIAL CRITICISM AND HYBRIDITY IN LITERARY THEORY	5
3.1.1. <i>Hybridity</i>	5
3.2. STEREOTYPES	9
3.2.1. <i>Anti-Irish Sentiment in the U.S.</i>	9
3.2.2. <i>The Stage Irish</i>	11
3.2.3. <i>Historical and Fictional Stereotypes of the Irish</i>	13
3.3. IRISH NATIONAL IDENTITY	16
3.4. THE CONSTRUCTION OF IRISH IDENTITY IN AMERICAN LITERATURE	16
3.5. AMERICAN NATIONALISM AND IRISH IMMIGRATION	18
3.6. IRISH-AMERICAN IDENTITY: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE HYPHEN	20
3.6.1. <i>Imagined Ethnic Communities</i>	24
4. ANGELA'S ASHES	25
4.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	25
4.1.1. <i>Ireland between the 1930s and 1950s</i>	25
4.1.1.1. Fianna Fáil	25
4.1.1.2. Turmoil in the 1940s and 1950s	26
4.1.2. <i>Historical Background in the USA – Irish Immigration</i>	27
4.1.2.1. The 1930s and the Great Depression	28
4.1.2.2. Ellis Island	28
4.2. SYNOPSIS	30
4.3. KEY EPISODES: CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS, HYBRIDITY AND STEREOTYPING	31
4.3.1. <i>Representations of 'the Other'</i>	32
4.3.2. <i>Language and Accent</i>	33
4.3.3. <i>Religion and the Church in Ireland</i>	35
4.3.3.1. Catholicism in Ireland	36
4.3.3.2. Ulster: Separation and Conflict	38
4.3.4. <i>The Role of the Irish Woman and Sexuality</i>	40
5. 'TIS	44
5.1. HISTORICAL SETTING	44
5.1.1. <i>The Korean War</i>	45
5.1.2. <i>Immigration after World War II</i>	45
5.2. SYNOPSIS	46
5.3. KEY EPISODES: CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS, HYBRIDITY AND STEREOTYPING	48
5.3.1. <i>Cross-Cultural Understanding from a Psychological Perspective</i>	48
5.3.2. <i>Religion</i>	50
5.3.3. <i>Language and Accent</i>	52
5.3.4. <i>The Hyphenated Self and Hybridity: In Between Cultures</i>	56
5.3.5. <i>The Other: Representations of Stereotypes in a Cross-Cultural Environment</i>	59
5.3.5.1. Irish Stereotypes	60
5.3.5.2. American Stereotypes	64
5.3.5.3. Stereotypes Applied to Puerto Ricans	65
5.3.5.4. Stereotypes Applied to Native Americans	66
5.3.5.5. Stereotypes Applied to Swedes	67
5.3.5.6. Stereotypes Applied to Jews	67
5.3.5.7. Stereotypes Applied to African Americans	68
6. TEACHER MAN	69
6.1. SYNOPSIS	69
6.1.1. <i>Part I: It's a long Road to Pedagogy</i>	70
6.1.2. <i>Part II: Donkey on a Thistle</i>	71

6.1.4. <i>Part III: Coming Alive in Room 205</i>	73
6.2. KEY EPISODES: CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS, HYBRIDITY AND STEREOTYPING	74
6.2.1. <i>Irish Stereotypes</i>	74
6.2.2. <i>Language and Accent</i>	76
6.2.3. <i>Religion and Trauma</i>	77
6.2.4. <i>The Irish in America</i>	79
6.2.5. <i>Hybridity</i>	79
6.2.6. <i>Multiculturalism</i>	81
6.2.6.1. Blacks.....	83
6.2.6.2. Jews	83
6.2.6.3. Chinese.....	84
7. FRANK MCCOURT: TRAUMA AND IDENTITY	86
7.2. THE AMERICAN DREAM: FROM RAGS TO RICHES	90
9. CONCLUSION	95
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	97
PRIMARY LITERATURE:	97
SECONDARY LITERATURE:	97
APPENDIX: ANGELA'S ASHES – THE FILM.....	101
8.2. TRANSFERRING A LITERARY TEXT INTO A FILM: ADAPTATION THEORY.....	101
8.2.1. <i>Cliché 1: Only the Telling Mode (Narrative Fiction) Has the Flexibility to Render Both Intimacy and Distance in Point of View.</i>	102
8.2.2. <i>Cliché 2: Interiority is the Terrain of the Telling Mode; Exteriority is Best Handled by Showing and Especially by Interactive Modes</i>	104
INDEX.....	106
ABSTRACT IN GERMAN.....	110
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	113

List of Illustrations

Illustration 1: Frank McCourt	2
--	----------

Wargo, Theo. 16 Aug. 2012.

<http://www.esquire.com/archives/blogs/endorsement/by_tag/frank%20mccourt/15;1>.

Illustration 2: Racialized Caricatures.....	10
--	-----------

Harold Knight. Home Page. 9 Feb. 2010. 5 July 2012.

<<http://sumnonravidus.wordpress.com/2010/09/02/%E2%80%9Cit-doesn%E2%80%99t-factor-in-%E2%80%9D-or-%E2%80%9Cto-constitute-the-irish-as-something-other-than-the-american-%E2%80%98white-working-class-%E2%80%99/>>>.

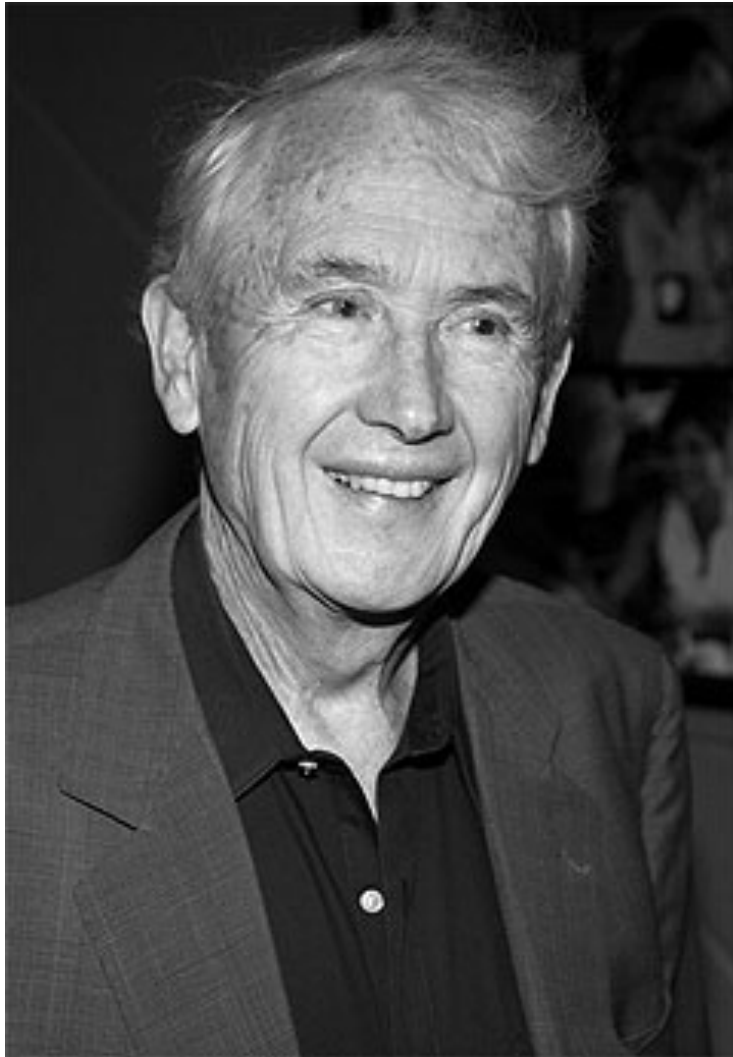


Illustration 1¹ Frank McCourt

*The minute I opened my mouth then they'd say, "Oh, you're Irish." Suddenly I'm labeled. I wasn't a human being. In Ireland I was just a low-class type, but here I'm a low-class Irish type, an Irish low-class type. So I didn't know.*²

¹ Wargo, Theo. 16 Aug. 2012.

<http://www.esquire.com/archives/blogs/endorsement/by_tag/frank%20mccourt/15;1>.

² McCourt, Frank. "Interview with Frank McCourt". *Academy of Achievement*. 19 June 1999. 16 Aug. 2012. <<http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/mcc1int-3>>.

1. Introduction

I chose Frank McCourt's memoirs as the subject for my diploma thesis because ever since I first read *Angela's Ashes* I was fascinated with McCourt's style of narration. By describing his harsh childhood, his early years of adolescence and the dire circumstances, which he had to grow up in, he skillfully applies irony and a certain sense of humor which at the same time captivated and entertained me as a reader in a unique way.

The book *Angela's Ashes* was published in 1996 and shortly after gained commercial and critical success, remaining on the bestseller lists for hundreds of weeks, winning a National Book Critics Circle Award in 1996 and the Pulitzer Prize in the following year.

Michiko Kakutani of the *New York Times* tellingly summarized the essence of the memoir: "there is not a trace of bitterness or resentment in *Angela's Ashes*."³

Devon McNamara wrote in the *Christian Science Monitor* that

[...] what has surprised critic and reader alike is how a childhood of poverty, illness, alcoholism, and struggle, in an environment not far removed from the Ireland of [eighteenth-century English writer Jonathan] Swift's 'A Modest Proposal,' came to be told with such a rich mix of hilarity and pathos.⁴

The last word in *Angela's Ashes*, chapter nineteen, is "'Tis". McCourt's second book, entitled *'Tis*, starts off where *Angela's Ashes* ends: the arrival in the United States. This book was published in 1999 and describes McCourt's turbulent time after his arrival in the USA. Coming back to the city of his dreams – New York - the author struggles to get by and takes on various jobs, desperately trying to make a living. Such jobs involved cleaning at a hotel, scrubbing toilets at a diner and working at the docks, dealing with heavy cargo. During the Korean War, McCourt joins the army and spends some time back in Europe. After a time of hesitation and low self-confidence due to his heritage, he eventually enrolls at New York University in order to become a teacher. Malcolm Jones⁵ described *'Tis* in a *Newsweek* review: "Superficially, 'Tis is the classic immigrant's tale... [A] melting-pot story where

³, ³ and ⁴ "Frank McCourt." *Contemporary Authors Online*. Detroit: Gale, 2009. *Gale Biography In Context*. Web. 17 Nov. 2010.

<<http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/bic1/ReferenceDetailsPage/ReferenceDetailsWindow?displayGroupName=K12-Reference&prodId=BIC1&action=e&windowstate=normal&catId=&documentId=GALE%7CH1000123540&mcode=view&userGroupName=43wien&jsid=abff4ffdf9d2e6ac3b49d3f09df4fc3>>.

nothing melts... But more than that, it is the story of a man finding two great vocations - teaching and storytelling - and he wins our trust by never touching up his memories."

Similarly, *Library Journal* reviewer Gordon Blackwell⁶ asserted, "McCourt's entertaining 'Tis [...] recounts candidly, and with humor where appropriate, his return to the United States." "In 'Tis, [McCourt] must live between the tormenting reality of [the American] dream and the sad past of his soul's memory," stated Gingher in *World*, adding: "The book's lyrical power of reclamation has everything to do with its author's ability to live between these worlds, which in some profound way are only vivid and intelligible in terms of each other."

McCourt's latest memoir *Teacher Man*, published in 2005, chronicles in an episodic fashion the author's long career of thirty years as a high school teacher. McCourt's "dark humor, lyric voice and gift for dialogue are apparent" in this tale of the ups and downs of his career, observed a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor. With *Teacher Man*, "we get the best self-portrait of a public-school teacher ever written," noted Malcolm Jones in a *Newsweek* review, who suggested that McCourt has "told the tale of that experience so well that when you've finished it, you don't envy him. You envy his students"⁷.

This diploma thesis will provide a brief overview of the genre of the memoir in its specific context with regard to postcolonial aspects focusing on the issue of hybridity and stereotyping in the three source texts. Regarding my research questions, I propose three major arguments, which I shall discuss in the course of this study. First of all, I will try to come to the bottom of the question of how hybridity and stereotypes are presented in cross-cultural encounters in Frank McCourt's memoirs. Secondly, I will analyze the construction of Irishness in the United States and its change between the arrival of the first Irish Famine immigrants and the beginning of the 21st century - especially in a cross-cultural context. My last research question will analyze McCourt's trilogy in the light of the Bildungsroman; What kind of psychological and moral development has Frank McCourt undergone, what does this mean for his identity formation and can he be considered an example of the concept of the American Dream?

⁶ and ⁶ "Frank McCourt." *Contemporary Authors Online*. Detroit: Gale, 2009. *Gale Biography In Context*. Web. 17 Nov. 2010.

<<http://ic.galegroup.com/ic/bic1/ReferenceDetailsPage/ReferenceDetailsWindow?displayGroupName=K12-Reference&prodId=BIC1&action=e&windowstate=normal&catId=&documentId=GALE%7CH1000123540&mode=view&userGroupName=43wien&jsid=abff4ffdf9d2e6ac3b49d3f09df4fc3>>.

2. Frank McCourt and the Genre of the Memoir

"I'm always quoting Gore Vidal and his memoir, 'Palimpsest,'" McCourt said. 'Vidal said a memoir is an impression of your life, but even if you say it's just your impression you can't put in things that didn't happen. You can put in impressions about how you felt about things that happened. You can't put in made-up events. These things are easily verifiable'" (Frank McCourt, qtd. in Grondahl)

In another interview, Frank McCourt tellingly stated: "all the facts are true" (Foster 169, qtd. in Forbes 475). This again shows in a humorous way how ambiguous definitions of 'fact' and 'truth' can be. In the following paragraphs of this chapter I will try to come to the bottom of some of the problems inherent in the genre of the memoir.

There are several autobiographical genres such as autobiography, diary, journal, letter, credo, log memoir, for example. All of these are regarded as non-fiction. Nevertheless, it is sometimes rather hard to draw the line between fiction and non-fiction in texts in which the author claims to provide an authentic record of his life.

Nancy E. Zuwiyya⁸ defines 'memoir' as follows:

The memoir, especially as it is being used in publishing today, often tries to capture certain highlights or meaningful moments in one's past, often including a contemplation of the meaning of that event at the time of the writing of the memoir. The memoir may be more emotional and concerned with capturing particular scenes, or a series of events, rather than documenting every fact of a person's life.

Characteristics of memoirs include common elements of storytelling (i.e. narrator/protagonist, setting, plot, development, imagery, conflict, characterization, foreshadowing and flashback as well as irony and symbolism). The story or events are often told from an emotional perspective and may have a therapeutic function for the author in a way that the writing may help him or her to overcome traumata, for instance (Zuwiyya).

Frequently, when remembering personal events in life, processes of reevaluation will occur. Therefore, "many memoirs also partake in the narrative conventions of historiography and fiction, frequently employing what Roland Barthes calls a 'reality effect' to infuse their stories with a sense of verisimilitude" (Mitchell 608).

⁸ Zuwiyya, Nancy (2000). *Definition of a Memoir*. 17 Nov. 2010.
<<http://inkspell.homestead.com/memoir.htm>>.

Frank McCourt once stated in an interview “[a] memoir is an impression of my life [...]. It captures the atmosphere, color and tone of what I experienced. An auto-biography captures the facts. I’ll let someone else write an auto-biography of me” (qtd. in Grondahl).

Memory can be interpreted as an “alternate legitimate source of historical truth” (Mitchell 608). By adopting this thought, an autobiography is not exclusively a personal expression, but a narrative reflecting ‘inner dynamics’ as well as a cultural product. In McCourt’s *Angela’s Ashes* subjectivity is conveyed through the act of remembering. Mitchell (616) continues by stating that

[...] in its style and its narrative, however, *Angela’s Ashes* is not only more realistic than impressionistic, but at times reads more like a nineteenth-century novel than a memoir. The text’s marketing makes this generic indecisiveness explicit: “the volume was at first alternately identified as fiction and as autobiography, but the time of publication it had settled down as ‘a memoir’” (qtd. in Foster 166) – but a memoir that reads like a fiction.

Since McCourt focuses on educational experiences *Angela’s Ashes* can also be labeled Bildungsroman, highlighting the “struggles of this conventional form by employing an ironic adult voice” (Mitchell 616). Despite the application of a child’s voice, we still receive an adult perspective that uses irony as “means of easing pain aroused by the telling. The child speaks with an adult wit” (Mitchell 616).

Frank McCourt himself, as a historical figure triggered some negative reactions to his memoir especially by various Limerick residents, who blame him for exploiting their city and portraying it in an unpleasant way, making a fortune out of it. One example which illustrates how powerful the memoir’s reality effect has been is an article by Margaret O’Brian Steinfelds entitled *I Knew Angela*, which “questions the historical authenticity” of *Angela’s Ashes* (Mitchell 620). Steinfelds claims that she knew the “real” Angela and accuses McCourt of “creating ‘fictive kin’ in his memoir” (Mitchell 620). She obviously has a very narrow view of historical accuracy and authenticity. Moreover, she assumes that her notion of reality depicts the real Angela, ignoring the fact that her knowledge of Frank’s mother is a rather limited one. This again illustrates the “reality effect” of the memoir (Mitchell 621).

3. Hybridity, Stereotyping and Identity

3.1. Postcolonial Criticism and Hybridity in Literary Theory

My first research question is based on postcolonial aspects of literary criticism. As Peter Barry states in his introduction to literary and cultural theory:

One significant effect of postcolonial criticism is to further undermine the universalist claims once made on behalf of literature by liberal humanist critics. If we claim that great literature has timeless and universal significance we thereby demote or disregard cultural, social, regional, and national differences in experience and outlook, preferring instead to judge all literature by a single, supposedly 'universal' standard. (Barry 192)

The three classical stages of postcolonial writing are the '*adopt*' phase, where colonial literature is commonly accepted as "universal validity", the '*adapt*' phase which is characterized by a partial "intervention in the genre". Finally, the so-called '*adept*' phase suggests that "the colonial writer is an 'adept' in the form, not a humble apprentice [...]". Cross-cultural processes are also of major concern in postcolonial criticism (Barry 196).

3.1.1. Hybridity

The above-mentioned phases are closely linked to the development of the stages of feminist criticism, where the concepts of hybridity, diversity and difference have become central (Barry 197). Postcolonial critics "celebrate hybridity and 'cultural polyvancy', that is, the position of individuals and groups belonging simultaneously to more than one culture (for instance, that of the colonizer, through a colonial school system, and that of the colonized, through local and oral traditions)" (Barry 199). Eventually, postcolonial criticism focuses on cultural variations or differences in literary texts. With this being said, these cultural differences can be manifold, hereby "including issues of gender (feminist criticism), of class (Marxist criticism), and of sexual orientation (lesbian/gay criticism)" (Barry 198).

In McCourt's case, being born in New York and having received his schooling in Limerick, he puts himself in the position of an Irish-American (Mitchell 618). However, as Mitchell (619) points out

McCourt's identity often seems to find itself occupying a provocative and sometimes discomfiting hybrid space between both cultures. Most notably, whether intentionally or not, *Angela's Ashes* often seems to confirm the picture of Ireland as a superstitious, unhygienic, narrow-minded backwater of Europe. In this way the book provides contemporary Americans with the unspoken guilty pleasure of slumming in mid-twentieth century Limerick without ever having to leave the comfort of their clean, well-plumbed country.

The Irish and the concept of nomadism are very closely linked. Considering the Irish-American or in *Angela's Ashes* case American-Irish for the predominant part of the memoirs, these hyphenated expressions themselves point to binaries. Binaries relating to in-between spaces, which are according to O'Connor (356),

[...] not contained with any national borders of any kind and, as such, [they are] a concept that is in constant flux. In a literal, as well as figurative sense, a new cartography is formed – one that maps what Homi K. Bhaba terms a 'passage between fixed identifications' (qtd. in Bhaba 5).

These in-between spaces based on processes of cultural differences create new instances of identity (Bhaba 2). In this chapter selected key passages shall highlight instances of interstices or cultural hybridity.

According to Bhaba, "an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present" (Byrne 5) is the place where these in-between spaces can be found. In these encounters the past is not solely recalled, but renewed (Byrne 5).

It is important to grasp that for Bhaba hybridity is not a negative thing; "rather, he suggests that hybridity enables the ability to discursively challenge authority and results in the performative creation of cultural identity" (Dowd 91). Cultural hybridity is a necessary step to achieve a new kind of identity. Cross-cultural encounters and friction therefore are crucial in identity formation.

Naturally, this hybrid hyphenated form of identity can and will also lead to frustration at times. Dowd exemplifies this frustration with a comment Joe Kennedy, patriarch of the Kennedy family, once made rebuking "a Boston newspaper for labeling him an Irishman" (113): "I was born here. My children were born here. What the hell do I have to do to be called an American?" (Shannon vii) (qtd. in Dowd 113). This frustration was common for many Americans with Irish roots experiencing "a kind of identity crisis in the early decades of the twentieth century" (Dowd 113). Furthermore, the historian Shannon explains that "the ethnic group 'closest to being 'in' while still being 'out'" (132) are the Irish.

Since the Famine immigration, Irishness has changed from an identity implying a shared history to an identity connoting only vague, sometimes superficial, cultural similarities. As a result, many modern Irish Americans felt disconnected from the culture of their ancestors, but they also felt disconnected from American culture. Confusion emerged from this sense of being both deficiently Irish and deficiently American, and the challenge for this generation became reconciling their American identity with their cultural heritage in such a way as to show the two to be compatible, not mutually exclusive. (Dowd 113)

Studying the writers of American literature in the early twentieth century (cf. T.S. Eliot and F. Scott Fitzgerald) – especially in the modernist era - reveals that Irish Americans served as a perfect example with regard to modernist identity anxieties. Dowd points out that

[...] as figurative metaphors with established histories of embodying American social fear, Irish American literary characters offered writers ready-made models of alienation that could perfectly represent the fractured personas, historic discontinuities, cultural isolation, economic despair and national insecurities that typified that period. (113)

As a result the Irish-American character served as a paradigm of the “modernist everyman” (Dowd 113) marked by fragmented identities and estrangement. In the prime of the modernist period - especially in the 1920s - however, the Irish population in the United States had undergone a change, therefore Irish-American identity was perceived differently by the vast majority (Dowd 114f.). There were other, ‘newer’ immigrant groups present and the Irish seemed to have assimilated to American mainstream in Anglo-American terms of course. Furthermore, Irish immigration had decreased significantly and “the population of American-born Irish now greatly outnumbered the population of foreign-born Irish” (Dowd 115). When it comes to identity, third and fourth generation Americans of Irish descent perceived themselves in a different manner than their ancestors did. Irishness to them had lost its significance, they felt American and lived the American way of life: socially, culturally and politically. They “moved out of the old ghettos and dispersed throughout cities, often engaging in new professions and marrying outside their ethnic group; [...] they proudly rallied to American patriotic causes and pursued careers in politics” (Dowd 115). Nevertheless, “popular perceptions had not fully reconciled Irish identity with American identity, many obstacles still remained for Americans of Irish heritage” (Dowd 115).

One of these obstacles presented itself in the form of economic factors. Despite the fact that some highly successful, prosperous Irish-Americans had emerged, economic equality had not been established yet. The powerful Protestant establishment in America still put barriers into place which “would allow the Irish some measure of success, but not enough to threaten traditional economic and social hierarchies” (Dowd 115). They clearly prevented Irish advancement to the high positions and the majority of Irish-Americans was still to be found in a working-class environment, according to Shannon “many of them below the level of subsistence” (Dowd 116).

Another obstacle regarding a successful inclusion of the Irish-American community was presented by “their national loyalties” (Dowd 116) during the beginning of the twentieth

century. The period of the Easter Rising, followed by the civil war in Ireland drew a significant amount of attention to “Irish nationalist causes in the U.S.” (Dowd 116). Many Irish-Americans at that time still felt connected to their old home country – some distinctly in a political sense. At the beginning of World War I, many Irish-Americans “openly opposed America’s entry into the war, arguing that Irish Americans had more in common (politically and religiously) with Germany than Ireland. To them, Great Britain was still perceived as the archenemy per se (Dowd 116).

Although things had ameliorated greatly for the Irish in America as opposed to the past centuries, Shannon characterizes their problematic standing in American society as “‘accommodated’ but not ‘accepted’” (Dowd 116).

Another time of transition for the Irish in America took place in the 1930s, the time Frank McCourt was born in New York. According to the historian J. J. Lee, 1931 represented “a date that looms large in Irish-American historiography because it ‘marks the end of the immigration flow that had lasted since before the Famine’” (Lee 36, qtd. in Dowd 152). Almeida (549) illustrates that “[t]he reduction in Irish immigration to the U.S. was extreme; in the 1920s, approximately 211,000 Irish immigrated to America, but that number declined to just 11,000 in the 1930s” (qtd. in Dowd 153). This decline in Irish immigration can be traced back to the tightening of immigration laws which were introduced in 1921 and 1924, but the prime reason was the Great Depression. During this period and the resulting high unemployment, emigration to the U.S. tapered off significantly (Dowd 116).

Kerby A. Miller (555) points out that

Irish American culture moving into the 1930s decreasingly focused on Irish nationalism while increasingly emphasizing specifically American concerns. ‘[T]he long, dark winter of Irish exile in American was over’, and [...] something new was beginning. (qtd. in Dowd 152)

Irish Americans no longer felt like a secluded immigrant community, or a parallel American society, or that part of them was still to be found across the Atlantic. They did not see themselves as “victims of British oppression, interlopers on the American scene, or political and social outsiders in the U.S. [...] The Irish-American present, future and even, to a large degree, the past were now rooted in American culture and history” (Dowd 153).

In the aftermath of the Great Depression, Irish-American identity cannot be seen in the same light as before, due to the fact that it is “no longer rooted in an immigrant context, [...] [and has become] increasingly indefinite and invariable” (Dowd 153).

3.2. Stereotypes

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*⁹, a stereotype is defined as:

Derived from the Greek (stereos = solid, typos = mark), and applied in the late 18th century as a technical term for the casting of a papier mâché copy of printing type, the concept was developed by the North American journalist Walter Lippman in his book *Public Opinion* (1922) to mean the fixed, narrow ‘pictures in our head’, generally resistant to easy change. It usually carries a pejorative meaning—in contrast to the sociological process of typification.

In the construction of otherness the concept of ‘fixity’ plays a crucial role: “Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism [...]” (Bhabha 66). This kind of representation “connotes rigidity” (Bhabha 66) and repetition. Stereotyping is a “major discursive strategy”, a form of “knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always ‘in place’, already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated” (Bhabha 66).

Giving an overview of what Irish stereotypes consist of also implies presenting information regarding the development of such stereotypes. It is almost impossible not to go back to representations of the “Stage Irish” since most associations with this fictional figure are still present in the minds of many people. Maybe not in such a radical, exaggerated form, however in more alleviated ways. Where do these stereotypes come from?

3.2.1. Anti-Irish Sentiment in the U.S.

For a major part of the nineteenth century, “the Irish were a uniquely undesirable ethnic minority in America – the hated immigrant group *du jour* (Dowd 12). They ‘invaded’ American cities and their seemingly ‘unpleasant demeanor’ caused anti-Irish sentiment to “peak in the period 1850-1880, the decades that saw both the arrival of the Famine immigrants and the” (Dowd 12) anxiety caused by an unstable American national identity. One explanation regarding the emergence of such a rejection of Irishness, is offered by historian Kevin Kenny (Race 366), who claims that

[...] developments in the field of natural science (especially in the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* in 1859) and the rise of Irish physical force nationalism shaped the features of anti-Irish resentment in America (Race 366). Racialized caricatures of the Irish as violent ape-men bent on political anarchy clearly owe much to theories of the evolution of species and public discomfort with Fenian politics. (Qtd. in Dowd 12)

⁹ "stereotype". *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*. Ed. John Scott, Gordon Marshall. Oxford UP, 2005. eNotes.com. 2006. 16 Jan, 2011 <<http://www.enotes.com/oxsoc-encyclopedia/stereotype>>.

The illustration below clearly depicts the racialized representation of Irish immigrants and Irish-Americans in the U.S. in the nineteenth century. This simian creature resembles more a wild animal, which has been confined in a cage in order to protect the public on the one hand, and on the other hand to present the captive to the broad public. In a mob-like manner the public is representative of common members of society: men, women, children, police officers, etc. – all full of resentment at the sight of this Irishman.



Illustration 2¹⁰ Racialized Caricatures

This anti-Irish resentment in America has English roots. Whereas British animosities towards the Irish can be traced back to nationalism, American antipathy towards the Irish is rooted in race. Kenny (Race 364-370) points out “several reasons for the difference in attitudes, but most importantly observes that in England, the Irish primarily threatened political sovereignty, whereas in America, they primarily threatened social order” (qtd. in Dowd 14). In America the Irish were never considered as menace regarding political power. They “never tried to undermine the authority of the government” (Dowd 14). Rather, they desired to be

¹⁰ Harold Knight. Home Page. 9 Feb. 2010. 5 July 2012.
<http://sumnonrabidus.wordpress.com/2010/09/02/%E2%80%99Cit-doesn%E2%80%99t-factor-in-%E2%80%99D-or-%E2%80%99Cto-constitute-the-irish-as-something-other-than-the-american-%E2%80%98white-working-class-%E2%80%99/>>.

integrated and included: what they craved was American citizenship and to be assimilated – something they never wanted from Great Britain (Dowd 14).

In the American literary canon these stereotypes, conjuring up an anti-Irish sentiment, were also frequently applied. Writers portrayed the Irish “as boogey-men, societal villains, and ethnic clowns [...] using an Irish brogue or shillelagh¹¹” (Dowd 14) in order to convey otherness. Stereotypical Irish names containing an “O” or a “Mc” alongside with Irish clichés can be found in popular American texts (Dowd 15).

One very popular figure was prominent on American stage of the nineteenth century. This personification of Irish stereotyping should cast its shadows over the next centuries to come. The following subchapter will explore its origins and effects on Irish-American identity formation.

3.2.2. The Stage Irish

The expression “Stage Irish”, also called the “Stage Irishman” actually dates back to Shakespeare’s times. The first recorded appearance of this character can be found in *Henry V* in the role as Captain Macmorris. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the stage Irishman was attributed the following characteristics: “unattractive, dirty, shiftless figure, wearing ill-fitting country clothes and smoking an Irish pipe” (Trotter 27). Moreover, he has access to illegal whiskey called potcheen and is not hesitant to get drunk on a daily basis. Furthermore, the stage Irishman of the 1800s represents a belligerent human being, yet at the same time a person with a sense of humor. He has the gift of the gob, meaning he is quite eloquent, however he is also an easy victim to betray (Trotter 37f.). Often the color of his hair is fiery red and he has a thick Irish brogue.

Trotter (38) further points out that

In the United States, characterizations of the Irish immigrant, such as Moser the B’howery Boy or the portrayals of the comedy team of Harrigan and Hart, became stage fixtures. Although there are similarities in stage Irish characterizations on both sides of the Atlantic, and plays with both American and English versions of Irish

¹¹ **Pronunciation:** /ʃɪˈleɪlə, -li/: a thick stick of blackthorn or oak used in Ireland, typically as a weapon. Origin: late 18th century: from the name of the town Shillelagh, in Co. Wicklow, Ireland.

"shillelagh". Oxford Dictionaries. April 2010. Oxford Dictionaries. April 2010. Oxford University Press. 05 July 2012 <<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/shillelagh>>.

caricatures appeared in both countries, the stage Irish immigrant served a different dramatic and ideological purpose for its American audiences than England's colonial stage Irishman.

The American stage Irish immigrant represented – however in an ironic way – the growing, powerful Irish communities in American cities. This figure was portrayed as sharp-witted, “ambitious” as well as influential, whereas the English version of the stage Irishman “reflected the United Kingdom's imperialist attitude towards – and anxiety about – Ireland” (Trotter 38).

Early representations of stage Irish in English theatres were characterized as drunks and savages who “mutilated the English language with Gaelic exclamations and curses. Despite their anger and villainy, they were little more than dumb animals who, when handled properly, really posed no threat to civilized man” (Dowd 17).

In the eighteenth century a subtle change took place regarding the representation of the stage Irishman: he adopted more comic features and became very popular with audiences, who took a laughing at these Irish clowns (Dowd 17). Still carrying vicious traits of earlier caricatures, the stage Irish was portrayed as a “blatant fool who often retained a menacing disposition and subhuman physical features, but he also displayed new qualities with which audiences could sympathize [...] [h]e was less overtly threatening than the earlier type” (Dowd 17). What the stage Irishman essentially represented through his inferior traits was English superiority in all its shapes: culturally, politically and economically (Dowd 17). A significant rise in popularity of these characters in England can be seen during the years of the Great Famine between 1845 and 1852 (O'Neill 7f.), a period which was marked by starvation, disease and consequently emigration: the Irish were seeking refuge in many English cities. Curiously, stage Irishmen at that time were represented as “inherently loyal and grateful to English authority” (Dowd 17). A factor which caused English audiences to sympathize with this character in a way, they did not with the actual Irishman. Moreover, Dowd points out, this “discrepancy reveals significant cultural disconnect with Anglo-Irish relations” (17).

A more positive characterization of the stage Irishman however cannot be justified with sympathy towards the poverty-stricken Irish. “He still had to satisfy the traditional functions of the stereotype, but now he also had to ease the guilt and fear of a new historical context” (Dowd 17f.)

Through early British drama, American audiences became familiar with the stage Irish and when the Famine immigrants arrived on American soil, “the stage Irish stereotype was

already firmly ensconced in American minds” (Dowd 18). In the second half of the eighteenth century, Americans altered the characterization of the stage Irish to better suit their purposes. Early British versions of the Stage Irish focused on “national difference, verbal awkwardness, and a proclivity for violence, American portrayals of the stage Irishman often emphasize class difference, communalism, and general naiveté” (Dowd 19). The threat he posed was directed towards America’s “social equilibrium” (Dowd 19). Bischoff and Noçon (63) explain that “one important difference between the English and American versions of the character was that, in America, Irishness was dramatized as a condition ‘of being *torn between two countries and cultures* [emphasis added]” (qtd. in Dowd 19).

When analyzing the character of the Stage Irishman, it is essential to consider not only the kinds of stereotypes that have been created, more importantly we need to look at the historical context in which the characters emerged. Dowd points out

[t]hat what is too often ignored is that the stereotype – real or not – impacted ethnic discourse in significant ways. The imagined Irishman of the stage might never actually be found on the street, but theatergoers carried him in their minds, and such concepts necessarily influenced real-world ethnic relations. (20)

This short overview regarding the emergence of the stage Irishman highlights, how certain stereotypes attributed to the Irish and Irish immigrants to America were created or more so propagated in the minds of the broad public. In addition, it shows how persevering such stereotypes can be over a period of several centuries. Even in the mid-twentieth century McCourt was facing many of these clichés – not only because he experienced harassment or ethnic discrimination, but also because these ethnic concepts and stereotypes were inherent in himself as a person. McCourt was trying to overcome these stigmata all his life. At first he was full of shame because of his health, his appearance, his poverty and education, later he was able to profit from these stereotypes through his memoirs.

3.2.3. Historical and Fictional Stereotypes of the Irish

Reviewing stereotypical representations of the Irish over various decades in literature reveals that not only in the fields of history and politics, they highly contributed to creating a distorted image of the Irish in the United States. In the course of history we have come across various derogative portrayals of the Irish such as “the simian laborer of the early mid-nineteenth century, the wispish leprechaun of the early twentieth, or the burly patriot of the 1960s” (Connors 1). Historically speaking, caricatures of the American Irish had surfaced long before the major migration waves of the 1840s. However, “by the 1850s, the images had

shifted from Fenimore Cooper's peasants, Hugh Brackenridge's 'Teagues', and Sara Hale's maidservants to those of shiftless parasites spawning large families that they were unable to support" (Connors 1f.). The Irish husband was considered a drunkard and wife-beater – a stereotype that was well fed by the newspapers. Of course the Irishman also had some positive sides to him,

[...] "but that was less broadcast – he was cheerful when sober, and willing to offer hospitality to relatives and friends. His notion of kinship was, in fact, a great source of amusement, since it extended to 'a cousin by reasons of his mother's grandfather being a half brother to a maternal aunt'. The Irish wife and mother was frequently drawn as unsociable, even quarrelsome, though such visions were often tempered in the literature by her concern for her children and her determined effort to hold the family together. (Connors 2)

Popular newspapers as well as weeklies frequently featured Irish prejudices, portraying caricatures "of pipe-smoking Paddies, slatternly domestics, and riotous corner boys. [...] Scholarly views reinforced the popular ones, since nineteenth-century historians were, in the main, genteel New Englanders, like Edward Everett Hale, men who viewed the Irish with distrust and suspicion" (Connors 3).

Although the stage Irishman was still prominent on Broadway in the 1920s, "members of aspiring Irish-American families occasionally replaced domestics and laborers in the spotlight" (Connors 4). This transition is illustrated in Jeff Branen's play, *An Irish Stew*, where "Irish traits were modified by middle-class American mores" (Connors 4), as the following playwright's description of Patrick Leahy shows:

Middle-aged and slight with characteristic make-up, typical bald Irish red wig and sideburns. His dress is of the average Sunday-go-to-meeting type; can be a swallow-tailed or Prince Albert coat; ... tan derby hat, standing collar and inflammable cravat. (Connors 4)

Leahy's efforts were greatly appreciated among the Irish community and by World War I, the middle-class Irish gained respect "in the eyes of old-stock Americans, particularly when they were compared to the new undesirables – the Italians, the Slavs, and the Jews" (Connors 4f.). In historical terms, the reception of Irish immigrants did not seem to undergo such evident changes in the same period of time. Connors points out that Frederick Bushee still marked Irish immigrants "as an inferior breed" (5):

At the present time, therefore, [...] [the Irish] show perhaps the largest proportion of socially inferior individuals of any foreign nationality. ... They gravitate toward unskilled work. ... Their complete conformity in religious matters indicates little creative power or independence of thought. Though it is true that in political life they

have developed leaders, even here their real power lies in their solidarity, in the docility of the rank and file.

It took historians another generation, before the Irish were re-considered and re-evaluated. In 1926 some immigration historians, among them Marcus Hansen, demanded research regarding this issue and put a new perspective on Irish Americans. His findings can be summarized in a comment in which he states that “[o]nce I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants *were* America” (Conners 5). Furthermore, researchers such as Oscar Handlin revealed “that urban environment and native discrimination were responsible for Irish poverty, disease, and crime” (Conners 5). The Irish American community was able to recover in terms of prejudices and by the 1950s the Irish had been a highly popular subject among researchers for quite some time which caused a decline in professional interest. Had the story of the American Irish really been told? Demurs from the Catholic side arose and suggested that while some stereotypes had been corrected, others emerged, especially pointing in the direction towards Irish Catholics being portrayed as “otherworldly” (Conners 5f.).

In the late 1960s and the early 1970s the role of the Irish woman (especially in family life) became a field of interest for some historians. Their findings were quite surprising and “now contradicted earlier assumptions, reporting that Irish families in nineteenth-century America were no larger than native-born families, that family structures did not disintegrate in urban settings, and that Irish women played important economic and familial roles, in holding families together” (Conners 7).

Literature has always been a meaningful source for analyzing social and political history. However, for the historian examining Irish-American issues, it became obvious that “fiction of the second and third generations was subjective and re-created stereotypes in a way that the immigrant press had for the first generation” (Conners 7). As a consequence, literature of that time had to be interpreted with caution if consulted as a source of historical data (Conners 7).

Undoubtedly, historical perception of the Irish who had come to America and their further generations has changed substantially over the second half of the twentieth century (Conners 8). Finally, most of the nineteenth-century stereotypes have been dropped and “Irish-American writers of fiction recognize the anachronisms of literature, time that their literature represent ‘what was’ and ‘what is’” (Conners 9).

3.3. Irish National Identity

“National identity is the cultural outcome of a discourse of the nation” and serves many purposes (Delanty 2). It provides people with a feeling of belonging to a group, which is characterized through a common experience, distinguishing them from other groups. Furthermore, it acknowledges “citizens of a nation-state” and lastly, it “influences the character and goals” of such a state (Delanty 2). National identity is a combination of “collective cultural” and “political” identity. Often being bound to geographical borders it features some sort of “compulsory nature”, claiming “universality” (Delanty 3). National cultural identity is characterized by values and rules in social institutions such as family, religion and education, whereas national political identity is implemented in political civic practices and institutions (Delanty 3).

Irish national identity in the period of concern: the first half of the twentieth century, was first of all formed by the creation of a “modern, mass identity” and secondly, by “its institutionalization in a nation-state” (Delanty 5). Prominent features of Catholic southern Ireland constituted “cultural anti-modernism and political authoritarianism of much of the Catholic part of [...] Europe (Delanty 5). Delanty (7) describes “post-colonial” Ireland to be “a clearing-house for difference and what is needed now are symbols of inclusion as carriers of a shift from the politics of sovereignty, in which difference has been played out, to a new identity base for a new politics”.

3.4. The Construction of Irish Identity in American Literature

Reviewing Irish characters in American Literature involves more than just detecting, examining, and illustrating stereotypes attributed to Irishness (Dowd 1). When analyzing the concept of how Irish identity has been constructed it is necessary to look at

[...] the characters with complex, even problematic, claims to that identity. It is not enough to look for simple patterns that confirm supposed ethnic truisms (either positive or negative); rather, we need to explore the discrepancies within, and the liminality of, Irishness during [...] U.S. history. Irishness is not and never has been a stable cultural concept in America, despite the supposedly essential and timeless implications of the ethnic stereotype. By studying the literary representations of Irish-American characters, we can witness just how dynamic and responsive Irishness has been to its shifting political and cultural context. (Dowd 1)

Furthermore, it is crucial to evaluate the maturation of Irish-American characters over time. Examining the American writers in the nineteenth and twentieth century will uncover that they used “the metaphorical presence of the Irish” (Dowd 2) to talk about social and political shortcomings. In a way American-Irish characters embodied public fear and, therefore, they

functioned as a voice for corruption, crime rates, “threats to public health, challenges to public welfare, the issue of temperance, labor unrest, and the decline of domestic manners and morality” (Dowd 2).

Irishness represented difference: not a binary difference as we have seen in African-American characterizations, portraying the Other or the outsider, but rather in a sense of deviance. The Irish-American character was not supposed to represent the opposite “of the white ideal in the way the African-American character was” (Dowd 2f.), but a form of “perversion of the Anglo-American, made all the more monstrous and threatening by its similarities to the mainstream population” (Dowd 2). Moreover, this form of stereotyping had a powerful effect regarding the defining of limits of white Americans. It clearly indicated how far an individual could go in order to stay in the realms of “white normativity” (Dowd 2). In addition, Dowd (2f.) suggests that

[m]ore so than any other ethnic identity in America, the Irish were monstrous doppelgangers for the dominant Anglo-Saxon population because they could almost pass as mainstream Americans despite what was believed to be their fundamental deficiencies.

Literature evolving around Irish immigrants becoming Irish-Americans and ultimately Americans is an essential part of the American narrative. Many stories have been told and written describing how “ethnic outsiders” became “cultural insiders” (Dowd 3). This is truly part of American culture and history and naturally a highly popular theme telling tales of “transformation [...], immigrant loyalty, communal allegiance, poverty, and ethnic bias [...] which are not obstacles to success, but rather tools for Americanization” (Dowd 3).

In the eighteenth and nineteenth century when mass Irish immigration to the U.S. started, examples for future ethnic immigrant communities were set. Future immigrant groups measured themselves against Irish-American writers in terms of immigrant narratives and “methods of self-representation and stereotype subversion; they learned how to write simultaneously for sympathetic and hostile readers” (Dowd 3). Furthermore, Dowdy (3) points out that

[American-Irish writers] established rhetorical strategies to subvert social and political expectations; they found ways to criticize their community without undermining it; they demonstrated how to use ethnic identity as an organizing principle for a novel or a play; and perhaps most importantly, they revealed how ethnic material could be both artistically and *commercially* [emphasis added] appealing to a broad segment of the population.

This is especially true of Frank McCourt's memoirs, which – above all *Angela's Ashes* – were an immense commercial success.

No longer can Irishness be seen as a negative marker in modern American society: it has been “absorbed into a homogenous white culture” (Dowd 4) and many Irish-Americans would find it hard to believe how differently they had been perceived a hundred years ago. In the twentieth century, Irishness was just one piece in the ‘salad bowl’ we call American society and has largely become invisible. An “almost complete assimilation of the Irish into mainstream American culture” (Dowd 4) has taken place.

Literary criticism on Irish-American literature can be divided into two generally different categories: “taxonomies of Irishness or histories of Irish-American writers” (Dowd 4). Taxonomies, in Dowd's opinion, do not quite offer satisfactory analyses of ethnicities. By applying taxonomies, categories of stereotypes are created which often lack further analysis. However, they do not provide any information concerning the “understanding of the significance of these types or how they function in a broader cultural context” (Dowd 4). Hence, taxonomies offer plausible strategies in order to detect or classify clichés or stereotypes. Nevertheless, this should only be a first step in the analysis: a method I shall apply as well, however solely to highlight the many instances of stereotypes in McCourt's memoirs. The next step to be taken is to examine the histories, i.e. “the lives and works of Irish-American writers” (Dowd 4) which is certainly useful, “but only provides half of the picture” (Dowd 4). According to Dowd (5), in order to achieve a thorough understanding of how Irish identity is constructed in America, it is crucial to examine how Irish writers not only perceived themselves, but also how they were perceived by others. As a consequence, authors of different heritage – not only Irish – need to be taken into consideration (Dowd 4f.). “Ethnic group identities are never constructed entirely from within, but always in interaction with other groups” (Dowd 6).

3.5. American Nationalism and Irish Immigration

Regarding identity formation and nationalism, the United States saw a radical shift which started at the end of the Civil War and continued throughout the turn of the century. Americans were confused about their national identity and attempted to search for common grounds as to what qualified an individual to be regarded as true American or patriot (Dowd 6). The following developments “led to this anxiety regarding American nationalism, the most important being the Civil War and its fallout” (Dowd 6).

After the Civil War national unity became a major objective which resulted in emphasizing “political, social, and economic cooperation as a tonic to overcome sectional animosity” (Dowd 6) during the period of Reconstruction:

The passing of the Fourteenth Amendment, which granted due process and equal protection to former slaves, radically changed the concept of American identity by legally eliminating race as a criterion for citizenship. Despite this, race still figured prominently in actual public perceptions of American identity. [...] The Civil War and ensuing era of Reconstruction did not truly usher in a new kind of multi-racial/multi-ethnic America, but instead inspired a large segment of the population to equate American nationalism with white Protestantism, a fact that would prove problematic for the Catholic Irish immigrant (Dowd 6f.)

Another significant factor contributing to American nationalism proved to be industrialization. Since many people depended on work in the city factories, they moved from rural settings into urban areas and found themselves in a pool of diversity regarding the population with all their ethnic backgrounds (Dowd 7). This new situation in an industrialized surrounding made “it harder for individuals to ascribe to non-local forces. Suddenly the slaughterhouse worker in Chicago depends more on his affiliation and cooperation with the Oklahoman rancher or the New York grocer than he does on his interactions with actual neighbors in Chicago” (Dowd 7).

Thirdly, the rise of American imperialism at the turn of the century is considered yet another key element leading to American Nationalism. The beginning of this period was pronounced by the Spanish-American War of 1898 (Dowd 7). America needed to present itself as a united and powerful nation, prepared to fight the enemy. This strife for nationalism or unity (especially in times of war) was reinforced by the media such as the press but also by literature (Dowd 7).

A nativist mindset led people to believe that “an American national identity was something inherited, not something acquired (Michaels 8, qtd. in Dowd 7) . This assumption suggests of course that immigrants were regarded as inferior to those born on American soil when it comes to representing a true American.

Investigating the waves of Irish mass immigration reveals that “the arrival of the Irish was akin to invasion” (Dowd 8) which is clearly expressed in the following statistics:

During the Famine years (1845-1855), nearly 1.5 million Irish immigrated the U.S. (Miller 291, qtd. in Dowd 8). In the years following the Famine (1846-1921), another 3 million Irish followed. By 1900, there were more Irish living in the U.S. than in Ireland (Miller 346, qtd. in Dowd 8). (Dowd 8)

Americans were shocked at the sight of “such a disadvantaged and impoverished immigrant group [...] and were frightened by the potential threat to already unstable American social integrity” (Dowd 8), thus unsettling an already fragile and unstable nation trying to form a national identity (Dowd 8). Due to their physical likeness and the ability to speak the same language, the Irish resembled the Anglo-American natives (the in-group) in a significant way. Nevertheless, Irish immigrants were pushed into the position of the “default out-group” (Dowd 8), making “their loyalties to their community, their heritage, and their church bec[o]me signs of their lack of loyalty to their adopted country” (Dowd 8) and stigmatizing them as utterly un-American.

In summary, American nationalism is a mental concept, which is usually created or invented when national identity is still in an unstable, fragile state and fear is a major factor triggered by threat. Americans at that time were not prepared to integrate immigrants of a nation which consisted of impoverished, dirty, sick, and unusual people. They were not prepared to belong to the same group yet (Dowd 8f.).

3.6. Irish-American Identity: The Importance of the Hyphen

In *'Tis* (116) Frank McCourt tellingly points out the issue of hybrid identities in America's society:

Why is it the minute I open my mouth the whole world is telling me they're Irish and we should all have a drink? It's not enough to be American. You always have to be something else, Irish-American, German-American, and you'd wonder how they'd get along if someone hadn't invented the hyphen.

But what exactly does it mean to be Irish-American with all its linguistic implications? For Brian Heron, only Irish citizens can be considered “real Irish” (Hallissy 17) and this goes along with the majority of conventional classifications. Considering the Celtic Tiger and the Post-Celtic Tiger Ireland, however, this assumption bears some problematic issues. Such as for example Irish immigration, which has been rather extensive regarding this era. If you ask people on the streets of Dublin about their origins, chances are that the answers are going to be Poland, Rumania or Slovakia – anything but Ireland. Over the past two decades, Dublin has been a major target of especially Eastern European immigrants. Naturally, this nowadays cosmopolitan center has been a favorable destination for tourists from all over the world.

The term “Irish American” without the hyphen refers to the fact “that the United States is different from, say, France or Spain, in that its citizens share geography but not ethnicity”

(Hallissy 17). This non-hyphenated term “connotes an American who belongs to the subdivision Irish; American is the noun, Irish the adjective describing it.

As a contrast, “American Irish”¹² signifies the opposite of the above-mentioned expression. “American” is now the modifier to the noun “Irish”. This might suggest closeness to Ireland of Irish people residing in the USA.

Thirdly, the hyphenated form “Irish-American” as Lynne Truss (*Eats, Shoots and Leaves* 158) has accurately pointed out that “the tricky tiny hyphen [...] is used quite distinctly to connect (or separate) individual words” (Hallissy 17f.).

These three denotations illustrate the issue of connecting an Irish identity with an American one. The term Irish-American is obviously the most appropriate one for “American people who are linked to, yet disconnected from the Irish” (Hallissy 18) and, therefore, seems most appropriate for McCourt’s memoirs.

In order to examine the concept of Irish-American, Irish American, or American Irish identity or maybe identities, I have to get to the roots of Irish immigration starting at the pre-famine generation.

According to James Byrne (*Paddy* 1), Woodrow Wilson (35-36, qtd. in Byrne *Paddy* 1) once said that “[s]ome Americans need hyphens in their names, because only part of them have come over; but when the whole man has come over, heart and thought and all, the hyphen drops of its own weight out of his name”. Over the course of the past century, Irish Americans have left their Irish past behind and have moved towards social and economical progress as American citizens. Leaving “the cultural hybridity of hyphenation” (or in Bhabha’s terms the entertained “difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy”) (Bhabha 5 qtd. in Byrne *Paddy* 1f.).) behind and adopting thoughts of Americanism would result in an “Irish American cultural identity whose” goals were nativist, defending “American nationalism against the foreign” (Byrne *Paddy* 1f.).

By the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century, Irish Americans served as a successful example for assimilation. However, with the birth of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and the resulting “pro-minority discourse”, Americans turned to ethnic roots in order to label their identity, only to find Irish American culture “stranded as a relic of Americanization, the unwanted offspring of national miscegenation” (Byrne *Paddy* 2). It

¹² Cf. for instance Kevin Kenny’s work: *The American Irish: A History*.

seems that this is exactly the hybrid space, Irish American culture is still located today: trying to position itself in the face of other, “more successful minorities” in search of its own ethnic identity (Byrne *Paddy* 2). This dislocation is asking for “rewriting its past as a tale of racial discrimination, in line with other more successful minority paradigms” (Byrne *Paddy* 2). Despite Byrne’s use of the expression “minority paradigms”, I personally would avoid applying the term “minority” to major groups of American immigrants, since it represents a rather unusual label when referring to the development, or current state of the American population. Especially in the discourse of Irish Americans, it seems inappropriate to speak of a minority.

In their recent works¹³ several critics and such as T.W. Allen, D. Roediger or N. Ignatiev have contributed “to the construction of whiteness in the nineteenth century America (Byrne *Paddy* 2).

Historically speaking, it has to be distinguished between Irish immigrants to the United States according to their time of departure or more accurately put, the historical and social circumstances resulting in emigration. For centuries, famine immigrants had experienced what it means to represent the “constitutional, racial, and even spatially Other”, however at the same time located in their homeland, Ireland (Byrne *Paddy* 24).

In the decade following the Great Famine (1845) an estimated 1.6 million Irish immigrated to The USA. At that time this figure represented a growth of America’s population of about 8 percent (Byrne *Paddy* 4). This significant shift in population had of course dramatic consequences in Ireland, however it also “challenged the economic, social, and political structures of American society. Moreover, this shift threatened members of “Anglo-Saxon origin and ethics of American identity (Byrne *Paddy* 5).

Pre-famine emigrants consisted mainly of Protestants and Presbyterians who were usually educated and wealthy searching for “independence, adventure and economic improvement (Byrne *Paddy* 5).

As a contrast, famine immigrants were characterized through being poor, unskilled and mostly “Roman Catholic males”. Overall, they came from rural, Irish-speaking areas, inexperienced in urban surroundings and life-style, seeking “congregation in impoverished,

¹³ in order of the authors mentioned above these works have the following titles: *Invention of the White Race*, *Wages of Whiteness* and *How the Irish Became White*.

immoral and unhealthy urban ghettos” (Byrne *Paddy* 5). They came from “beyond the pale” (Byrne *Paddy* 5).

‘The Pale’ used to be a physical border in the literal sense represented by ditches. These ditches were meant to mark the geographical and political region in and around Dublin called the ‘English Pale’. This marking of ‘the pale’ dates back to 1495 when a law was implemented, restoring the authority in Ireland to the Crown. This law would be in force for 288 years (Byrne *Paddy* 5f.). Even though “the Pale as a geographical entity had ceased to exist” in the seventeenth century, it clearly remained a psychological border and marker “of English identity (Byrne *Paddy* 6). “Beyond the pale” became an expression referring to the native Irish and their “Gaelic social practices” (Byrne *Paddy* 6).

The majority of famine immigrants to the United States consisted of men and women from beyond the pale and “continued to live in communities”, sticking to themselves as a group (Byrne *Paddy* 6). What is interesting about this and explains the origins of Irish-American identity is the fact that due to their previous positioning as “the Other” back in Ireland, these new immigrants were put in the same position in the “New World”. A new world is what they were faced with, yet in the immigrants’ minds there was still a fixed value system, a code of behavior and an attitude “that had been deeply affected by their past experiences and memory of the old land” (Victor Walsh 23, qtd. in Byrne *Paddy* 6). Byrne (6f.) continues to further elaborate the development of Irish-American identity:

The immigrant’s “past experience”, of living beyond the pale, inherently affected the way in which they perceived and received American social, cultural and political identity, particularly as they encountered in the New World representations of themselves as the cultural Other which had clearly been drawn on earlier British models. The psychology of Otherness, which at home had been occasioned by a sense of geographical and subsequent psychological displacement, would, upon their arrival in the New Word, become starkly represented in racial terms.

Although Byrne’s explanation refers to famine and post-famine immigrants, this concept can easily be applied to Frank McCourt, returning to America. Because of his accent he is constantly seen as the Other and being identified as Irish: clearly, certain stereotypes are attributed to him. These stereotypes contribute to some kind of reality, meaning that we all live up to our stereotypes at certain points in our lives whether we like it or not.

In *‘Tis* many episodes reflecting cultural encounters can be found which lead to inferiority, desperation and sometimes even anger on McCourt’s side. The following example taken from *‘Tis* (218) will illustrate this issue:

At the next meeting at the psychology class the professor asks me a question about Jung and the collective unconscious and the moment I open my mouth I know everyone is staring at me as if to say, Who's the one with the Irish brogue? The professor himself says, Oh, do I detect an Irish accent? And I have to admit he does. He tells the class that, of course, the Catholic Church has been traditionally hostile to psychoanalysis. Isn't that right, Mr. McCourt? And I feel he's accusing me. [...] They're listening only to my accent and there are times I wish I could reach into my mouth and tear my accent out by the roots. Even when I try to sound American people look puzzled and say, Do I detect an Irish brogue?

3.6.1. Imagined Ethnic Communities

In *Imagined Communities* (6), Benedict Anderson gives the following definition of an “imagined political society”:

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion ... all communities larger than primordial villages of fact-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. (qtd. in Dowd 9).

According to Anderson, nationalism as well as ethnicity are concepts, which have no manifest in reality. Furthermore, he proposes that “[m]any people believe in their inherent ethnicity (i.e., that there is something essentially Irish within them)” (Dowd 9).

In modern American society, ethnicity is seen as something positive, “as something that helps [contemporary Americans] resist homogenization” (Dowd 10):

They proudly display badges of their ethnicity and embrace their hyphenated identities in order to distinguish themselves from the crowd while also legitimizing and stabilizing their sense of self. In particular Irish-American identity has become a much celebrated ethnic identification. (Dowd 10)

Clearly, the concept of ethnicity and Irish-American identity as well as its perception by others has significantly changed over the past fifty years. Nowadays Irish-American identity as well as Irish identity in general “has become a much-celebrated ethnic identification” (Dowd 10).

4. *Angela's Ashes*

4.1. Historical Background

The aim of this subchapter is to give a brief overview of the historical and political setting of young Frank McCourt's life. In order to highlight the hybridity of his identity formation during the first nineteen years of his upbringing, I will summarize both, the historical backgrounds in the USA at the time – especially with a New York focus – as well as the one in Ireland.

4.1.1. Ireland between the 1930s and 1950s

Ireland in the 1930s was, to use Joyce's early referring to Dublin in the 20th century, a place of "paralysis". The first twenty years of independence marked an era trying "to roll back the threat of modernity in a whole variety of ways" (Delanty 155). The influence of the Catholic Church was significant and fostered a climate of religious conventionalism, imposing "a social system in which inequality and functional de-differentiation and stasis were acceptable" (Delanty 155). The Catholic Church in Ireland acquired power over institutions such as health care, education, art, economy and welfare. Family life, sexuality and subjugation over the female body (cf. chapter 4.2.4.), were also controlled by the Church (Delanty 137). Obedience at school as well as in all other social and private aspects was demanded. "Careers could be endangered by speaking out" (Delanty 138).

Unemployment had its roots partly in the clerical "indifference to socio-economic innovation" (Delanty 140) and partly in the 1937 Constitution. This Constitution, drafted by De Valera, did not bring about significant change regarding republican values or the government, however, it "marked a substantial shift in one key respect: the implicit primacy given to Catholic natural law over positive law" (Ward, 1994, p. 252, qtd. in Delanty 152). Therefore, one of the key ideas of a modern Europe such as inalienable human rights were set back given priority to "the general Catholic collectivity" (Delanty 153). Consequently, the problem of unemployment which was especially acute in urban areas and in this case in Limerick, was solved through emigration.

4.1.1.1. *Fianna Fáil*

Fianna Fáil was founded in 1926 by Éamon De Valera and represents the "largest and most successful of the southern state's post-Independence political parties" (Goodby 89). "It was a populist movement [...] [and] based on a pre-industrial block of interests which united urban

workers, the rural poor, and small capitalists and landowners, in a fight against neo-colonial structures” (Goodby 89).

When De Valera came into power in 1932, one of his first tasks was “to suspend the payment of land annuities by Irish farmers to the British government, which led through a series retaliatory measures into a full-scale ‘Economic War’” (Duffy 118). His policy was “to develop small domestic industries, although the damage to the agricultural sector, particularly to the small farmer group which formed the backbone of the party’s rural vote, led to the gradual decline of the policy in the late 1930s” (Duffy 118).

Regarding Irish social development, De Valera focused on education, Church-State relations and Anglo-Irish affairs, which traditionally had proved to be a delicate issue. The Oath of Allegiance and the Office of Governor-General were removed from the Treaty of 1921 and in 1937 a new Constitution was introduced (Duffy 118). In 1938, the ‘Economic War’ was ended through an agreement with Great Britain. De Valera took on a “policy of military neutrality during the Second World War” (Duffy 118). Maintaining this policy was challenging – especially after America entered the War – and required diplomatic ingenuity facing the pressure of the Allies as well as Nazi Germany. Although De Valera’s policies were in favor of the Allies in practice, Ireland adhered to its neutrality, which pushed the country in a less favorable position abroad (Duffy 18). At the end of World War II, Ireland’s government had become increasingly unpopular, due to “economic hardship, the emergence of new rival political parties and a series of scandals combined to present the image of a party too long in power” (Duffy 118). Fianna Fáil was defeated in the 1948 election.

4.1.1.2. Turmoil in the 1940s and 1950s

Ireland during the 1950s was characterized by economic difficulties and political instabilities. Ireland at that time had only experienced “two single-party governments during the first 25 years of the state’s existence and three short-lived governments (two ‘inter-party’ coalitions and one Fianna Fáil minority administration)” (Duffy 120) – all of them had “followed each other in quick succession” (Duffy 120). However, none of the cabinets had managed to deal with the tremendous problems the country was facing. In 1949 “the first inter-party government did take the dramatic step of formally declaring a Republic” (Duffy 120). This era was also dominated by several crises. Emigration had reached higher levels which had not been seen since the 1880s “and which came to symbolize the failure of the Irish state to provide a basic standard of living for its citizens” (Duffy 120). According to Duffy,

[...] [t]his increase in emigrants was due to a combination of factors, most notably the increasing use of machinery in rural areas which reduced the demand of farm labour, the lack of indigenous industrial development in the major industrial centres in Britain. All these factors conspired to siphon off enormous numbers of young Irish men and women, with the poverty stricken areas of the western seaboard being particularly badly affected. (120)

This repeated loss of population was aggravated by a subsequent decline in the marriage rate; It “was only with the election in 1959 of Séan Lemass [...] that the almost hermetically-sealed nature of the Irish economy and society was finally opened up to external influences” (Duffy 120).

This brief overview on Irish history regarding the first half of the twentieth century highlights the problematic circumstances the McCourt family had to face upon their return to Ireland. What they had tried to escape in the first place was still waiting for them in Ireland: poverty, disease and desperation.

4.1.2. Historical Background in the USA – Irish Immigration

Despite the curious fact that the McCourt family represents part of a minority of Irish-American immigrants returning to Ireland, I will briefly summarize the historical and political circumstances (cf. chapter 3) regarding emigration in which this family lived in the United States during the 1930s.

After centuries of discrimination on American soil, the Irish left behind most of it, as well as the impoverishment in the first half of the twentieth century. Until John F. Kennedy, the first President of the United States of Irish descent, was elected in 1960, Irish-American Catholicism was still of lesser respectability (Kenny 181).

The number of Irish emigrants to the USA declined significantly between 1901 and 1959. The US Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924 limited the quota of immigrants for all countries, thus forcing all immigrants to obtain visa before legally entering the United States. During the Great Depression and the Second World War the numbers of immigrants naturally fell steadily again to about 2.5 percent of America’s immigrants (Kenny 182ff.).

The reasons for the Irish to immigrate to the USA did not really differ from those in the nineteenth century. “[O]ngoing problems in agriculture and the landholding system combined with retarded urbanization and industrialization” (Kenny 183) certainly represented some of the main causes for emigration.

4.1.2.1. The 1930s and the Great Depression

Frank McCourt was born in 1930 and spent the first five years of his life in New York. In order to outline the circumstances under which the McCourt family had to live, I will give a brief overview of this period, which was severely marked by the Great Depression.

The start of the Great Depression I usually marked with the ‘Black Tuesday’, a never before seen stock market crash on October 29, 1929, “when the Dow Jones Industrial Average fell almost 23 percent and the market lost between \$8 billion and \$9 billion in value” (Taylor).

In the “Times Topics” section of the online Edition of the *New York Times*, Taylor describes the collapse of the stock market and the resulting crises as follows:

The stock market continued to decline despite brief rallies. Unemployment rose and wages fell for those who continued to work. The use of credit for the purchase of homes, cars, furniture and household appliances resulted in foreclosures and repossessions. As consumers lost buying power industrial production fell, businesses failed, and more workers lost their jobs. Farmers were caught in a depression of their own that had extended through much of the 1920s.

By 1932, the unemployment rate had risen beyond 20 percent and the American population was faced with a grim outlook:

Thousands of banks and businesses had failed. Millions were homeless. Men (and women) returned home from fruitless job hunts to find their dwellings padlocked and their possessions and families turned into the street. Many drifted from town to town looking for non-existent jobs. Many more lived at the edges of cities in makeshift shantytowns their residents derisively called Hoovervilles. People foraged in dumps and garbage cans for food. (Taylor)

It was not until the United States’ involvement in World War II, which was marked by the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, that the economy saw a slow recovery. However, this alleviation of the crises was largely owed to the defense industry with its “humming factories that supplied the American war effort” (Taylor). Unemployed workers found jobs in the factories, but “it was not until 1954 that the stock market regained its pre-Depression levels” (Taylor).

4.1.2.2. Ellis Island

‘The Golden Door’ as Ellis Island is also referred to, was the first building most immigrants between 1892 and 1954 entered upon their arrival on American soil. For many it was not the desired warm welcoming they had hoped for, but represented yet another strain on their exhausting and wearisome journey to the ‘Land of the Free’. It was not unusual to spend a full day at the port being examined and tested. About 12 million immigrants had to pass through

this major federal immigration station. “An examination of the history of Ellis Island reveals the origins of American diversity and offers a powerful and moving account of the immigrant experience” (Houghton 5).

In the first half of the twentieth century, Ellis Island used to be one of the most significant ports of entries to the United States. After the Immigration Acts mentioned above, passengers who arrived at Ellis Island had to undergo a process of inspection including being questioned extensively. People suffering from a disease, or having a criminal record, were sent home or were kept in hospitals for long periods.

For many immigrants Ellis Island represented the beginning of a new era and a new identity. McCourt managed to summarize the issues of entering the USA, putting himself into the place of people who hoped for successful immigration and naturalization, in the following passages:

Looking at Ellis Island and an old wooden ferry rotting between two buildings makes me think of all the people who passed here before me, before my father and my mother, all the people escaping the Famine in Ireland, all the people from all over Europe landing here with their hearts in their mouths for fear they might be caught with disease and sent back and when you think of that a great moaning moves across the water from Ellis Island and you wonder if the people sent back had to return with their babies to places like Czechoslovakia and Hungary. People who were sent back like that were the saddest people in all of history, worse than people like me who have bad eyes and the little red flag but are still secure with the American passport. (‘Tis 181)

This passage describes the fear and insecurity many immigrants felt when they arrived at Ellis Island. They were examined and checked for physical disease or mental illness:

Ellis Island doctors were particularly watching for signs of contagious diseases like trachoma, tuberculosis, diphtheria, and other states of health such as poor physique, pregnancy and mental disability. Any immigrant suspected of being in questionable health was chalk-marked with a letter of the alphabet ("B" for back problems, "F" for face, "H" for heart) and removed to a physical or mental examination room. Those immigrants with illnesses were sent to the Ellis Island Hospital.¹⁴

This quotation indicates that trachoma used to be a reason for rejection this is probably the reason why Frank McCourt was worried about his red eyes, the result of a chronic conjunctivitis he had been suffering from most of his childhood.

¹⁴National Park Service. Home Page. 3 July, 2012. 11 July 2012.
<http://www.nps.gov/elis/historyculture/people_doctor.htm>.

The following quotation taken from *'Tis* describes in an intriguing way how immigrants must have felt: being at the mercy of immigration officers and health personnel, being treated like animals at livestock auctions. They had come so close to realizing their American Dream, they were so close to literally seeing what was ahead of them: the buildings, the lights - a fresh start. Yet, they were treated as if nobody wanted them here in New York. What a setback this must have been.

[...] though I can't stop thinking again of the ones who were sent back with the bad eyes and the bad lungs and wondering what it was like for them in towns and villages all over Europe once they had a glimpse of New York, the tall towers over the water and the way the lights twinkle at dusk with tugboats hooting and ships blaring in the Narrows. Did they see and hear all this through the windows at Ellis Island? Did the memory bring pain and did they ever try to slip into this country through a place where there weren't men in uniform rolling back their eyelids and tapping at their chests. ('Tis 255)

Frank McCourt was born in the U.S., which made him an American citizen and holder of an American passport. For this reason he never had to undergo the process of immigration and naturalization. Yet, he felt for the people who did have to, which became obvious every time he passed the Statue of Liberty or Ellis Island on one of his ferry trips. Clearly, he was also reminiscent of his parents and what they must have endured – especially when their hopes were squashed in the face of the Great Depression, which ultimately forced them to move back to Ireland.

4.2. Synopsis

Frank McCourt was born in Brooklyn, New York in 1930. As indicated in chapter 4.1.2.1., the time was heavily marked by The Great Depression with the results of high unemployment rates and poverty. After the loss of his only baby sister only weeks after her birth, Angela¹⁵ is unable to take care of her remaining two little boys. This inability of providing proper care is mainly due to a depression triggered by the infant's death. Thus, the decision is made, or maybe forced on the family, to move back to Ireland.

The reception of the McCourt family in Limerick, Angela's hometown, is far from friendly, as on the one hand, coming back to Ireland is interpreted as the ultimate failure. On the other hand, Angela's husband Malachy is a man from the North associated with all the common stereotypes of that time: being a Presbyterian and Orange supporter. However, nothing could be further from reality, since Malachy has fought for the Old IRA. His problems are not religiously motivated, but rather rooted in alcoholism. Therefore, he has serious troubles to

¹⁵ Angela McCourt, Frank's mother (featured in the title of the memoir).

first of all find a job due to his northern accent and, secondly, *if* he manages to find employment he is unfit to hold his job - drinking the wages away and not being capable of getting up in the morning.

The Depression ridden, poverty stricken Limerick of those times only aggravates the circumstances for the family and the living conditions are horrendous. Moreover, the lack of proper sanitation as well as medical care causes the death of Frank's baby twin brothers. All that is left for the McCourts, is to live off "the dole" and welfare, borrowing and even begging. Upon Angela's pleas to her drunkard husband, Malachy McCourt, he sets off to work in England, where laborers are in demand. Full of hopes for a better future in expectation of telegram money orders, the rest of the family stays back in Limerick. Unfortunately, they will never be the lucky recipients of such a telegram.

Soon, Frank is left to take on various jobs in order to support his family and later himself after a fight with his mother. He continues to save up money - not solely in an ethical way – and finally succeeds in purchasing a boat ticket for the Irish Oak to get to New York. *Angela's Ashes* ends when Frank finally arrives there at the age of nineteen.

4.3. Key Episodes: Cross-Cultural Encounters, Hybridity and Stereotyping

McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* contains various stereotypes relating to Irishness, the Other, religion and so forth. In the following part of this thesis I will analyze my first research question: How are hybridity and stereotypes presented from different, specifically Irish-American perspectives in Frank McCourt's memoir? I will try to categorize these constructed stereotypes according to their nature in order to point out instances of cultural hybridity, especially in cross-cultural encounters. The opening passage in the memoir (AA¹⁶ 9) serves well as a summary:

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.

¹⁶ Henceforth *Angela's Ashes* will be abbreviated AA.

4.3.1. Representations of ‘the Other’

Frank McCourt provides several categories representing the Other, such as Irish upper class, Americans, English, Protestants, Jehovah Witnesses, Muslims and Jews (El-Tom 78). Due the immense popularity of the memoir, *Angela’s Ashes* has also sparked off rigorous criticism. Some critics have pointed out the racist discourse, which is cunningly disguised in “a harmless narrative of an oppressed child” (El-Tom 78).

The passages below will highlight binary oppositions and stereotypical representation of the Other. Notably, these representations often feature negative associations and attributes regarding the Other.

Based on the great influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland, the Irish perceived many things originating on the Continent or across the Atlantic as sinful. The Catholic Church imposed a nearly unsustainable moral codex on the Irish population.

The passage below, taken from *Angela’s Ashes* describes, how sin was lurking everywhere, especially across the shores from Ireland. The Other here is represented by ‘sinful’ America as opposed to pious, devout Ireland:

Last Rites and what is that sacrament called, McCourt? Extreme Unction, sir. That’s right, McCourt. Not bad from a Yank from the sinful shores of Amerikay. (AA 149)

Another example for otherness is illustrated in the following passage, where other religions and their believers are seen as heathens:

Priests and masters tell us Confirmation means you’re a true soldier of the Church and that entitles you to die to be a martyr in case we’re invaded by Protestants or Mahommedans or any other class of heathen. More dying. I want to tell them I won’t be able to die for the Faith because I’m already booked to die for Ireland. (AA 323)

Religiously based bias regarding Protestants in Northern Ireland was very common. Due to Ireland’s history, the North represents the Other par excellence:

That’s not a Limerick name. Where did you get a name like that? My husband, sir. He’s from the North. He’s from the North and leaves you here to get the relief from the Irish Free State? Is this what we fought for, is it? I don’t know, sir. Why don’t you go up to Belfast and see what the Orangemen will do for you, ah?

Racial stereotypes occur frequently in Frank McCourt’s memoirs. The following quote highlights prejudices concerning the other in British colonies and describe India and Africa as desperate places, a popular stereotype that was attributed to them. Postcolonial studies such as

Edward Said's famous work *Orientalism*¹⁷ analyzed the ways the Western World perceived Eastern cultures: primitive and aggressive.

Oh, says the librarian, he reads hundreds of books about English officers in Ireland. I've read some myself out of pure curiosity and you can see why those officers are glad to be in Ireland after all they put up with in India and Africa and other desperate places. At least the Irish people here are polite. We're known for that, the politeness, not running around throwing spears at people. (AA 355ff.)

The next passage reflects a conversation young Frank McCourt has with an Englishwoman named Mrs. Harrington. For her, the Irish represent otherness and she quickly applies various stereotypes regarding the Irish: they complain, they are starving and prone to alcohol abuse. England as the oppressor of Ireland tried to repress its guilt by viewing the Irish as inferior and constantly being dependent on Britain. Clearly, Mrs. Harrington is also referring to the Famine which put Ireland in the most miserable state.

I can't stand it. Here, more sherry. Ah, no, thanks. [...]. That puny Celtic whine. You people love your alcohol. Helps you to crawl and whine better. Of course you want food. You have the collapsed look of a starving Paddy. Here. Ham. Eat. (AA 414)

4.3.2. Language and Accent

According to phonetician J.C. Wells, "[a]ccents constitute an important part of many stereotypes" (29). Through listening to somebody, we collect information and apply certain concepts or stereotypes to that person in order to fit him or her into a 'slot'. Wells suggests that

Not only historical or quasi-mythical figures like cowboys are seen as stereotypes, but all kinds of categories of people: occupational groups (plumbers, piano-tuners, oil tycoons, hairdressers, nurses, reporters, [...]), national, local, or ethnic groups (Irishmen, American, Australians, Englishmen, New Yorkers, Glaswegians, Italians, West Indians, Chinese, Poles, Arabs), political groups (conservatives, communists, liberals and so on, depending on the political make-up of the community in question), age and sex-groups (old women, boys, middle-aged men, teenage girls), socio-economic groups ('lazy' workers, 'exploiting' bosses, respectable people you would be proud to be associated with, 'rough' people you would not be proud to be associated with, 'stand-offish' middle class people who give themselves airs, nouveaux riches, aristocrats, [...]) and many others. And in most cases the stereotype includes an appropriate accent. (29)

Sociolinguistic variation is common knowledge, which is not always accurate, however it "is a significant part of a community's shared set of attitudes" (Wells 29). We like to draw

¹⁷ Said, Edward W. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

conclusions and make judgments about people we meet based on their accents. We assume that their accents can provide us with information about their class affiliation or other personal qualities such as intelligence, etc. (Wells 30). In addition, accents immediately mark people as immigrants.

I selected the passages and key scenes below in order to illustrate, how different accents in cross-cultural encounters can create misunderstandings and are often heavily marked by certain stereotypes. Specifically in the case of a Northern Irish accent in the Republic, speakers were, and sometimes still are regarded in a negative way. Stereotypically, the “Northerners” are associated with Protestantism and Unionist politics. In other instances, a different accent can be the reason of social bias or even discrimination.

The following quote exemplifies, how Frank’s father is unable to find employment in the Limerick factories due to his northern accent. Yet, in turn, he criticizes the Limerick accent, equating it with lower working class, from which he tries to distance himself. This clearly shows, how accents can be a marker of social class and politics.

Bosses and foremen always show him respect and say they’re ready to hire him but when he opens his mouth and they hear the North of Ireland accent, they take a Limerickman instead, That’s what he tells Mam by the fire and when she says, Why don’t you dress like a proper workingman? He says he’ll never sink that low and the greatest sorrow of his life is that his sons are now afflicted with the Limerick accent. She says, Sorry for your troubles and I hope that’s all you’ll ever have, and he says some day, with God’s help, we’ll get out of Limerick and far from the Shannon that kills. (AA 115)

Since Frank McCourt’s father was a Catholic from the North who had fought for the IRA, he represented a man that never really knew where he belonged. Due to his religion he felt Irish, but in Ireland he did not receive a warm welcome because of his northern accent. In America he was unable to find a job because he was Irish and loved the drink. In the memoirs he represents a hybrid character who never felt like he belonged anywhere – not even his to own family.

In the next passage, Angela is pleased with the fact that her husband finally found a job, but at the same time she is worried, he might lose it again because of his provenience:

She says, this job could be the saving of us. ‘Tis hard enough fir him to get a job with his northern accent and if he loses this one I don’t know what we’re going to do. (AA 135)

When the McCourts return to Ireland and the boys have to attend school, they are ridiculed because of their American accents. Their Irish classmates relate their accents to the only thing they know about the U.S.: cowboys and gangsters:

The boys at Leamy's want to know why we talk like that. Are ye Yanks or what? And when we tell them we came from America if they want to know, Are ye gangsters or cowboys. A big boy sticks his face up to mine. I'm asking ye a question, he says. Are ye gangsters or cowboys? I tell him I don't know and when he pokes his finger into my chest Malachy says, I'm a gangster, Frank's a cowboy. The big boy says, Your little brother is smart and you're a stupid Yank. (AA 95f.)

The next quote illustrates, how English accents are related to British antipathy and that it would not be desirable to have your own flesh and blood speak the language of the colonizer, even if going to England would save them from starvation and poverty.

Mam herself could get a job in an English factory making bombs or something and God knows we wouldn't know ourselves with the money pouring in. She wouldn't be happy if we grew up with an English accent but better an English accent than an empty belly. Bridey says it doesn't matter what class of an accent an Irishman has for he'll never forget what the English did to us for eight hundred long years. (AA 276)

4.3.3. Religion and the Church in Ireland

Christianity represents the most popular religion in Ireland. Roman Catholicism is the predominant form in the Republic, followed by Protestantism in Northern Ireland including its various forms such as the Presbyterian Church, The Church of Ireland, and the Methodist Church.

Various records imply "that Christianity was first established in Ireland in the fifth century, mainly in the East and in the South-east of the country as missionaries from Britain, the most famous of these being St. Patrick, started to make impact" (Goodby 49). By the seventh century, the church had gained popularity and adopted local mythology "into its teaching and calendar" (Goodby 49). At that time, Christian scholarship and learning became a focus in Ireland, famous manuscripts such as the *Book of Kells* were produced, and Irish monks travelled to the continent influencing "religious life and theological doctrine" (Goodby 49).

At the end of the eighth century, the Viking Invasion first posed a threat to Irish Christianity, this however came to an end when the Vikings assimilated and became part of the local culture (Goodby 49).

The Norman Invasion in the twelfth century altered structures of the Irish Church and “[m]ore English and Anglicized bishops controlled the Irish Church and there were disputes among the Irish and Anglo-Irish in the monastic orders” (Goodby 49).

“After the Reformation, the established church in Ireland was the Church of Ireland which was under the suzerainty of the English king, who was also king of Ireland” (Goodby 50). In Anglicized areas, for instance the Pale around Dublin, the Church of Ireland was very influential. However, in the Gaelic parts of Ireland, Catholicism spread progressively as the Counter Reformation (Goodby 50).

Among the settlers of Scottish origin in Ulster, Presbyterianism was the dominant religion. Goodby summarizes Ireland’s religious landscape over the course of history as follows:

While [...] [Presbyterianism] has played an important part in Irish life since the sixteenth century, and helped to form the character of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy in the eighteenth century, the Church of Ireland has only ever had significant impact in urban areas and has had to play second fiddle to the Catholic Church and, in Ulster, the Presbyterian churches. (50)

4.3.3.1. Catholicism in Ireland

Catholicism became the most widespread religion in Ireland during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, “so much so that Irish identity and Catholicism have ever since been intertwined” (Goodby 42). The defeat of the Protestant Reformation strengthened Ireland as a country where Protestantism, the denomination of the English conquerors, was pushed to the position of a minority religion. In the eighteenth century due to the pope’s refusal to “recognize the Jacobite succession in 1766” (Goodby 42), Catholicism was not widely suppressed as it had been and was tolerated mainly on a local level. Nevertheless, Catholics were rejected from public life by the enactment of the Penal Laws (Goodby 42f.). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a Catholic middle class emerged which led to a gentry adding increasing pressure for political reform. After the Catholic Emancipation in 1829, the Catholic ascendancy rose and grew ever so popular and powerful in Ireland (Goodby 42). Furthermore, “Catholicism came to be closely identified with the objectives of nationalism, and self-government [...], [a factor which] was encouraged by the increasing alliance between Catholic clergy and nationalist political leaders in the country, a relationship which added to Protestant fears of the interference of Rome in Irish political and legislative affairs” Goodby 43).

While the Irish population declined due to massive emigration, “the number of priests rose by 150 per cent between 1861 and 1911” (Goodby 43). Through the support in nationalist affairs, the Catholic Church favored the Free State, where it could exercise “moral teaching” as well as “legal support” (Goodby 43). Censorship and playing a major role in matters of education, welfare provision and health helped to sustain this powerful position, which influenced the Constitution of 1937 (Goodby 43f.).

As frequently indicated in previous parts of this thesis, the Catholic Church in Ireland was probably the most powerful institution: socially and even politically. This certainly holds true for the time young Frank was growing up in Limerick. Naturally, any member of a different faith was doomed to hell and a declared “enemy” of good, pious Catholics.

The school system in Ireland in the 1930s and 1940s depended heavily on the Catholic Church. Education was based on religious knowledge and the subjects taught in history depended on the schoolmasters’ personal views. Overall, corporal punishment was a normal part of “teaching” and the curriculum was imposed on pupils in a harsh, often physically and mentally traumatizing manner. The following passage tellingly exemplifies these violent “teaching methods”. Fear was clearly *the* motivation for studying:

They hit you if you don’t know why God made the world, if you don’t know the patron saint of Limerick, if you can’t recite the Apostles’ Creed, if you can’t add nineteen to forty-seven, if you can’t subtract nineteen from forty-seven, if you don’t know the chief towns and products of the thirty-two counties of Ireland, if you can’t find Bulgaria on the wall map of the world that’s blotted with spit, snot, and blobs of ink thrown by angry pupils expelled forever. They hit you if you can’t say your name in Irish, if you can’t say the Hail Mary in Irish, if you can’t ask for the lavatory pass in Irish. It helps listening to the big boys ahead of you, They can tell you about the master you have now, what he likes and what he hates. One master will hit you if you don’t know that Eamon DeValera is the greatest man that ever lived. Another master will hit you if you don’t know that Michael Collins was the greatest man. (AA97)

The following extract shows the devious way the Catholic Church in Ireland exercised class distinction. The Church was powerful in all respects of society and the education of Ireland’s youth depended significantly on it. Frank was supposed to receive better schooling in order to gain good prospects for his future. Hence, he applied at St. Joseph’s to be an altar boy. At the sight of his pathetic appearance, the door was slammed in his face.

Well, she says, is he going to be an altar boy? There’s no room for him. Oh, she puffs on her Woodbine. I’ll tell you what it is she says. ‘Tis class distinction. They don’t want boys from the lanes on the altar. They don’t want the ones with the scabby knees and hair sticking up. Oh, no, they want the nice boys with hair oil and new shoes that have fathers with suits and ties and steady jobs. That’s what it is and ‘tis hard to hold

on the Faith with the snobbery that's in it. Och, aye. Och, aye my arse. That's all you ever say. You could go to the priest and tell him you have a son that has a head stuffed with Latin and why can't he be an altar boy and what is he going to do with all that Latin? (AA 184)

4.3.3.2. Ulster: Separation and Conflict

The North, Ulster, or Northern Ireland has its own story to tell. The history of The Troubles goes far back in time and Ireland as an island has seen many conflicts and tragedies due to religious segregation. Two opposing parties, Catholics and Protestants have lived side by side over the course of many centuries. They perceived each other as opposites, as the Other, although from a physical perspective they do not bear any differences. The only obvious difference lies in their religions. However, the long-ongoing struggle in Ireland has its roots not only in religiously motivated discrepancies. The conflict dates back to the seventeenth century.

According to John Darby (2003), the historical background of the conflict can be summarized with two major points:

The first is that the proximity of Britain and Ireland has guaranteed a long history of interaction and linkage. In addition to the military and political history of conquest and resistance, there were exchanges, many of them unequal, of people, cultures, goods, technologies, ideas and language.¹²

John Darby explains further:

The second general point relates to the peculiar nature of the settlement of the northern areas of the island of Ireland by English and Scottish settlers from the sixteenth century onwards. The 'Plantation of Ulster' attracted settlers from all classes, many of them smallholders or artisans. This pattern of settlement meant that the Protestant settlers lived in close proximity to the Catholic Irish who were cleared to the geographical margins but not exterminated. Within several generations the broad outlines of the conflict had been established. The territory contained two groups who differed in political allegiance, religious practice and cultural values. One group believed that their land had been stolen, while the other was in a constant state of apprehension. Northern Ireland still suffers from the problems of rival ethnic groups living cheek by jowl and in suspicion of each other¹⁸.

In 1921 the island was separated into two parts: twenty-six counties in the South gained independence and six counties in the Northeast remained under British rule as part of the

¹⁸ Darby, John. *CAIN Web Service. Northern Ireland: The Background to the Peace Process*. 14 Jan 2012. 12 July 2012. <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/darby03.htm>>.

United Kingdom. “The new state of Northern Ireland had an in-built Protestant majority (roughly 65 per cent Protestant and 35 per cent Catholic at the time of partition) and acquired its own parliament and considerable autonomy within the United Kingdom. Sovereignty was retained in Westminster, as was responsibility for defense, foreign policy and other UK concerns” (Darby 2003). A province cut off from the rest of the island, split in any sense. Home of so many identities, neglected by Britain and abandoned by the Republic: it was a boiling pot waiting to explode or as Darby puts it:

London was content to leave most Northern Ireland matters in the hands of the new Stormont administration. From its inception until the return of Direct Rule in 1972, political tension was constant in Northern Ireland, only varying in intensity. Sectarian strains were never far from the surface. A chronically insecure Protestant majority, an alienated Catholic minority, electoral malpractice, ethnic bias in the distribution of housing and welfare services, and a declining economy meant that the state could never command full political legitimacy. Nevertheless few observers could see the meltdown around the corner.

The following examples will show how religious aspects have been addressed in *Angela's Ashes*.

The passage below highlights the “centrality of the faith in Irish life” (Goodby 43). Many Irish immigrants to America tried to escape the heavy burden of strict Catholicism and, therefore, loosened their religious practices slightly. Frank and his brother Malachy were born in New York and did not receive this strict Catholic upbringing, which they would have in Ireland:

There is a picture on the wall by the range of a man with long brown hair and sad eyes. He is pointing out to his chest where there is a big heart with flames coming out of it. Mam tells us, That's the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and I want to know why the man's heart is on fire and why doesn't He throw water on it? Grandma says, Don't these children know anything about their religion? And Mam tells her it's different in America. Grandma says the sacred heart is everywhere and there's no kind of excuse for that ignorance. (AA 67)

When Angela is forced to receive welfare from St. Vincent de Paul Society and is treated disrespectfully due to her nice coat she brought from America and the fact that she has a husband who is from the North. Her friend Nora is very frustrated with this situation and ironically mentions the Quakers as a more reliable source for charity. For this reason she is accused of being a ‘souper’. The term ‘souperism’ “refers to the practice of proselytizing at the same time as offering food (often in form of soup) to the poor, reportedly a popular tactic of Protestant evangelicals during the Famine” (Goodby 222). Poor Irish Catholics who accepted this kind of charity in form of a soup were said to have sold their souls to the devil.

Do you know what we have here? We have a souper in our midst. We had the soupers in the Famine. The Protestants went round telling good Catholics that if they gave up their faith and turned Protestants they'd get more soup than their bellies could hold and, God help us, come Catholics took the soup, and were ever after known as soupers and lost their immortal souls doomed to the deepest part of hell. (AA 77)

The following quote describes the antagonism young Frank must have felt at the sight of rich, beautiful Protestants. While the Catholic Church propagated doom for everyone being of a different denomination, for McCourt this doom was well disguised. Again, this passage emphasizes the pressure that was put on the broad Irish population by the Church through suggesting guilt and fear:

On Sunday mornings in Limerick I watch them go to church, the Protestants, and I feel sorry for them, especially the girls, who are so lovely, they have such beautiful white teeth. I feel sorry for the beautiful Protestant girls, they're doomed. That's what the priests tell us. Outside the Catholic Church is no salvation. Outside the Catholic Church there is nothing but doom. (AA 214)

The last text passage in this subchapter illustrates, how Irish Catholics are stereotyped by, in this case, the English. Here, references to Celtic paganism ("Paddy ritual") are addressed which are stereotypical for Irish Catholicism:

Are you dead, Mrs. Harrington? I'm not afraid. Your face is icy. Oh, you're dead all right. I'll baptize you with sherry from bloody Catholic fascist Spain. I Baptize thee in the name of the Father, the Son, the – What the bloody hell are you doing? Get off my wife, you wretched Papist twit. What primitive Paddy ritual is this? (AA 413f.)

4.3.4. The Role of the Irish Woman and Sexuality

In order to understand how stereotypes in cross-cultural encounters regarding Irish women emerged, the following section of my thesis will examine their origins.

This subchapter is closely linked to the Catholic Church in Ireland and its powerful influence on its members, however in this case the focus is on female members. The role of the Irish woman was clearly confined to piety and devoutness in all aspects of life. Women were supposed to take care of the household, look after their children and serve their husbands in the best possible way. Due to the fact that any kind of contraception was illegal at that time in Ireland, they were forced to bear as many children as "God would want them to have".

Purity and virginity were expected of young Irish girls until their wedding day. Any violation regarding the often religiously based rules of conduct resulted in social ostracism and, most of all, secretiveness resulting in bigotry.

According to J. J. Lee, however, the role of women before the Famine in Ireland was quite different: “a wife’s earnings in domestic industry and her contribution to agricultural labour made marriage a viable proposition for the hardy but poor youth” (38). “[A man] would rely on the combined efforts of his wife and himself to eke out a modest subsistence” (Lee 38). After the Famine the situation changed and dowry gained greater significance. The downside from a female perspective to this was that women lost economic independence and made them much more vulnerable to male economic dominance” (Lee 38). Furthermore, Lee argues that

[a]s the wife made a lesser economic contribution in current terms to the household, the amount of capital she brought with her assumed greater importance. Because the daughter had little to bring except the dowry she got from her father her marriage prospects now depended more completely on him and she had to become more subservient to his wishes. The relative independence that daughters had enjoyed in choosing a mate before the Famine diminished. (38)

As a result, the marriage rate declined: “[b]y 1926 about 25% of women remained unmarried aged 45, compared with about 10% before the Famine” (Lee 38). The hopelessness of women’s marriage prospects in Ireland is also reflected by the high number of female emigrants. “Only about one-third of emigrants from Europe as a whole between 1850 and 1950 were women. But in Ireland the proportion reached about 50%” (Lee 38f.).

For Irish farmers, dowering two daughters would have equated a financial loss followed by a loss in social status. Therefore, many women were denied having their own families and marriage eclipsed for many young Irish people. Temptation now had to be handled in a different way:

Sex, therefore, must be denounced as a satanic snare, in even what had been its most innocent pre-Famine manifestations. Sex posed a far more subversive threat than the landlord to the security and status of the family. Boys and girls must be kept apart at all costs. (Lee 39)

This increasingly male dominated society “coincided with the growth of clerical power” (Lee 39). “The church was able to preach its doctrines in detail for perhaps the first time in Irish history to the mass of the people just at the moment when the new image of woman, and the new public obsession with sex, was gaining the ascendancy” (Lee 39). In addition, the proportion of “clergy to laity also began to rise dramatically” (Lee 39). Lee also suggests that

[d]utiful women teachers. Including many dedicated nuns, taught girls obedience, docility and resignation to the role assigned to them by a male providence, until the more gullible came to believe that the role was a law of universal nature and not simply the product of a peculiar and transient set of local circumstances. (41f.)

“It was a sick society” (Lee 42), where those who tried to escape poverty, hopelessness and spinsterhood, were forced to emigrate or ill fared. The following passage taken from *Angela’s Ashes* illustrates the role of the ideal Irish woman in the 1930s:

Everyone knows Irish girls keep themselves pure especially Limerick girls known the world over for their purity who have a man to come back to like Gerry Halvey himself. If a girl comes back after a year with a certain class of a walk that’s different from the one she went away with then you know she was up to no good with the Englishmen dirty horny bastards that they are. (AA 438)

Due to this standing of women in Irish society, men were also reluctant to invest in the education and training of women. If they were to seek employment at all, it was only for a short period: before getting married. Then women would assume their role as full-time housewife, which was the picture of the ideal woman. Through the vast majority of the twentieth century, the Roman Catholic Church has maintained its dominant position in Ireland. Professor Chubb (qtd. in Lee 59) “emphasizes three predominant characteristics of this political culture; authoritarianism, loyalty and anti-intellectualism”. Anti-intellectualism was also a factor owed to the Catholic Church, which left Ireland “cut off to a large extent from European Catholic life and thought, so it maintained its traditional ways and attitudes” (Lee 60). The relationship between the Church and the State was close which highly impacted the way the “Catholic moral code became enshrined in the Constitution and law of the State” (Lee 61). Concerning the role of Irish women the Constitution of 1937 (Article 41.2) declares that

[...] [i]n particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State support without which the common good cannot be achieved. [...] The State shall, therefore, endeavour, to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties at home. (Lee 60)

The massive influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland “makes it easier to understand the introduction of legislative provisions such as” (Lee 61): the prohibition of “the sale, advertising or importation of contraceptives” in 1935, the “mandatory ban on books or periodicals ‘advocating the unnatural prevention of conception’” in 1929 and 1946, “the prohibition on divorce law” in 1937, and the “protective clauses, such as the Factory Act in 1955, regulating the hours of work for women” (Lee 61f.).

Another passage from *Angela’s Ashes* illustrates the issue regarding birth control in the 1940s. Distributing British magazines and newspapers was not an easy task in Ireland at that time:

since advertisements of contraceptives were banned, they had to be removed, i.e. sometimes even torn out.

Hey, McCourt, wait. Listen. Don't give him all the page sixteens when you come back. Why? We can sell 'em, me an' Peter. Why? 'Tis all about birth control and that's banned in Ireland. What's birth control? (AA 440)

At that time, McCourt was sixteen years old and he did not have the least inkling what birth control meant.

Acts and legislations such as the prohibition of contraception, abortion and divorce “weaken[ed] women's reproductive rights and control of their bodies” (Goodby 256).

As already indicated above, the Roman Catholic Church also had a significant impact on sex and sexuality in (especially post-Famine) Ireland. “The Church's attitude to relations between the sexes was patriarchal, based on the beliefs that responsibility for Original Sin lay with women, and that this placed the onus on them to prevent sexual sin” (Goodby 217). All sexual matters were directly connected to guilt, which represented a burden that could only be relieved through confession. Hence, “extensive clerical monitoring” (Goodby 217) even strengthened the already powerful position of the Catholic Church in Ireland:

In this climate, sex and sin became almost synonymous. Women, from this point of view, were regarded as complementing men, but subordinate to them. They were effectively defined by their childbearing biological function as ‘Naturally’ destined for home-making and family-rearing, and work after marriage was either prevented or frowned upon. (Goodby 217)

Like many “aspects of sexual politics in Ireland, divorce is charged with a great socio-political significance” (Goodby 71). In the Constitution of 1937, divorce legislation had been neglected and therefore divorce remained a legal impossibility. After various attempts to defeat proposals of such a legislation it was not until a referendum in 1995 “that the nation voted by a narrow majority of 50.28 per cent in favour of divorce in cases where couples had lived apart for four years” (Goodby 72).

Abortion to this day still remains illegal in Ireland and “the abortion debate touches a raw nerve of national self-identity, and fears concerning modernization, the changing role of the family, and the increasing independence of women” (Goodby 2f.).

5. *'Tis*

5.1. Historical Setting

This chapter will give a brief overview of the historical events and the political situation in the USA of the 1950s. What kind of America did Frank McCourt encounter during his first ten years after his emigration from Ireland?

The United States after World War II and the following decade are characterized by economic growth and anti-communist sentiment resulting in the so-called Cold War, which would last almost half a century.

For fifteen years following World War II, the nation witnessed a period of unparalleled economic growth. A pent-up demand for consumer goods fueled a steady industrial expansion. And heavy government spending during the Cold War added an extra stimulus to the economy, offsetting brief recessions in 1949 and 1953 and moderating a steeper one in 1957-1958. By the end of the 1950s, the American people had achieved an affluence that finally erased the lingering memories of the Great Depression. (Divine 877)

Finally, the American people were able to indulge in material goods. “The obsession with material goods took on an almost desperate quality, as if a profusion with houses, cars and home appliances could guarantee the nightmare of the depression would never return” (Divine 876). Residential areas around major cities like New York for instance experienced a significant increase; suburbs grew by about fifty percent, whereas the city population remained basically stagnant. Another characteristic for this economic growth and wealth is the baby boom where young married couples had three to five children as opposed to one or two during the Second World War (Divine 876). “These larger families led to a 19 percent growth in the nation’s population between 1950 and 1960, the greatest increase rate since 1910” (Divine 876).

Despite this newly arisen prosperity, feelings of anxiety in the American population seemed to be order of the day. Various events abroad and especially the rivalry with the Soviet Union “[have] led to the second Red Scare, with charges of treason and disloyalty being leveled at loyal Americans” (Divine 877). Nuclear war was the sword of Damocles – frightening and real:

Many Americans joined with Senator Joseph McCarthy in searching for the communist enemy at home rather than abroad. Loyalty oaths and book burning revealed how insecure Americans had become in the era of the Cold War. Thus beneath the bland surface of suburban affluence, a dark current of distrust and insecurity marred the picture of a nation fulfilling its economic destiny. (Divine 877)

The years followed by World War II were marked by the growing conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. Even though they had tried to negotiate their fundamental differences regarding the division of Europe, postwar economic aid as well as the atomic bomb discussion, positions reached a deadlock (Divine 851). The result was the Cold War.

5.1.1. The Korean War

“The rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union grew in the late 1950s and early 1960s” (Divine 860). Both sides rebuilt their military forces, and “diplomatic competition spread from Europe to Asia as each of the superpowers sought to enhance its influence in the Orient” (Divine 860), thus the Cold War had become a global issue.

In 1945, Korea had been divided at the thirty-eighth parallel (Divine 863):

The Russians occupied the industrial North installing a communist government under the leadership of Kim Il-Sung. In the agrarian South Syngman Rhee, a conservative nationalist emerged as the American-sponsored ruler. [...] The Russians, however, helped train a well-equipped army in the North, while the United States – fearful Rhee would seek unification through armed conquest – gave much more limited assistance to South Korea. (Divine 863)

On June 25, 1950, the North-Korean army invaded the South, which was seen as an act of aggression on the American side:

Within a few days, American troops from Japan were in combat in South Korea. The conflict, which would last for more than three years, was technically a police action fought under UN auspices; in reality, the United States was at war with a Soviet satellite in Asia. (Divine 863)

American troops managed to push further north where they encountered the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army. Although The United States debated on invading China, this was never actually carried out in order to limit the war.

The Korean War settled into stalemate near the 38th parallel truce talks with the communists bogged down for the rest of [President] Truman’s term in office. The president could take heart from the fact that he had achieved his primary goal, defense of South Korea and the principle of collective security. Yet by taking the gamble to unify Korea by force, he had confused the American people and humiliated the United States in the eyes of the world (Divine 864)

5.1.2. Immigration after World War II

The fragile political situation as well as the destruction caused by the Second World War naturally had its effects on immigration in the United States.

World War II caused enormous damage to homes and factories in cities and towns throughout Europe, and reshuffling of national boundaries left many people unable or unwilling to return to their native lands. Some had collaborated with the Nazis during World War II and feared retribution; others scorned the communists; still others could not endure going back and rebuilding their lives amid the ruins. (Dinnerstein and Reimers 118)

America reacted to the misery in Europe and granted preference to displaced persons, which became the Displaced Persons (DP) Act of 1948. This act however turned out to be in favor of immigrants with a Christian background, discriminating against people of the Jewish faith. Therefore, this Act was amended in 1950, when “most of the Jewish refugees had gone to Israel” (Dinnerstein and Reimers 118) already. “Ultimately about 400.000 people arrived in the United States as a result of the two DP laws” (Dinnerstein and Reimers 118).

5.2. Synopsis

The sequel to *Angela's Ashes* begins where *Angela's Ashes* ends. McCourt left Cork on the Irish Oak in October of 1949. During an unintended stop further up north due to the bad weather conditions, Frank has his first sexual encounters in the free world. On the boat he meets a priest who wants to help him getting started in New York by finding young Frank a job at the Biltmore Hotel and a place to stay. This priest's intentions are ambiguous, on the one hand he is of great assistance to Frank, on the other hand he tends to drink too much and what is even worse, at one point he attempts to seduce Frank in a hotel room.

Working as a houseman at the Biltmore, McCourt is ordered to clean, sweep and empty ashtrays in the lobby and this is where he first encounters rich college students whom he hates but most of all envies at the same time. This is also the time Frank meets immigrants from other countries such as Puerto Rico or Jamaica but also Native American people who he calls “Indians”. He carefully observes their language and their culture, which the author reflects (not without stereotyping) in the voice of the young, naïve and sometimes desperate Frank McCourt: the Irish immigrant not used to cross-cultural encounters and the big city life. During his first time in New York, Frank experiences what it means to be Irish in America. He is constantly judged as soon as he opens his mouth due to his ‘thick’ Irish accent.

Frank seems to be constantly absorbing knowledge he gains from such cross-cultural encounters like a sponge. However, he also spends most of his spare time reading books such as *Crime and Punishment*, therefore also absorbing literary knowledge. McCourt certainly knows, that cleaning toilets and mopping floors is no what he expected his life to be like in

the United States. His frustration shows when he tries to drown his sorrows in various Irish bars.

During the Korean War, Frank decides to join the US Army seeing it as a way out of the Biltmore Hotel. He is sent to Germany where he trains dogs and later rises in his rank to a corporal because of his exceptional skills as a clerk typist. One of his dramatic experiences while being stationed in Europe is a visit to the concentration camp in Dachau only a short time after the Second World War. McCourt's time in Germany allows him to undertake a trip back to Ireland where he visits his family in Limerick as well as his father's side of the family in Belfast.

After his discharge from the Army, Frank takes on a job unloading trucks at the Port Warehouses. Again, turning to alcohol, his inappropriate behavior results in losing his girlfriend Emer to an "insurance man" (*'Tis* 172).

At the age of twenty-three, McCourt finally enrolls at NYU, which is solely possible due to his GI Bill, since he finished schooling in Ireland aged only fourteen. Struggling to make his way through college by working at the docks in several warehouses. Frank is very self-conscious about his accent and feelings of inferiority and shame arise during his classes. NYU is also the place he meets the girl of his dreams: Alberta Small, whom he calls Mike. She is the first woman he has a serious relationship with even though his parents would strongly disapprove of her, due her Protestant faith. Just like McCourt did with his previous girlfriend, he continues to mistreat Mike especially in times of excessive drinking.

In the summer of 1957 Frank completes his degree and passes his exams at the Board of Education, enabling him to teach English at high schools. Looking for a position as a teacher, McCourt has to overcome various obstacles created by his 'Irish brogue'. Several schools refuse to hire him as a teacher on grounds of his accent. He finally succeeds in finding a position at McKee Vocational and Technical High School where the author can gain valuable teaching experience, especially getting to know what it means to teach indifferent students who "don't want to read any dumb books" (*'Tis* 305) and whose only goal is to make their teacher tell them stories about Ireland.

In the meantime, Frank's brothers have also come to New York and lead a quite successful life there, starting their own families. In 1959 Angela and her youngest son Alphie arrive on the *SS Sylvania*, finally reuniting the family on American Soil. Alberta persuades McCourt into marriage in 1961, ten years later they have a daughter named Maggie. One day, a letter

from Belfast arrives, containing his father's pleas for a reunion. In fact, Malachy McCourt who claims to be a changed man meets the family in New York in a state of drunken stupor. Unfortunately he is not able to overcome his addiction and leaves for Ireland once more. This time however, for good. After having held various substitute teaching positions, Frank is offered a permanent position at the prestigious Stuyvesant High School.

In the last chapters of *'Tis*, McCourt describes his time being the Creative Writing Teacher at Stuyvesant. Unfortunately, his marriage with Alberta breaks down and Frank leaves the family one week before Maggie's eighth birthday.

During all this time, Angela's health is deteriorating. Frank's relationship with her is an ambivalent one. He describes his mother as a bitter, narrow-minded, overweight woman, who has been stuck in her old ways, refusing to accept progress and everything that is not Catholic. Filled with bitterness and a desire to die, Angela passes away at the age of seventy-three. We get a sentimental, truly sad response from Frank McCourt despite his previously mentioned ambivalent relationship to his mother.

In 1985 sad news reach the McCourts in New York: Malachy McCourt senior had also passed away. They fly to Belfast in order to pay their last respect to their father. During the seemingly bizarre funeral, Frank remembers his father, starting from all the bad things he had done to his family, how he had destroyed Angela's life. Nevertheless, there is a change in these bitter thoughts, he suddenly remembers the positive things about his father: the stories, his strong belief in Ireland and the Republic.

'Tis ends with the scattering of Angela's ashes in Limerick, an episode, giving the first memoir its title.

5.3. Key Episodes: Cross-Cultural Encounters, Hybridity and Stereotyping

This section will analyze various instances of cross-cultural encounters in *'Tis*. This includes religion, language and accent, ethnicity and the use of stereotypes and prejudices. Being transferred to a new cultural setting and in this case a rather multicultural one, may lead to difficulties in the sense of belonging. Feelings of hybridity are certainly the outcome of this as Frank McCourt describes so vividly.

5.3.1. Cross-Cultural Understanding from a Psychological Perspective

'Tis offers a wide range of cross-cultural encounters, more so than its prequel *Angela's Ashes*. These cross-cultural encounters are described under various aspects and circumstances, which

will be illustrated in the following chapters. First of all, however I will summarize the main concepts of cross-cultural understanding from a psychological perspective. In addition, I will also touch upon the “problem of stereotypes and prejudices as an important aspect of the process of cross-cultural understanding” (Six 42).

According to Ulrike Six cross-cultural understanding is

[...] a complex multidimensional process including mutually interrelated cognitive, affective and behavioral processes. Its ultimate goals and results are to acquire knowledge about, and insight into, intracultural elements, patterns and phenomena of the foreign (as well as of one’s own) culture, into intercultural relations, similarities and differences between one’s own and the foreign culture [...]. (43)

Stereotypes are part of a cross-cultural understanding. Stereotypes and prejudices are “socially and culturally shared beliefs and attitudes towards social categories or groups” (Six 47). Prejudices however,

[...] are seen as manifestations of these pictures attitudes and beliefs. They are conceptualized as affective and behavioral components of the same subject, resulting in special kinds of social judgments and behavior tendency or avoidance, under certain conditions even in social discrimination. (Six 47)

Prejudices and cross-cultural understanding are closely connected in terms of social-cognitive processes (Six 48). Prejudices are determinants in the way we process information within a social context. Our environment is too complex, therefore we apply shared beliefs regarding various social categories in order to facilitate our orientation (Six 48). Such categorizations “occur in the context of social comparisons” (Six 49). Furthermore, they “fulfill emotional and social functions: they are based on the general human need for self-identification and on the motivation to achieve and maintain a positive self-identity” (Six 49). Thus, one’s own group is perceived “as distinctive and superior to relevant other groups, resulting in ingroup favoritism” (Six 49).

Alexander Thomas claims that “an intercultural exchange can be characterized by the fact that a person or a group of persons who have grown up in a specific cultural environment leaves his home culture and enters a foreign culture, stays there [...] and tries to [...] reach his goals under these foreign cultural conditions” (287). Communication becomes difficult because of misunderstood reactions. This might even lead to a culture shock, a concept, which suggests that cultural encounters are experienced unexpectedly and unpleasant, or even trigger negative perceptions of one’s own culture.

“Comprehensive and effective cross-cultural understanding needs direct experiences with the hosts in the host cultural environment” (Thomas (290).

Cross-cultural understanding can be interpreted as the desired outcome of cross-cultural encounters. However, in *'Tis* we find numerous episodes where common stereotypes are plainly presented. In many cases an understanding of different cultural patterns has not really occurred yet, prejudices are frequently portrayed in a rather ironic style.

5.3.2. Religion

The theme of Protestants as a representation of the ‘archenemy’ has been carried over from *Angela's Ashes*. Having arrived in New York, Frank McCourt finds himself in a multicultural environment where religious freedom is practiced. His first encounters with Protestants are rather surprisingly very positive - given the prejudices he was raised with in Ireland. Protestants in Ireland were perceived as the British, the enemy: as the Other. In America this is different.

My mother used to say you could spot Protestants a mile away by their reserved manner. (*'Tis* 16)

Given the binary opposition of Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, members of a particular faith were easily spotted. On the one hand this is due to the close-knit communities at that time, where everybody knew each other, and on the other hand owed to various stereotypes and prejudices. A multicultural environment impedes the application of imminent stereotypes, particularly on religious grounds.

When Frank is back in Europe due to his serving in the U.S. Army, he decides to pay a visit to his father in Northern Ireland. Here, the religious differences take on a prominent position once again: Frank's father, a Catholic in Northern Ireland, is regarded an outsider.

I'm not in the mood for talk but I have to be polite to the man even when he says the McCourts of Moneyglass are a fine family even if they're Catholics. Even if they're Catholics. (*'Tis* 150)

On a second occasion, many years later, Frank decides to visit his father again. During the visit, he makes plans to go on a trip to the Protestant area in Belfast, notoriously known as Shankill Road. Belfast is a city full of oppositions, and segregation on grounds of religious beliefs is a prominent factor (cf. chapter 4.2.3.2). Shankill Road as well as Falls Road – the Catholic opposite – share a sad reputation and these places are history-charged. Even though these roads are in immediate vicinity it could have been deadly to walk on either one of them

not too long ago. The sole reason for being beaten up or even shot in these areas would be walking down Shankill Road as Catholic or taking a stroll on Falls Road being Protestant. Daunting murals and painted curbs are intimidating signs to keep the “enemy” out.

When we returned to his house I told my uncle I’d like to walk through the Protestant area, the Shankill Road. He shook his head. Quiet man. I said, Why not? Because they’ll know. What will they know? They’ll know you’re a Catholic. How will they know? Och, they’ll know you’re a Catholic. (‘Tis 442)

Frank immediately associates the man whom he assumes to be a Protestant, as a member of the Orange Order, marching around and commemorating the victory of William of Orange over Catholic James II at the Battle of the Boyne. Until this day these marches are seen as a provocation by many Catholics and give reason to violent outbreaks every year:

The man lets me out and when I say thanks I wonder to myself if he marches around on the twelfth of July beating a drum with the other Protestants but he has a kind face and I can’t imagine him beating a drum for anything. (‘Tis 150)

On Fifth Avenue, Frank observes some people on their way to St. Patrick’s Cathedral. He envies them in a way because they can attend mass having gone to confession. Frank still seems traumatized by the alleged sins he has committed. He thinks that what he has done is too grave that no priest will ever absolve his sins. This is a childhood trauma Frank cannot escape, not even in his late years. Too strong are the fears by which he had been influenced by the Catholic Church in Ireland:

I’d like to make my peace with God but my sins are so terrible any priest would drive me from the confessional and I know once again my only hope for salvation is that I’ll have an accident where I’ll linger for a few minutes so that I can make an Act of Perfect Contrition that will open the gates of heaven. (‘Tis 350)

Frank’s brother Michael wants to marry a Protestant girl which is nothing unusual in the United States, however an immoral act in the Catholic mind of Angela McCourt. She despises Protestants in such a vigorous way that she will not even attend her son’s wedding. In addition, she is utterly disappointed due to the fact that her son will not have a Catholic ceremony in a Catholic church, in the presence of a Catholic priest:

There was her lovely son Michael getting married and no sign of a priest, nothing but a Protestant minister in the living room who could pass for a grocer or for an off-duty policeman in his collar and tie. Malachy had rented two dozen folded chairs and when we took our places I noticed Mam’s absence. [...] especially the sight of her lovely son Michael falling into the clutches of Protestants and their ministers. (‘Tis 374f.)

As discussed in chapter 4.2.4., abortion is still illegal in Ireland to this day. This is certainly due to the significant influence of the Catholic Church. In the Catholic Canon abortion is an

act of murder and can lead to excommunication. Thus, for Angela, women having committed such a sin are doomed. Since she also moved to the United States to live with her children, she is cross-culturally confronted with different moral codes.

I just want to die. Oh, stop. You'll be out by Christmas. You'll be dancing. I will not be dancing. Look, there's women running around this country getting abortions right and left and I can't even die. What in God's name is the connection between you and women getting abortions? Her eyes filled. Here I am in the bed, dying or not dying, and you're tormenting me with theology. (*'Tis* 465)

5.3.3. Language and Accent

Chapter 4.2.2. already indicated how different accents are associated with certain stereotypes in our minds. During his first period of time in New York, Frank becomes acquainted with the New York accent. In linguistic terms, this accent is known for omitting the post-vocalic /r/. The New York City accent as well as the Boston accent (particularly in lower varieties) are described as non-rhotic, which represents a prominent marker. Frank has started to familiarize himself with the American way of life and selects things he likes about his new country – such as food for instance – on other occasions, he feels like an outsider and the reason for this lies in his Irish accent.

Waw. That's what she says. She really means war but she's like all Americans who don't like to say "r" at the end of the word. They say caw instead of car and you wonder why they can't pronounce words the way God made them. I like lemon meringue pie but I don't like the way Americans leave out the "r" at the end of a word. (*'Tis* 22f.)

The following passage describes rather accurately that, apart from a distinctive accent, Americans tend to use different vocabulary: vocabulary Frank is not used to. Often, these different usages of words referring to one and the same item or aspect are so embedded in a certain variety that they will quickly expose "foreigners". In this section Frank also criticizes the American preference for euphemisms, whereas the Irish tend to be more direct in their language. Therefore, in addition to getting used to a different accent, Frank has to learn new vocabulary even though he speaks the same language.

In America a torch is called a flashlight. A biscuit is called a cookie, a bun is a roll. Confectionary is pastry and minced meat is ground. Men wear pants instead of trousers and they'll even say this pant leg is shorter than the other which is silly. When I hear them saying pant leg I feel like breathing faster. The lift is an elevator and if you want a WC or a lavatory you have to say bathroom even if there isn't a sign of a bath there. And no one dies in America, they pass away or they're deceased and when they die the body, which is called the remains, is taken to a funeral home where people just stand around and look at it and no one sings or tells a story or take a drink and then it's

taken away in a casket and interred. They don't say coffin and they don't like saying buried. They never say graveyard. Cemetery sounds nicer. ('Tis 60)

During his time in the U.S. Army, Frank is stationed in Germany. Finding himself in such a multi-cultural environment, he is often identified as Irish due to his accent. This puts him into a strange position because it appears unusual for a seemingly Non-American to serve in the U.S. Army. His accent is frequently subject of debate. The quotation below illustrates Frank's peculiar position; again he is judged on grounds of his Irish accent, or as it is referred to in a more derogative way: brogue.

Do what you're told, keep your mouth shut especially when you have a brogue that stands out, and if you do that you'll see your girlfriend again with your balls intact. ('Tis 100)

Frank's Irish accent seems to be a negative social marker – at least for him personally. This goes as far as having developed a kind of anxiety every time he opens his mouth. He may appear American, but as soon as he speaks out, he is identified as Irish and all imaginable stereotypes having been applied to this nation suddenly emerge. This might not actually be the case all the time for everybody, what is crucial here is that Frank feels this way. He feels stigmatized and, therefore, suffers from low self-esteem:

It's the same with Catholicism. If I answer a question they hear my accent and that means I'm a Catholic and ready to defend Mother Church to the last drop of my blood. Some professors like to taunt me by sneering at the Virgin Birth, the Holy Trinity, the celibacy of St. Joseph, the Inquisition, the priest-ridden people of Ireland. ('Tis 231)

The next passage illustrates Frank's inner conflict and how he is torn between two cultures. Again, he blames his accent for not being accepted as a person but for being stigmatized. His insecurity progresses to an extent where he refuses to speak. During his time serving in Europe, he wears an American uniform, which makes his appearance American. His accent however will unmask his real Limerick identity and he assumes that people in the North will judge him. One minute he is admired as an American soldier, the next he will be ignored due to his Limerick origin. In Northern Ireland he is not accepted for being from the South wearing a U.S. Army uniform. His unstableness triggers thoughts of acting through putting on an American accent. Yet, he rejects these thoughts because his acting would not be very convincing or even credible:

If I go to the North in a train I should wear my uniform for the admiration I'm sure to get though I know if I open my gob with my Limerick accent people will turn away or stick their heads in books and newspapers. I could put on an American accent but I

already tried that with my mother and she went into hysterics, laughing. She said I sounded like Edward G. Robinson under water. If anyone talks to me the only thing I can do is nod my head or shake it or put on the look of a secret sadness caused by a severe war wound. ('Tis 147)

In another instance, and from a different (Irish) perspective, Frank is perceived as a 'Yankee soldier' and the children are mocking an American accent. Here, he is seen as an American: rich, generous and known for chewing gum:

I'm sure my brothers Michael and Alphie are bragging to the whole world that I'm coming home and they'll be sad if I don't stroll down the lane in my corporal's stripes. The minute I go down the steps of the National Hotel the boys at the Lyrical Cinema call across Pery Square, Hoi, Yankee soldier, yoo hoo, do you have any choon gum? Do you have a spare shilling in your pocket or a bar of candy in your pocket? They pronounce candy like Americans and that makes them laugh so hard they fall against each other and the wall. ('Tis 131)

During McCourt's time as a student at NYC, his insecurity continues based on his Irish accent. He does not even dare to raise his hand because he fears he will be reduced to his 'brogue':

Some students raise their hands and ask questions but I could never do that. The whole class would stare at me and wonder who's the one with the accent. I could try an American accent but that never works. When I try it people always smile and say, Do I detect an Irish brogue? ('Tis 189)

The quote below clearly demonstrates Frank's fear of being identified as Irish. It almost seems as if he is paranoid and so inhibited that everything he says will be related to Ireland with all associated stereotypes. His accent is something he cannot camouflage even if he desires to do just that. This leaves him so desperate that he wishes he could tear his accent out of his mouth:

At the next meeting at the psychology class the professor asks me a question about Jung and the collective unconscious and the moment I open my mouth I know everyone is staring at me as if to say, Who's the one with the Irish brogue? The professor himself says, Oh, do I detect an Irish accent? And I have to admit he does. He tells the class that, of course, the Catholic Church has been traditionally hostile to psychoanalysis. Isn't that right, Mr. McCourt? And I feel he's accusing me. [...] They're listening only to my accent and there are times I wish I could reach into my mouth and tear my accent out by the roots. Even when I try to sound American people look puzzled and say, Do I detect an Irish brogue? ('Tis 218)

After receiving only a temporary teachers' license due to his Irish accent, Frank starts to apply for teaching positions. They even suggest speech classes for him in order to 'improve' his pronunciation but more so, to reduce or even eliminate his Irish accent. He has no ambitions to apply for renowned high schools on the basis of his lack of self-esteem. But even the most

‘difficult’ schools in terms of teaching refuse to employ him. Again, he is ridiculed and labeled “Paddy-off-the-boat”, a term which was assigned to Irish immigrants, having just arrived in the U.S.:

The Academic Chairman at Grady Vocational High school in Brooklyn says, yeah, he’d like to help me out but, You know, with that brogue you’d have trouble with the kids, they might think you talk funny and teaching is hard enough when you speak properly and doubly hard with a brogue. He wants to know how I passed the speech part of the teachers’ license examination and when I tell him I was issued a substitute license on condition I take remedial speech he says, Yeah, maybe you could come back when you don’t sound like Paddy-off-the-boat, ha ha ha. He tells me in the meantime I should stick with my own people, he’s Irish himself, well, three-quarters Irish and you never know with other people. (‘Tis 280)

Similar to the quote above, McCourt describes his difficulties in finding a teaching position on grounds of his accent. This passage however, illustrates a slight change in attitude towards Irish accents. For the first time it is described as charming – still, Frank is rejected and not taken seriously. Teaching recruiters from NYU compare him to famous Hollywood actors of Irish origin. This also shows that during the 1950s the Irish in America had started to be rehabilitated by society.

I sit on the Staten Island Ferry thinking of teacher recruiters from suburban high schools at NYU, how they told me I seemed intelligent and enthusiastic but really my accent would be a problem. Oh, they had to admit it was charming reminded them of that nice Barry Fitzgerald in *Going My Way* but but but. They said they had high standards of speech in their schools and it wouldn’t be possible to make an exception in my case since the brogue was infectious and what would parents say if their kids came home sounding like Barry Fitzgerald or Maureen O’Hara? (‘Tis 286)

The rehabilitation of the Irish in America is partly rooted in the second, third, fourth, etc. generations of Irish-Americans. Most of them had established themselves in society and some were quite successful. The following quote also refers to the fondness of many Americans to refer to their origins, the use a (cultural) hyphen to refer to their ethnicity (as indicated in Chapter 3.6.). Furthermore, this quote illustrates, how Americans like to ‘discover their roots’ and how they like to talk about their ancestry. At the same time it clearly shows that many of these ‘hyphenated’ Americans only show superficial interest regarding their cultural origins. In reality, many Irish-Americans for instance have lost touch with the (real) culture and politics of their ancestors. The woman in this passage, for example does not fully comprehend the causes of the conflict between Catholics and Protestants:

Oh, you're Irish. It's so nice to hear the brogue here. She tells me her ancestry and wants to know where I came from, when I came, will I ever go back, and why are the Catholics and Protestants always fighting in the Old Country. ('Tis 302)

Again, Frank's accent gives reason to relate to Irish ancestry when he applies for a loan to visit his mother in Ireland. The man at the Beneficial Finance Company refers to the large number of children Irish families used to have. This is also a hint at the Catholic Church banning contraception and, therefore, making birth control unavailable to the Irish, forcing impoverished families to have more children than they could possibly feed. This quote also points out the high mortality rate of children in Ireland in the past centuries.

The man at the Beneficial Finance Company says, Do I detect a brogue? He tells me where his mother and father came from in Ireland and how he plans to visit himself though that'd hard with six kids, ha ha. His mother comes from a family of nineteen Can you believe that? He says. Nineteen kids. Of course, seven died but what the hell. That's how it was in the old days in the Old Country. They had kids like rabbits. ('Tis 356)

In *'Tis* accents are frequently equated with identity. When Frank undertakes a trip to his old country, people assume he has not changed at all on the sole basis of his inherent accent. It is curious, that Frank McCourt never shook off or even changed his Irish accent. Perhaps, in the end it was the one thing that saved him as he stated in many interviews¹⁹.

They meet me on the streets and tell me I look grand, that I look more like a Yank all the time. Alice Egan argues, Frankie McCourt hasn't changed on hour, not one hour. Isn't that right, Frankie? I don't know, Alice. You don't have the slightest bit of an American accent. ('Tis 360)

Back on a visit to Ireland, Angela watches her granddaughter Maggie play on grass. She mentions that she would love for her to "grow up with an Irish accent", although she does not mind her speaking with an American accent. It seems that what she is actually trying to convey is that she would love her to be truly Irish – not hyphenated Irish.

We looked at children wrestling in the grass and Mam said it would be lovely to stay here a few years and see Maggie grow up with an Irish accent, not that she had anything against the American accent, but wasn't it a pure pleasure to listen to these children and she could see Maggie growing up and playing on this very grass. ('Tis 444)

5.3.4. The Hyphenated Self and Hybridity: In Between Cultures

Hybridity in cultural terms as it has been elaborated in chapter 3.1.1., represents a crucial feature throughout Frank McCourt's life. It seems as if he never felt as if he truly belonged

¹⁹ cf. Interview with Frank McCourt featured on YouTube (2'12'')
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QqUzuBp-2E>>.

somewhere. In his books he describes himself as this hybrid character, a fact that troubled him deeply throughout his life, as the following quotations will show. Only later, he found a way to use this cultural hybridity to his advantage when he started his teaching career.

The subsequent passages serve as examples for hybrid identities. It is very often the case that immigrants have significant difficulties adapting to a new culture and at the same time preserving the culture of their origins.

The passage below illustrates Frank's troubled hybrid identity perfectly well. He is on a plane, returning to New York from Ireland. His attitude towards Ireland seems to have changed into a more positive direction. Whereas, the first time he emigrated he could not wait to leave Ireland and he was full of expectations and dreams going to America. Many years later he reconciled himself with the bitterness he had felt towards Ireland, the hardships he had to endure in this country. Still, he does not know, where he belongs:

The plane lifts into a western sun which touches the Shannon with gold and even though I'm happy to be returning to New York I hardly know where I belong anymore. (*'Tis* 361)

Frank's lack of self-esteem due to his accent and his appearance prevents him from acting freely in terms of speech. If he were not 'stigmatized' he would not have to be pinned down to his Irishness on a constant basis. At NYU he has to justify his origins, which he is actually trying to escape. He feels pressured by only being perceived as Irish although he certainly is much more.

If I didn't have red eyes and an Irish accent I could be purely American and I wouldn't have to put up with professors tormenting me with Yeats and Joyce and the Irish Literary Renaissance and how clever and witty the Irish are and what a beautiful green country it is though priest-ridden and poor with a population ready to vanish from the face of the earth due to puritanical sexual repression and what do you have to say to that, Mr. McCourt? (*'Tis* 232)

In New York, Frank encounters an old man who advises him to stick to the Irish community. The old man seems to refuse to adept himself to the American way of life and cherishes the morals and rites of the 'old country'. Frank, on the other hand, is young and willing to take in this new American experience. He wants to embrace every bit of it but is hindered by his Irish past. Frank and the old man represent true opposites: one refusing to transgress, or perhaps having given up on trying, and the other one trying to change, to forget, to excel. Frank wants

to do better, to have a fulfilled life and rejects the idea of being forced to follow the traditional Irish curriculum vitae: getting married to an Irish woman, producing many children and living the life of a farmer:

From time to time the old man leaned around Paddy to tell me, Stick to your own: I'm in New York, land of the free and home of the brave, but I'm supposed to behave as if I were still in Limerick, Irish at all times. I'm expected to go out with Irish girls who frighten me with the way they're always in a state of grace saying no to everything and everyone unless it's a Paddy Muck who wants to settle on a farm of land in Roscommon and bring up seven children, three cows, five sheep and a pig. I don't know why I returned to America if I have to listen to the sad stories of Ireland's sufferings and dance with country girls, Mullingar heifers, beef to the heels. (*'Tis* 266)

The following quote highlights Frank McCourt's inner conflict during the conversation with his friend Paddy and the old man, and presents his weariness of being torn between two countries:

There was a darkness in my head from the whiskey and I was ready to tell Paddy and the old man, I'm weary of Ireland's sufferings and I can't live in two countries at the same time. (*'Tis* 266f.)

Another instance illustrating Frank's conflict with his hybrid identity is represented by the passage below. He emphasizes that he is troubled by 'being two things at the same time'. Other, successful Irish-Americans managed to profit from this hybridity; they used it to their own advantage. At this point, Frank has not reached this state yet, because his Irishness has not helped him in any way. The ethnic hyphen he has to carry around is nothing short of a burden on him. His main concern is his ethnic origin; everything evolves around his Irish-American identity. It seems as if he needs to resolve this matter first, to be able to make peace with his hybridity and to move on.

I'd like to be Irish when it's time for a song or a poem. I'd like to be American or American-Irish though I know I can't be two things even if Scott Fitzgerald said the sign of intelligence is the ability to carry opposed thoughts at the same time. I don't know what I'd like to be and what does it matter with Alberta over in Brooklyn with her new man? Then in a shop window I catch a glimpse of my sad face and I laugh when I remember what my mother would have called it, the gloomy puss. At Fifty-seventh Street I walk west toward Fifth Avenue for a taste of America and the richness that's in it, the world of the people who sit in the Palm Court of the Biltmore Hotel, people who don't have to go through life carrying *ethnic hyphens* [emphasis added]. You could wake them in the middle of the night, ask them what they are and they'd say, Tired. (*'Tis* 347)

Even in his relationship with Alberta, an Episcopalian with an upper-class upbringing, Frank's Irishness represents a central theme. Ironically, food and in particular potatoes, prevent him from walking out of this relationship after they had an argument. Here, McCourt himself uses the stereotype of the ever-existing Irish hunger in this passage. According to him, Alberta blames his Irishness for certain traits she finds repelling such as Franks drinking habits for instance.

My own. The Irish. I could drink Irish, eat Irish, dance Irish, read Irish. My mother often warned us, Marry your own and now old-timers tell me, Stick with your own. If I listened to them I wouldn't be rejected by a Rhode Island Episcopalian who once said, What would you do with yourself if you weren't Irish? And when she said that I would have walked out except that we were halfway through the dinner she'd cooked, stuffed chicken with a bowl of pink potatoes tossed in salt butter and parsley and a bottle of Bordeaux that gave me such shivers of pleasure I could have tolerated any number of barbs at myself and the Irish in general. (*'Tis* 347)

The potato has been a blessing and a curse for the Irish. Even though serving as a staple food across the world today, the potato is still stereotypically connected to the Irish. Before the famine years Ireland had to rely on it as a main source of food, due to the fact that as a colonized country they were forced to export agricultural products. Since the Irish were so dependent on the potato, the potato blight caused mass starvation and disease.

But no, the drink makes her livelier and after a few swallows she says, Let's eat, goddammit. Irishmen like to eat, and while we're eating, she says, Do you like that, Frank? I do. Well, then, eat it. You know what I always say. A meal ain't a meal without a potato in it and I'm not even Irish. No, goddammit, not a drop of Irish though there's a bit of Scotch. MacDonald was my mother's name. (*'Tis* 276f.)

5.3.5. The Other: Representations of Stereotypes in a Cross-Cultural Environment

Chapter 5.3.1 examined the role of stereotypes in a cross-cultural setting. The following subchapters will serve as examples where instances of stereotyping have been applied to various ethnicities. In a multicultural setting such as the one in New York City, stereotypes and prejudices are common features. Prejudices (as mentioned in chapter 5.3.1.) serve as pictures in our heads, social and cultural shared beliefs which

[...] are seen as manifestations of these pictures attitudes and beliefs. They are conceptualized as affective and behavioral components of the same subject, resulting in special kinds of social judgments and behavior tendency or avoidance, under certain conditions even in social discrimination. (Six 47)

The following part of this thesis will highlight just how strongly prejudices have been used (frequently of course in a rather ironic way) in *'Tis*.

5.3.5.1. Irish Stereotypes

When Frank first arrives in New York he feels quite lonely and decides to enter an Irish bar. There, he has a conversation with the barman who senses Frank's capabilities. According to this barman, alcohol is not the solution to overcome boredom and loneliness. He had seen it many times before and warns Frank not to make the same mistakes as many Irish had made before. He recommends going to the Public Library and to study instead of getting involved with 'dreamy micks':

You'll see two great stone lions. Walk up the steps between those two lions, get yourself a library card and don't be an idiot like the rest of the bogtrotters getting off the boat and stupefying themselves with drink. Read your Johnson, read your Pope and avoid the dreamy micks. (*'Tis* 33)

'Paddy-from-the-bog', as well as 'Paddy-off-the-boat', are derogative denotations, which have been frequently used for Irish immigrants. Many Irish farmers used to grow potatoes or turnips, or as it can be still observed predominantly in the western part of Ireland, cut turf in bogs or marshes to obtain heating material.

He says make sure I get clothes that make me look like an American and not the Paddy-from-the-bog stuff that makes me look like a turnip farmer. (*'Tis* 51)

Peter McNamee is the platform boss at the Refrigerating Company where Frank finds employment over the summer. McCourt's job at the platform is to unload frozen beef. Peter is also an Irish immigrant who is trying to make a living in New York. In this passage, he refers to the Irish being prone to Tuberculosis, consumption, or 'the curse of the Irish' to name another term frequently used for this disease. This reference is likely to have originated from the period of the Great Famine and the resulting health issues, the poverty, the lack of medical care, as well as the disastrous hygienic conditions on the ships – so called coffin ships – coming from Ireland or England to America. Daniels (135) describes the situation in the mid-nineteenth century as follows:

Typhus, cholera, dysentery, and what was called "ship fever" – in the mistaken belief that shipboard conditions caused the epidemics – were the great killers. We know now – and medical authorities at midcentury were beginning to realize – that these diseases did not originate at sea but were brought aboard by either passengers or crew. Once

aboard the conditions on the crowded and unsanitary ships were ideal for the propagation of disease. In the famine year of 1847 – the worst year in terms of mortality – perhaps 100,000 men, women, and children embarked for Canada from British ports. Some 17,000 died at sea and another 20,000 died of disease after landing[.] [...] [D]uring the latter half of 1847 [...] 850 of the 7,000 admitted to New York's new quarantine hospital died. Nor did the horrors end in 1847. Kerby Miller estimates that in the cholera year of 1857, 10 percent of the 180,000 Irish immigrants died at sea.

McNemee fears that health inspectors could close the platform down, due to the possibility of Irish workers suffering from Tuberculosis:

He tells me I should be going to school, that there's no excuse for me humping sides of beef in and out when I could use the GI Bill and moving up in the world. He says this is no job for the Irish. They come here and the next thing they're hacking and coughing up blood discovering they had TB all along, the curse of the Irish race but the last generation to be afflicted. (*'Tis* 184)

A rather positive cliché for the Irish, which is also still in place to this day, can be found in their hospitality. Irish hospitality is a tradition that dates back to Early Irish Law and literature from pre-Christian Ireland. According to Fergus Kelly, in *Early Irish Law*, the “obligation to provide hospitality falls on all householders. To refuse food and shelter where it is due is to be guilty of the offence of *esáin* (lit. ‘driving away’) [...] and requires compensation appropriate to the injured parties rank” (139).

My mother would never leave anyone standing in the middle of the room like this. She'd say, Sit down there and we'll have a nice cup of tea, because in the Lanes of Limerick it's a bad thing to ignore anyone and even worse to forget the cup of tea. It's strange that a man with a good job like the Captain and his mother on the couch wouldn't bother to ask me if I had a mouth in my head or if I'd like to sit down. I don't know how Mike can leave me standing like this though I know if this ever happened to her she'd simply sit down and make everyone feel cheerful the way my brother Malachy does. (*'Tis* 258)

Another sad chapter in Irish immigration history was the systematic job discrimination of the Irish. Especially during the Anti-Irish sentiment in the mid-nineteenth century, so-called NINA-No-Irish-Need-Apply-signs presumably started to appear. Nativist movements such as the Know-Nothing Party systematically propagated Irish job discrimination. McCourt uses the phrase ‘No-Irish-Need-Apply’ as a metaphor for not being welcome as an Irish person. When he meets Alberta's parents for the first time, he feels rejected and blames this on his ethnicity:

And I know from history books the Irish were never liked up here in New England, that there were signs everywhere saying, No Irish Need Apply. (*'Tis* 258)

It is interesting to note that in late research, NINA-signs have been regarded as an urban legend, a simple myth of victimization. Retired Professor of History, University of Illinois, Chicago, Richard Jensen claims the following:

The NINA slogan seems to have originated in England, probably after the 1798 Irish rebellion. Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries it was used by English to indicate their distrust of the Irish, both Catholic and Protestant. For example the Anglican bishop of London used the phrase to say he did not want any Irish Anglican ministers in his diocese. By the 1820s it was a cliché in upper and upper middle class London that some fussy housewives refused to hire Irish and had even posted NINA signs in their windows. It is possible that handwritten NINA signs regarding maids did appear in a few American windows, though no one ever reported one. We DO have actual newspaper want ads for women workers that specifies Irish are not wanted; [...] In the entire file of the New York Times from 1851 to 1923, there are two NINA ads for men, one of which is for a teenager. Computer searches of classified help wanted ads in the daily editions of other online newspapers before 1923 such as the Brooklyn Eagle, the Washington Post and the Chicago Tribune show that NINA ads for men were extremely rare - fewer than two per decade. The complete absence of evidence suggests that probably zero such signs were seen at commercial establishments, shops, factories, stores, hotels, railroads, union halls, hiring halls, personnel offices, labor recruiters etc. anywhere in America, at any time. NINA signs and newspaper ads for apartments to let did exist in England and Northern Ireland, but historians have not discovered reports of any in the United States, Canada or Australia. The myth focuses on public NINA signs which deliberately marginalized and humiliated Irish male job applicants. The overwhelming evidence is that such signs never existed. (405)

It is important to point out, however, that Jenkins is not trying to convey that job discrimination against the Irish did not actually take place. Due to scientific evidence, this study suggests is that NINA-signs might only constitute a myth in the Irish-American community. Furthermore, it needs to be noted that a song “No Irish Need Apply” by John F. Poole, written in 1862, enjoyed immense popularity at that time. According to Jenkins, this might be an important factor, which led to the mystification of the NINA-sign.

The ‘drunken Irishman’ represents yet another widely-used stereotype. Alcoholism is often connected with a dysfunctional lifestyle. According to Elizabeth Malcolm, certain groups were prone to alcohol because

[d]rink cushioned the stresses of poverty, isolation, and celibacy that were epidemic among the small farming communities in the west of Ireland. American researchers in particular were looking for explanations of apparently high levels of alcoholism and alcohol-related mental illness among Irish immigrants and their descendants in the United States. Rural life in the west provided the explanations they sought. In 1976, Richard Stivers argued that heavy drinking had been a prominent feature of male group identity in rural Ireland from at least the 1870s until the 1940s. The camaraderie

of such groups was compensation for the paucity of opportunities to marry and own land; and it was from such groups that most male emigrants to America had come. (322)

The following samples will indicate various instances where stereotypes alluding to Irishness in connection with alcoholism have been applied:

Teacher, you Scotch or somethin'? No. Irish. Oh, yeah? Irish like to drink, eh? All that whiskey, eh? You gonna be here Paddy's Day? I'll be here on St. Patrick's Day. You not gonna be drunk an' throwin' up at the parade like all the Irish? ('*Tis* 294)

The quote indicates that whiskey and festivals such as St. Patrick's Day are intimately connected with each other.

The Irish traditionally drink more alcohol than other Europeans. Indulgence was encouraged by the association of alcohol with social events such as wakes, weddings and festivals. During the eighteenth century, whiskey (usquebaugh) became the most widely consumed drink [in Ireland], along with poteen (poitín), a spirit legally brewed from potatoes. In the nineteenth century, the national movement for temperance gained widespread support and, by the 1840s, the production of whiskey in Ireland had almost halved [...]. Historians have also suggested, that the stereotype of the drunken Irishman was largely an English myth, fabricated to support the concept of a nation unfit to govern itself. (Goodby 6)

The following passages also illustrate the stereotypical connection between the Irish and alcohol:

The wives treat us coolly the rest of the way in the car, talking only to each other and making comments on the Irish and how you can't trust them with a simple task 'like crossing a street with a wedding cake, how these Irish couldn't have one or two drinks and be content till the reception, oh, no, they had to walk and tread each other to rounds till they're in such a condition you couldn't send them to the grocery for a quart of milk. ('*Tis* 381)

The cop came at me again and told me keep moving, pal, and I tried to cross 116th street with a bit of dignity so that he wouldn't be able to point the finger and tell his partner, There goes another whiskey-head mick from the Old Country. ('*Tis* 267)

Course he was drinking. Goddam Irish are always drinking but I never heard of no Irishman waiting for the train on the tracks before. ('*Tis* 358)

This last quote relating to the 'drunken Irishman' is quite symbolic. Here, Angela refers to alcoholism as 'the curse of the race, or simply 'the weakness'. The use of euphemisms clearly indicates the high prevalence of alcoholism in the Irish community:

If my mother were alive would she go to the funeral of one who had left her in beggary? No, she might not go to the funeral herself but she'd tell me to go. She'd say no matter what he did to us he had the weakness, the curse of the race, and a father dies and is only buried once. ('*Tis* 473)

When Frank McCourt appears at school on St. Patrick's Day, his students are amazed. With all Irish clichés in their minds many would not have expected an Irish person to attend work on such a traditional day. They bring small presents and shower their teacher with supposedly Irish gifts – basically anything Irish they could think of. The following passage serves as a list of items, concepts and customs supposedly associated with the Irish: Irish food, the color green, leprechauns, shamrocks, shillelaghs, etc.:

They groan when I appear on the day. Aw, shit, man, excuse the language, what kinda Irishman are you? Hey, teacher, maybe you'll go out tonight with all the Irish an' maybe you won't be here tomorrow. They bring me green things, a sprayed potato, a green bagel, a bottle of Heineken because it's green, a head of cabbage with hole for eyes, nose, mouth, wearing a little green leprechaun cap made in the art room. The cabbage is Kevin and has a girlfriend, an eggplant named Maureen. There's a greeting card two feet by two wishing me Happy St. Paddy's Day with a collage of green paper things, shamrocks, shillelaghs, whiskey bottles, a drawing of a green corned beef, St. Patrick holding a glass of green beer instead of a crozier and saying, Faith an' Begorrah, it's a great day for the Irish, a drawing of me with a balloon saying, Kiss Me I'm Irish. The card is signed by dozens of students from my five classes and decorated with happy faces shaped like shamrocks. (*'Tis* 309)

5.3.5.2. American Stereotypes

The selected passages in this section serve as representations of the Other, depicting how Americans are stereotypically perceived by an Irish immigrant.

Frank is not accustomed to the social conventions in America such as overt friendliness and amicability even towards strangers. Especially during his first time in New York, this cheerfulness which is often attributed to Americans, puzzles him to a degree where he feels embarrassed and insecure because he is not quite sure how to react:

Sometimes a college girl will smile at me and say, Hi, and I don't know what to say. I'm told by the hotel people above me I'm not to say a word to the guests though I wouldn't know how to say Hi anyway because *we* [emphasis added] never said it in Limerick and if I said it I might be fired from my new job and be out on the street with no priest to get me another one. (*'Tis* 39)

This 'American' affableness triggers feelings of unease and discontent in Frank McCourt. He is used to 'minding his own business' and he has never learned to talk about emotions. Since he is very uncomfortable with questions concerning his thoughts and feelings, he is perceived as unapproachable:

Besides it's only Americans who ask questions like that, What are you thinking about? or What do you do? In all my years in Ireland no one ever asked me such questions and if I weren't madly in love with Mike Small I'd tell her mind her own business about what I'm thinking about or what I do for a living. (*'Tis* 255)

The American Dream represents an essential concept in the American way of life and this thesis will elaborate this concept in a section below (cf. chapter 7.2.). Nevertheless, the idea of the American Dream can also be understood in terms of clichés, as McCourt illustrates in the following quote. Supposedly, having graduated from college, from now on things should work out for Frank:

[...] a little weak in the eye and teeth department, a college degree and a teaching job and isn't this the country where all things are possible, where you can do anything you like as long as you stop complaining and get off your ass because life, pal, is not a free lunch. (*'Tis* 348)

4.3.5.3. Stereotypes Applied to Puerto Ricans

After the Spanish-American War of 1898, Puerto Rico was annexed by the United States. Therefore they cannot, strictly speaking, be regarded as immigrants (Daniels 320). Since they were considered American nationals, “and, after 1917, American citizens by birth [...], their comings and goings were not affected by immigration legislation” (Daniels 320).

Most Puerto Ricans who have come to or been born in the United States face two related problems: poverty and race prejudice. Puerto Ricans are a racially mixed group. [...] [T]here is a large admixture of white and black ancestry in the island's population. Although Puerto Rico is not without color prejudice, it is less pervasive and total than that existing on the mainland, and for many newcomers the experience of American-style race prejudice in which one is either black or white is a shock and a major social problem. (Daniels 322f.)

Researchers have pointed out that in New York City blacks and Puerto Ricans should be political allies, in fact, they are more like rivals. This rivalry is also expressed in another sense: “They ‘compete’ for places at the lower end of the poverty spectrum” (Daniels 323).

The ethnic slur ‘spic’ as it is used to refer to Puerto Ricans in the passage below, has the following origin:

Spic, spik, spick, spig. Until 1915, an epithet for an Italian, possibly deriving from *spaghetti* (Flexner 1976, qtd. in Herbst 211). It is also often said to derive from the expression that parodies the speech of Spanish or Italian people, “no spica da English.” Later, spig and spic were applied especially to Mexicans, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans, but also to anyone from Latin America, to Spaniards and the Spanish language, and to Portuguese. In fact, it was used for any immigrants whose foreignness was visible, including even Pacific Islanders. (Herbst 211)

While working at the Biltmore Hotel in New York, young McCourt encounters various immigrants of different ethnic backgrounds. At the same time he experiences, how immigrants (in this case Puerto Ricans) are perceived by white Americans, even if these white

Americans are immigrants themselves. This passage shows how stereotypes and racial prejudice are passed on:

Eddie Gilligan, the union shop steward, says it's a good thing I'm Irish or it's down in the kitchen I'd be with the spics. That's a new word, spics, and I know from the way he says it that he doesn't like Puerto Ricans. He tells me Mr. Carey takes good care of his own people and that's why I'm a houseman with a uniform instead of an apron down there with the PRs singing and yelling *Mira mira* all day. I'd like to ask him what's wrong with singing when you're washing dishes and yelling *Mira mira* when the humor is on you [...]. [...] I have opportunities for advancement they'll never have because all they want to do is not learn English and make enough money to go back to Puerto Rico and sit under trees drinking beer and having big families because that's all they're good for, drinking and screwing till their wives are worn out and die before their time and their kids run the streets ready to come to New York and wash dishes [...]. ('*Tis* 45f.)

Another quote exemplifies the status of Puerto Ricans in American society:

Now Eddie says maybe the PRs aren't that bad at all. He wouldn't want them marrying his daughter or moving into his neighborhood but you have to admit they're musical and they send up some pretty good baseball players, you have to admit that. ('*Tis* 211)

Daniels explains their economic status as follows:

As the data for economic status suggests, relatively few Puerto Ricans have thus enjoyed the upwards social mobility that has been the unifying theme of the American immigrant experience. Puerto Ricans who have become prominent in the mainland seem concentrated in two fields, the arts and politics, although for a while, the most prominent Puerto Rican on the mainland was the baseball superstar, Roberto Clemente (1934 – 73). (325)

4.3.5.4. Stereotypes Applied to Native Americans

When encountering different cultures in America, Frank McCourt has to approach the sad history and exploitation of the Native Americans. His coworker at the Biltmore, Digger, is characterized by the trauma of Native Americans. He represents a figure that still suffers from the injustice and cruelty his people experienced. In this particular passage, McCourt mentions the fact that members of the Iroquois Nation were preferably employed at construction sites where skyscrapers were built, because allegedly, they were not prone to vertigo. Native Americans (e.g. Mohawk) did indeed take on jobs as ironworkers building bridges and skyscrapers all across the United States; their fearlessness of heights, however, is not supported by scientific evidence and represents more of an ethnic myth. The reasons for attributing Native Americans the virtue of having no apparent fear of heights are rather rooted in their stamina and skillfulness, which represented important features of their former nomadic lifestyle and huntsmanship.

Some days Digger is so overcome by the sufferings of his people he refuses to lay any carpet and when Mr. Carey won't fire him Digger says. That's right. White man can't get along with us Indians. White man gotta have Iroquois sixty floors up the skyscrapers to dance along steel beams. White man gotta have Blackfoot to lay good carpet. ('Tis 59)

4.3.5.5. Stereotypes Applied to Swedes

McCourt's cross-cultural encounters also include Swedish immigrants. In the following passage, stereotypes referring to Swedish food and drinking habits have been applied:

[...]Mind yourself at them Swedish parties. They'll be giving you their native drink, the glug, and if you drink that stuff you won't know Christmas Eve from the feast of the Immaculate Conception. It's black and thick and you'd need a strong constitution for it, and then they make you eat all kinds of fish with it, raw fish, salty fish, smoked fish, all kinds of fish you wouldn't give a cat. The Swedes drink that glug and it makes them so crazy they think they're Vikings all over again. ('Tis 67f.)

4.3.5.6. Stereotypes Applied to Jews

Over the course of history, Jewish people had to endure a significant amount of discrimination and racial prejudice. Examining the origins of various stereotypes would probably go beyond the scope of this thesis. For the sake of completeness, I included the next passage covering the prejudice of stinginess, which has often been stereotypically attributed to Jewish people. McCourt is referring to popular Jewish holiday resorts in the Catskill Mountains:

There are Jewish places up there, too, but they're not too active in the tipping department because they pay for everything in advance and don't have to carry cash. ('Tis 69)

The following passage represents a conversation Frank is having with his landlady, Mrs. Agnes Klein. She is of Irish descent and the widow of a Jewish man named Eddie. She describes the problems she had to face when they got married. Her Irish Catholic parents were strictly against her marrying a Jewish man and she had not dared to convert to Judaism for fear of losing her family. Even though the sufferings of the Jewish people are acknowledged in this part, the Jewish faith clearly represents the Other: a barrier that must not be crossed by Irish Catholics:

Father said it would break his heart if I became Jewish, not that he had anything against them, poor suffering people, but hadn't we suffered, too, and was I going to turn my back on generations of people getting hanged and burned right and left? He came to the wedding but not my mother. She said what I was doing was putting Christ back up there suffering on the cross, wounds an' all. She said people in Ireland starved

to death before they'd take the Protestant soup and what would that say about my behavior? ('Tis 206)

4.3.5.7. Stereotypes Applied to African Americans

The discrimination of African Americans epitomizes a very sad chapter in the history of the United States. When Frank McCourt came to America in 1949, the Civil Rights Movement was only in its very early stages. Segregation in schools was about to change when a unanimous decision of the Supreme Court in 1954 in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* declared "separate educational facilities are inherently unequal" (Divine 890). In the following year, Black Activism started to take on a dynamic force with Rosa Park's arrest on a local bus.

The next passages to come, describe the utter discrimination and racism as it has been carried out on African Americans. Blacks, for instance, were not allowed in various public places such as bars as it is illustrated in the quote below. Frank is very attached to his older, black friend Horace and wants to buy him a drink. The bar, however, refuses to admit African Americans:

Black man not welcome in that bar. Fuck that for a story, says Eddie. No, mon, no trouble. There's another place we have a beer, mon. I don't know why Horace has to give in like that. He has a son in university in Canada and he can't have a beer himself in a New York bar. He tells me I don't understand, that I'm young and I can't fight the black man's fight. ('Tis 183)

Frank grasps the concept of stigmatization on grounds of skin color. All the time he had felt discrimination directed towards himself, due to his Irish ethnicity and in particular, his Irish accent. In his opinion he is better off than black people because people can change their accent but not the color of their skin:

I'd like to stay by myself because I don't know what to say to anyone and as soon as I open my mouth they'll say, Oh, you're Irish, and I'll have to explain how that happened. It's not as bad as being black. You can always change your accent but you can never change the color of your skin and it must be a nuisance when you're black and people think they have to talk about black matters just because you're there with that skin. You can change your accent and people will stop telling you where their parents came from in Ireland but there's no escape when you're black. ('Tis 302f.)

6. *Teacher Man*

Teacher Man represents the third memoir in the 'McCourt trilogy'. If we examine McCourt's trilogy in the light of a Bildungsroman, *Teacher Man* finalizes the authors moral and psychological growth, where teaching for McCourt can be regarded as a form of therapy, which helped him change from an insecure and self-conscious person into someone people will listen to. He discovers his gift as a storyteller through teaching in the classroom.

The final memoir completes the story of an Irish immigrant "who had settled for menial jobs cleaning a hotel and lugging ship cargo on the docks" (Grondahl) who became a high school teacher in New York and a world renowned author in his later years. *Teacher Man* "was also a refuge for a voracious reader and self-made intellectual, a poor kid who never managed to attend high school himself" (Grondahl).

McCourt once said in an interview that "[t]eaching isn't clear cut like being a doctor, where you operate and the patient gets better or worse. Or a lawyer, where you win or lose the case," McCourt said. 'As a teacher, you just do your best, keep poking away at it and hope'" (qtd. in Grondahl). Therefore, he felt the need for writing a book which manages to describe high school life from a teacher's perspective, and at the same time offers entertainment value. McCourt mentioned that "[t]here's a paucity of writing about teaching and all the movies and TV series are (expletive)," McCourt said. 'I wanted to open up the world of high school and to get into the day-to-day reality of teaching'" (qtd. in Grondahl).

"'Teacher Man' is a love letter to that anonymous army, unsung heroes in the trenches of the country's ongoing battle over how to educate its youth" (Grondahl).

6.1. Synopsis

In the prologue of *Teacher Man*, which was first published in 2005, Frank McCourt gives a psychological account of his traumatized childhood, suggesting who could take the blame for his sufferings or maybe not. He also refers to the stresses and strains of a teacher especially at public high schools. According to him, anyone surviving thirty years of teaching at New York high schools (particularly the city's lower-performing vocational schools) should be awarded a medal – especially having survived a miserable (Irish) childhood. "McCourt's signature lyricism, dark humor and witty anecdotes are evident throughout" (Grondahl).

For thirty years McCourt taught in five different high schools and one college in New York: McKee Vocational and Technical High School, Staten Island; High School of Fashion Industries in Manhattan; Seward Park High School in Manhattan; Stuyvesant High School in

Manhattan; He gave night classes at Washington Irving High School in Manhattan and also lectured at New York Community College in Brooklyn.

Teacher Man is composed of three parts describing the beginning of his teaching career, his failures as a teacher and as a Ph.D. candidate and, finally, his rise as a creative writing instructor at the prestigious Stuyvesant High School.

6.1.1. Part I: It's a long Road to Pedagogy

In March 1958, McCourt starts teaching at McKee Vocational and Technical High School. “Vocational schools were seen by many as dumping grounds for students ill-equipped for academic high schools” (TM²⁰ 13). His students try to avoid lessons by constantly asking him about his life. McCourt discovers his talents as a storyteller and recounts episodes about his life in Ireland. He tells them about the Irish school system, his alcoholic father, his time working at the docks and how he almost did not become a teacher after graduating, because he could not find a position due to his accent.

On his first day as a teacher he is almost fired for eating a bologna sandwich which had previously been the subject of a fight between two of his students. Accidentally it lands on McCourt's desk and he proceeds to eat it in front of an astonished class. “The bologna sandwich-eating incident broke the tension, gave McCourt street credibility among his voc-tech students, and laid the groundwork for future unorthodox methods” (Grondahl).

McCourt loves to teach through stories and in another episode, a comment about a sheep alluding to bestiality in a sarcastic way, gets him into trouble once again. Yet, he is allowed to continue his teaching career.

On the one hand, his use of stories fascinates his students: they are captured by his immigrant biography. On the other hand, he is often blamed for telling stories instead of teaching – especially by the parents.

On various occasions Frank McCourt asks himself whether he is a fraud as a teacher. He proceeds to actually teach grammar, however not very successfully. Over time, he becomes increasingly frustrated as a teacher.

²⁰ Henceforth, I will refer to *Teacher Man* as TM.

“Four years on the job in 1962 and I didn’t care anymore. I told myself I never cared in the first place. You entertain them with stories of your miserable childhood. They make all those phony sounds” (TM 78).

Then he comes up with ways to motivate his students in text production. One day he examines his drawer full of blatantly forged excuse notes and has an epiphany. He assigns the task of writing an excuse note either from Adam to God or from Eve to God. This is the first time the whole class engages in writing and is literally immersed in it. The next day everyone in class brings excuse notes, and the recital of these triggers a lively discussion – even the principal approves of this unorthodox teaching method.

The memoir is full of episodes about students such as Augie, a “nuisance in class” (TM 91). On grounds of behavioral issues, McCourt calls his mother, which has the consequence of Augie’s father coming to class and beating his son up in front of everybody. McCourt loses the confidence of his class as a result.

In another episode, his students Sal (an Italian boy) and Louise (an Irish girl) fall in love. Shortly thereafter, Sal is beaten up by Irish gang members in Prospect Park. McCourt refers to this kind of gang war as follows:

[Sal] and Louise knew these gang wars were stupid, especially with the Irish and Italians, who were all Catholic and white. [...] Sal and Louise could understand rumbling with the Puerto Ricans or the Negroes, but not one another, for Christ’s sakes. (TM 93)

Sal is disappointed and blames the Irish for his misery. He refuses to have an Irish teacher and arranges a transfer to another class. Kevin Dunne, another student gets sent to Vietnam and dies there. McCourt is sorry, he could not do more for him. At thirty, he marries Alberta Small, and enrolls at Brooklyn College for a Masters Degree in English Literature.

A colleague at McKee, threatens McCourt not to cross the line with students and encourage them to pursue an academic career since this is not “a feeder school for colleges” (TM 110). Students are meant to go into trades and he is not supposed to give students ideas they should not have. McCourt is urged to stay realistic.

6.1.2. Part II: Donkey on a Thistle

In 1966, after having taught eight years at McKee, McCourt is determined to move on. He receives a Master’s degree and transfers to New York Community College in Brooklyn. Students there are lower middle class adults, seeking an Associate’s degree in order to get a

promotion. Teaching at community college proves to be not very satisfying, since his students are not very motivated and tired attending night classes. McCourt asks himself, how they could write a research paper, when they still struggle to read a newspaper.

His college teaching career only lasts one year, then he resumes the position. Alberta complains about his aimlessness, his lack of effort.

Yet another teaching opportunity arises, this time at Fashion Industries High School. Although the head of Academic Department disapproves of him, he is still hired due to a teacher shortage. Again, he only lasts one term - he is forced to leave because he hits a student in the face with a magazine.

At Alberta's high school, Seward Park on the Lower East Side, there is an opening for a teaching position. "This was a melting-pot school: Jewish, Chinese, Puerto Rican, Greek, Dominican, Russian, Italian and I had no preparation or training for teaching English as a Second Language" (TM 129). He tells them how he got interested in pursuing a teaching career when he came to New York and took on a job at a hotel where he taught English to Puerto Rican workers during lunch hours.

Teaching at Seward Park High School is extremely challenging. He teaches three English as a Second Language classes and three regular ninth-grade English classes. One class is particularly challenging since it consists of twenty-nine black girls and two Puerto Rican boys. "All the ingredients of difficulty were wrapped up in this one group: gender clash; generation clash; culture clash; racial clash" (TM 136). His students do not take him seriously due to his whiteness and ignore him. One day he goes to a movie with this class and receives strange, discriminating looks. Due to their bad behavior at the cinema, they are almost forced to leave. McCourt feels embarrassed and has no control over this class. On another occasion, they persuade him to attend the Shakespeare play *Hamlet* where he feels embarrassed once more.

Even after ten years of teaching, incidents occur that push him to his limits. Although he has gained valuable experience as a teacher, a sixth sense as it were, students such as Benny "Boom Boom" Brandt for instance, challenge everything he has learned so far. They manage to provoke him to a point where he loses his temper once more.

Teaching becomes more and more frustrating for McCourt. Alberta encourages him to undergo psychological counseling. Having reached an absolute low, McCourt takes up the

idea of getting a Ph.D. in order to improve his situation. His wife suggests he should go to Trinity College in Dublin. For McCourt, Trinity College had always represented a kind of hurdle he had never imagined to overcome. He had always envied students who walked out of the gates at Trinity which he was drawn to every time he visited Dublin:

I stood by the gates admiring the elegant way the students tossed their flapping Trinity scarves over their shoulders. I admired the accents that sounded English. I coveted the beautiful Protestant girls who would never cast me a glance. They would marry their own kind, their own class of people, all Protestants with horses, and if the likes of me ever married one of them he'd be booted out of the Catholic Church with no hope for redemption. (TM 158)

At the age of thirty-eight he is accepted at Trinity and travels back to Ireland. Neither he, nor his wife are particularly sad about this separation, since their marriage has seen better days. On their first day apart, McCourt already has an affair with a nurse on the ship to Dublin. McCourt's academic career at Trinity College lasts two years in which he does not succeed in finishing his dissertation and decides to return to New York in 1971.

Back in New York as a failed doctoral candidate, he finds out that he will be a father. He takes on various substitute teaching positions depriving him of all authority - he is devastated:

I failed at everything. I looked for my place in the world. I became an itinerant substitute teacher, drifting from school to school. High schools called me for a day-to-day work to replace sick teachers. Some schools needed me when teachers were called for long spells of jury duty. I was assigned classes in English or wherever a teacher was needed: biology, art, physics, history, mathematics. Substitute teachers like me floated somewhere on the fringes of reality. I was asked daily, And who are you today? Mrs. Katz. (TM 178)

6.1.4. Part III: Coming Alive in Room 205

A friend, R'lene Dahlberg introduces McCourt to the head of the English Department at Stuyvesant High School, one of the most prestigious schools in the city, "the Harvard of high schools" (TM 183). He is offered a teaching position and from now on things will improve for Frank McCourt just at the right time when his daughter Maggie was born in 1971. He "began to feel at home in the world" (TM 184), in his classroom number 205. As a teacher at Stuyvesant, McCourt enjoys the freedom of being able to teach whatever he likes. He is hardly ever observed and received all the encouragement in the world.

In 1974, his third year at Stuyvesant, McCourt is "invited to be the new Creative Writing Instructor" (TM 190). Although he is very hesitant at first and doubting his abilities, he takes on this new position, which turns out to be one of his best decisions he has ever made.

At the age of forty-nine his marriage collapses. Yet, his professional life flourishes and McCourt becomes one of the most popular teachers at Stuyvesant:

They flocked to my classes. The room was packed. They sat on windowsills. One teacher, Pam Sheldon, said, Why don't they just let him teach in Yankee Stadium? That's how popular I was. (TM 199)

Still not free of self-doubt, McCourt wonders, whether this success is due to his teaching abilities, or owed to easily assigned high marks. Nevertheless, he continues his refreshing approaches to teaching and celebrates the freedom of teaching anything he approves of. He encourages the writing and recitals of recipes, poems, fairytales, restaurant reviews and so forth. Whenever a lesson seems to lack creative input, he frequently uses “dinner interrogations”, which are supposed to show that even superficial occurrences could be used to find a story. At times when his students seek inspiration, he tells them to use the ingredients of life, which everybody carries in them:

List your ingredients in your notebook. Cherish them. This is urgent. Jewish. Middle class. *New York Times*. Classical music on radio. Harvard on the horizon. Chinese. Korean. Italian. Spanish. A foreign-language newspaper on the kitchen table. Ethnic music pouring out of the radio. Parents dream of the Old Country. (TM 246)

Such ‘ingredients of life’ are what Frank McCourt then uses himself, to write down his very own story, shortly after his retirement.

6.2. Key Episodes: Cross-Cultural Encounters, Hybridity and Stereotyping

During his professional career, Frank McCourt teaches in a variety of multi-cultural classroom settings. His students represent a fraction of the American population and he has to work with them regardless of class, gender, age and ethnicity. Being an immigrant himself, he understands many of his students’ backgrounds well, or at least to a certain degree. Still, many of his cross-cultural encounters as a teacher are very challenging since teaching in a multicultural environment had not been part of his training. He, as so many others, is learning by doing: through experience, through encounters. The following chapters will examine ethnic and racial stereotypes, multiculturalism, identity issues and hybridity in McCourt’s *Teacher Man*. Theoretical background has been provided in previous sections of this thesis.

6.2.1. Irish Stereotypes

As in his previous memoirs, McCourt uses a variety of stereotypes, which are commonly associated with Irish identity.

Especially in New York one of the first associations people will probably have regarding the Irish is St. Patrick's Day, due to the immense popularity of the parade, which annually takes place on March 17th. When hearing McCourt's Irish accent, his students are puzzled and start to wonder who this person is:

No. I'm not Scotch. I'm Irish. Joey looks sincere. Oh, yeah? What's Irish? Irish is whatever comes out of Ireland. Like St. Patrick, right? Well, no, not exactly. This leads to the telling of the story of St. Patrick, which keeps us away from the b-o-r-i-n-g English lesson, which leads to another question. Hey, mister. Everyone talk English over there in Ireland? What kind of sports didja play? You all Catlics in Ireland? (TM 21)

The ignorance of McCourt's students regarding Irishness is not necessarily a disadvantage. Through teaching an audience unaware of many Irish stereotypes, McCourt is able to reclaim his Irish identity and comes to terms with his 'miserable childhood'.

A very popular and frequently quoted episode is represented by the passage below. Again, the ignorance of the students is emphasized which McCourt finds rather annoying. His deeply rooted feelings of inferiority regarding his Irish identity trigger cynical comments. At the same time however, his Irishness helps him to gain popularity. He seems different from other teachers: awkward, but refreshingly different.

Yeah, yeah. So, mister, did you go out with girls in Ireland? No, dammit. Sheep. We went out with sheep. What do you think we went out with? The class explodes. They laugh, clutch their chests, nudge, elbow one another, pretend to fall out of their desks. This teacher. Crazy man. Talks funny. Goes out with sheep. Lock up your sheep. (TM 22)

Naturally, the principle at McKee with various Irish stereotypes in mind, is rather displeased with McCourt's comment and traces his inexperienced reaction back to his Irish immigrant background – an unskilled, naïve person that just got off the boat:

You're the teacher. You say you went out with sheep and they're going to swallow every word. They don't know about the mating habits of the Irish. I'm sorry. This time I'll let it go. I'll tell the parents you're just an Irish immigrant off the boat. But I was born here. (TM 23)

The following quotes refer to alcoholism and violence - frequently used stereotypes alluding to the Irish. As soon as someone finds out that McCourt is Irish, they immediately bombard him with questions such as: "Do you drink? Not much. Be careful. You're Irish" (TM 45).

Sal, a student with Italian background was badly beaten by an Irish gang. Therefore, he refuses to stay in McCourt's class: "I don't care what Mr. McCourt wants. I don't want to sit

in class with no Irishman. They drink. Hit people for no reason” (TM 127). Consequently, Sal wants to attend Mr. Campbell’s class for the sole reason that he is not Irish: “You could never imagine Mr. Campbell hitting you from behind with a two-by-four, but, That Mr. McCourt. He’s Irish and you can never trust those sneaky bastards” (TM 94).

Other uses of stereotypes having frequently been applied to the Irish, contain notions of sickness (Tuberculosis), lousy cooking and starvation:

We loaded pallets with the cases and he told me in a normal way his first wife was Irish but she died of TB. Can you imagine that? T damn B. Lousy cook, my first wife, like the rest of the Irish. (TM 62f.)

Sal’s Italian family and Louise’s Irish family didn’t approve, but at least the wedding would be Catholic and that was OK. Sal joked to the class his family worried he might starve to death with an Irish wife on account of how the Irish can’t cook. He said and his mother worried how the Irish survived at all. (TM 92)

6.2.2. Language and Accent

McCourt’s Irish accent is once more subject to stigmatization, marginalization and subsequent feelings of inferiority. The following passage points out how accents in general are affected by stereotypes (cf. chapter 4.2.2.); in the classroom, McCourt talks about his childhood in Ireland:

Boys in that Irish school mocked the American accent I had from New York. You can’t go away and leave your accent behind, and when they mock your accent you don’t know what to do or think or feel till the pushing starts and you know they’re trying to get a rise out of you. [...] They call you gangster or redskin and then you fight and fight till someone hits you on the nose and you’re pumping blood all over your one shirt, which will get you into trouble with your mother, who will leave her chair by the fire and give you a good clitter on the head for fighting at all. There’s no use trying to explain to your mother that you got all this blood from defending your American accent, which you have because of her in the first place. [...] She says nothing about the American accent that got you into trouble in the first place. But it’s all right because in a few months that accent will disappear to be replaced, thank God, with a Limerick accent anyone but my father would be proud of. Because of my father, my troubles were not over. You’d think with my perfect Limerick accent at the age of four the boys would stop tormenting me but, no, they start mimicking my father’s North of Ireland accent and saying he’s some class of a Protestant and now I have to defend him [...]. (TM 27)

This passage does not exclusively relate to accent, it also contains allusions to inner conflicts regarding identity and expresses the hybrid character of Frank McCourt.

Many passages in *Teacher Man* referring to McCourt’s Irish accent however, seem very repetitive and have been carried over from the prequel *‘Tis* (cf. chapter 5.3.3.):

School after school told me, Sorry, your accent's gonna be a problem. Kids, you know, like to mimic, and we'd have Irish brogues all over the school. What would parents say when their kinds come home sounding like, you know, Barry Fitzgerald? You unnerstand our position? Assistant principals wondered how I managed to get a license with that brogue. Didn't the Board of Education have any standards anymore? (TM 56)

As it has already been pointed out in chapter 5.3.3., the Irish accent which McCourt had always experienced as a burden, takes on a different meaning after some time. At NYU, he uses his accent to his advantage, for instance when he needs a favor, such as prolonging deadlines for research papers, dealing with unexcused absences or missed exams: "I shuffled and mumbled the mishaps of my life to patient professors, hinted at great sadnesses. The Irish accent helped. I lived on the edge of faith and begorrah" (TM 39). The use of the expression 'faith and begorrah'²¹ in this context is amusing and significant at the same time. As Shane Walshe points out, such stereotypical expressions, or pat phrases, have Stage Irish connotations and therefore are highly artificial (260). McCourt's use of 'faith and begorrah' here, emphasizes the stereotypical concepts inherent in people's minds when they hear an Irish accent. In this case, McCourt uses these stereotypes to his advantage - he plays with them (cf. 'I lived on the edge').

During his time at McKee, McCourt's accent increases in popularity. Especially women find it rather charming, as the following quotes will show. Despite this fact, he is again reduced to the way he speaks – something he has grown tired of:

My first time at McKee, I had a student monitor, Norma, who gave out numbers so that parents would know who was next. First, I had to deal with the problem of my accent, especially with the women. As soon as I opened my mouth they'd say, Oh, my God, what a *cute brogue* [emphasis added]. (TM 70)

Mr. Bibberstein joked I must be a great teacher, getting along so well with the kids I never sent one to his office. He said it must be my Irish charm. You're not much to look at but the girls love your accent. (TM 108)

6.2.3. Religion and Trauma

Whenever Frank McCourt refers to Catholicism, it is in a traumatic way. In chapter 4.2.3.1., Catholicism in Ireland and its impact on Irish society have already been portrayed. The next passages indicate McCourt's traumatized character and the way he has been influenced by the Catholic Church. These rather negative influences deeply troubled his soul. This becomes

²¹ "Faith [...] meaning 'in truth' [...], is another feature which is [...] loaded with Stage Irish connotations [...]. According to the OED, *begorrah* is and "Anglo-Irish alteration of the expletive *by God*" (qtd. In Walshe 262).

especially evident when the only expression that comes to his mind is ‘*mea culpa*’ every time he thinks about his relationship to God:

When you get into the habit of examining your conscience it’s hard to stop, especially when you’re an Irish Catholic boy. If you do bad things you look into your soul, and there are sins, festering. Everything is either a sin or not a sin and that’s an idea you might carry in your head for the rest of your life. Then when you grow up and drift away from the church, *Mea culpa* is a faint whisper in your past. It’s still there, but now you’re older and not so easily frightened. When you’re in a state of grace the soul is a pure dazzling surface, but your sins create abscesses that ooze and stink. You try to save yourself with *Mea culpa*, the only Latin words that mean anything to you or God. (TM 31)

Feelings of inferiority arise constantly, whenever he is faced with Protestantism. McCourt feels insecure and intimidated, which he reveals through his typical style of self-deprecation. Here, McCourt also indicates that on the one hand Irish Catholics are looked down upon by Protestants and on the other hand, Irish Catholics make a point of distancing themselves from Protestants. Marrying a Protestant, for instance, would have implicated the excommunication from the Catholic Church:

My friend from Limerick, who knew more about the world than I did, said, Take a good look at Oliver and the rest of it because your type will never step inside those gates. The archbishop said any Catholic who goes to Trinity is automatically excommunicated. [...] I coveted the beautiful Protestant girls who would never cast me a glance. They would marry their own kind, their own class of people, all Protestants with horses, and if the likes of me ever married one of them he’d be booted out of the Catholic Church with no hope of redemption. (TM 158)

Similarly, the simple act of entering Trinity College, a former Protestant place, would require going to confession, since it was considered a sinful deed as the next quote illustrates:

I have to ... I have to look at Trinity College. The inside of it. I have to go through the gate. My third pint of stout was talking. That’s a Protestant place, she said. I don’t care. I have to go through the gate. Did you hear that? she said to the whole bar. He wants to go inside Trinity. Aw, Jaysus, said one man and another said, Mother o’ God. All right, General said the barman. Go on. Go to Trinity and look inside, but make sure you go to confession on Saturday. (TM 160)

Just how strong the opposition between Protestantism and Catholicism is and how Protestantism is clearly perceived as the Other, the enemy, becomes strikingly evident in the following passage. Having been admitted as a Ph.D. candidate at Trinity College, McCourt is on his way to Dublin. As a college, educating the Protestant ascendancy and loyal to the British Crown in the past, Catholics were not permitted as students until 1793, about two hundred years after its establishment (Goodby 241f.). “[...] [U]ndergraduates at Trinity came largely from the New English. Trinity acquired an early reputation for teaching a strong

Calvinist theology not readily assigned to appeal to Catholics or build bridges between the faiths” (Goodby 241).

I’m on the *Queen Elizabeth* sailing to Dublin, to Trinity College, if you don’t mind. Did you ever think, with your comings and goings, with all that waving, you’d be joining the enemy? Trinity College, the Protestant college, loyal always to this majesty and that majesty and what did Trinity ever contribute to the cause of freedom? But down there in your sniffing little soul you always saw them as superior, didn’t you, horse Protestants with their law-dee-daw accents, their noses in the air. (TM 163)

6.2.4. The Irish in America

In 1970 McCourt returns to Dublin for research on his dissertation. During the course of his studies, he becomes more and more interested in the Irish in America and how their image has changed over time. Finally, the Irish were rehabilitated and respected and all this had taken place in America. He is extremely fascinated by this theme, which varies tremendously from the actual topic of his dissertation²². This fascination can be interpreted as healing process for McCourt; he is coming to terms with his hyphenated identity and seems to accept it once and for all. As a consequence, McCourt wants to change the topic of his dissertation, which is denied by Trinity College. After eighteen months of trying or rather procrastinating as he has put it, McCourt returns home to New York, the home he had been missing without having completed his PhD:

At school in Limerick we heard repeatedly the long sad story of Ireland’s suffering under the Saxon heel, but barely a word about the Irish in America, their building and fighting and singing. Now I read about Irish music in America, The power and genius of the Irish in American politics, the exploits of the Fighting 69th, the millions who cleared a path to the Oval Office for John F. Kennedy. I read accounts of how mean Yankees discriminated against the Irish all over New England and how the Irish fought back and became mayors, governors, party bosses. (TM 175)

6.2.5. Hybridity

McCourt’s hybrid identity, as well as the concept of cultural hybridity, have been dealt with in previous sections of this thesis (cf. chapters. 3.1.1. and 5.3.4.). In *Teacher Man*, McCourt’s psychological development slowly goes into a more positive direction – really in the sense of the Bildungsroman (cf. chapter 6). Being caught in the middle of two cultures has been bothering him most of his life and sometimes tormented his soul. Only in his later years however, he discovers that it is not always a question of either or that he does not need to decide where he truly belongs to, and in a long process he learns to cherish his multi-faceted

²² The topic of McCourt’s unfinished dissertation at Trinity College is “Irish-American Relations, 1889-1911”.

identity. The following passages will highlight his inner struggles, his feelings of not belonging, his hybridity:

I had to find my own way of being a man and a teacher and that is what I struggled with for thirty years in and out of the classrooms in New York. My students didn't know there was a man up there escaping a cocoon of Irish history and Catholicism, leaving bits of that cocoon everywhere. (TM 20)

Teaching provided him with more confidence. It was a long process however to gain self-assurance, naturally including many setbacks: "Even with all my various experiences in America I still felt like someone just off the boat" (TM 106).

During his time in the U.S. Army, young Frank was able to visit Ireland. Wearing an American uniform, representing his new country, he frequently encounters disinclination. Whereas other U.S., soldiers are respected for what they are doing, McCourt is treated like a fraud, and loses respect:

Six years later I returned to Ireland in my American army uniform, which I thought would bring respect. It did, till I opened my mouth. I tried to put on an American accent to go with the uniform. It didn't work. At first, waitresses would rush to lead me to the table, but when I spoke they said, Arrah, Jaysus, you're not a Yank at all, at all. You're just Irish like everyone else. (TM 158f.)

Just how confused and torn McCourt is, during this visit to Ireland, is illustrated in the following quote:

I was confused. I was born in America. I grew up in Ireland. I returned to America. I'm wearing the American uniform. I feel Irish. They should know I'm Irish. They should not be mocking me. (TM 159)

Many years later, when McCourt returns to Dublin to write his dissertation, something has changed regarding his perception of identity. He is now rather identified as American, as 'a returned Yank' in search of his Irish roots. All the time in America, he had to suffer the consequences of all the prejudices and stereotypes which had been applied to him due to his Irish origins. Back in Ireland, he is again greeted with resentment: he looks like an American – a foreigner, however curiously with a Limerick accent.

Was he joking? I'd have to get used to the ways of Dublin men. It was dawning on me that I was an outsider, foreigner, returned Yank and, on top of it, a Limerickman. (TM 174)

The next quote offers a crucial transition regarding McCourt's identity, an epiphanic moment as it were. While wandering through the streets of Dublin, he feels like an outsider. Finally he

recognizes that the actual geographic location is not a determining factor when it comes to feeling at home. There 'was no door' for him in Dublin, his life is in New York, he misses it. It seems as if McCourt is finally able to locate himself – no more questions of either or – he found his place in the world and wants to return to it.

I wandered the streets of Dublin looking for the door. I had a notion that in any city there was a way in for the outsider and the traveler. In New York, for me, it was schools and bars and friendship. There was no door for me in Dublin and I had to admit, finally, what ailed me: I missed New York. At first, I resisted the feeling. Go away. Leave me alone. I love Dublin. (TM 177)

After this revelation, McCourt appears to be liberated from the self-tormenting thoughts of being torn between two cultures. Now, he has learned to accept the fact that there is no need to take sides, no urge to make a decision. He was not 'put on this earth' to constantly worry about who he is in terms of ethnic, social or even spiritual categories. He has finally accepted himself as the man he has become.

I don't know what I believe except that I wasn't put on this earth to be a Catholic or Irish or vegetarian or anything. (TM 195)

6.2.6. Multiculturalism

Whereas McCourt's previous memoirs have been rife with various stereotypical representations of the Other, *Teacher Man* offers also a new perspective. According to El-Tom, McCourt has constructed "a wide variety of categories of people – English, Protestants, Jehovah Witnesses, Muslims, Jews, Americans, Africans, Indians, and the Irish upper classes" (78). As a teacher he must deal with multicultural environments and through his students he experiences all the difficulties that might arise in such a setting:

There's so much teen unhappiness they form gangs and fight other gangs, not rumbles like the ones you see in the movies with star-crossed romances and dramatic music in the background, but mean fights where they grunt and curse one another, where Italians, Blacks, Irish, Puerto Ricans attack with knives, chains, baseball bats in Central Park and Prospect Park and stain the grass with their blood, which is always red no matter where it came from. (TM 13)

Even supposedly homogenous students - as in the following case white and Catholic - find themselves in a pool of ethnic bias. Ethnic diversity in this classroom seems to emphasize the differences. Stressing differences however contradicts the notion of the 'melting-pot', a concept which had already been taken up in the late eighteenth century by J. Hector. St. John de Crevecoeur.

He and Louise knew these gang wars were stupid, especially with the Irish and Italians, who were all Catholic and white. So why? What was it all about? Something called turf, territory, even worse, girls. Hey, get your guinea hands off my girl. Get your fat mick ass out of our neighborhood. Sal and Louise could understand rumbling with the Puerto Ricans or the Negroes, but not one another, for Christ's sakes. (TM 93)

Today, the use of the expression 'melting-pot' in reference to diversity is of course greatly outdated. It might seem strange that Frank McCourt, as a teacher with adequate experience in a multicultural classroom, would use this phrase. However, at a second glance, the application of the term 'melting-pot' perfectly fits the description of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s – the period of McCourt's teaching career. In those decades as well as centuries before, assimilation was the idea of integrating immigrants and their descendants. The expression 'melting-pot' contains a negative connotation, because American identity has been modeled on Anglo-conformity. This definition neglects any notion of diversity, hence disregards other languages, religions or ethnicities.

This was a melting-pot school: Jewish, Chinese, Puerto Rican, Greek, Dominican, Russian, Italian, and I had no preparation or training for teaching English as a second language. (TM 129)

The following passage contains a highly interesting representation of the Other. McCourt describes his toughest challenge as a teacher: an encounter full of binary oppositions: female versus male, young versus old and black versus white, or in his words: gender clash, generation clash, culture clash and racial clash. Even though McCourt tries to divert this perception of Otherness to the two Puerto Rican boys in this class, his attempt fails. The Puerto Rican boys have accepted the situation - McCourt is one who is intimidated, because he represents the true minority in this classroom of Otherness:

In 1968, at Seward Park High School, I faced the hardest challenge of my whole teaching career. I had the usual five classes: three English as a Second Language and two regular ninth-grade English classes. One of those ninth-grade classes consisted of twenty-nine black girls from an uptown feeder school and two Puerto Rican boys who sat in a corner, minding their own business, never saying a word. If they opened their mouths, the girls would turn on them, Who axed you? All the ingredients of difficulty were wrapped up in this one group: gender clash; generation clash; culture clash; racial clash. (TM 136)

Towards the end of *Teacher Man*, a transition regarding the perception of diversity can be observed. Diversity is now conveyed as something positive, a creative source:

I said, You know the ingredients of the McCourt life. You have your ingredients, too, what you'll use if you write about your life. List your ingredients in your notebook. Cherish them. This is urgent. Jewish. Middle class. *New York Times*. Classical music

on radio. Harvard on the horizon. Chinese. Korean. Italian. Spanish. A foreign-language newspaper on the kitchen table. Ethnic music pouring out of the radio. Parents dream of trips to the Old Country. (TM 246)

As previously argued, Frank McCourt uses various stereotypes in describing cross-cultural encounters. In the subsequent chapters, instances such cross-cultural encounters with African-Americans, Jews and Chinese have been selected.

6.2.6.1. Blacks

McCourt takes his class consisting of twenty-nine black girls to a Shakespeare play. Their bad manners cause McCourt great embarrassment. As a white teacher he is powerless and his class does not respect him as a person with authority. On their way back, a black bus driver encourages Serena, one of McCourt's students, to go to college and to work harder. "He said you had to work harder in this country when you were black but in the end that made you stronger" (TM 144). They have a pleasant conversation of mutual respect. McCourt observes the scene and is disappointed because the bus driver, whom she has only known for a few minutes, seems to have more positive influence on her than he could ever have as her teacher. For McCourt, the color of skin represents a border he will not be able to cross easily.

Serena is forced to move to Georgia to live with her grandmother. Clear references to Georgia's oppressive past of racial discrimination, as a southern state promoting slavery, are made. This passage also illustrates how racial discrimination against blacks was still very prominent at that time in Georgia, whereas in New York, the Civil Rights Movement has had greater impact, due to its greater multicultural influence.

The following Monday, Serena does not return to class. The girls say she'll never be coming back on account of how her mother was arrested, For drugs an' stuff, and now Serena has to live with her grandmother in Georgia, where they say, Black people are treated like niggers. They say Serena will never stay there. She'll be in trouble in no time talking back to white people. (TM 145f.)

6.2.6.2. Jews

On open school night, Frank McCourt meets Mr. Stein, a rabbi and the father of Bob. McCourt admires Bob for his originality, his humor and his courage. Bob is longing to live the life as a farmer. However, his parents are devastated with his choice of career. Jewish dietary laws prohibit the consumption of pork and, as a consequence, raising pigs is not a valid professional option for a young Jewish man. The rabbi fears that the Jewish community will discredit him:

The rabbi sat by my desk, heaved up his hands and said, OY. I thought he was joking but the way he dropped his chin to his chest and shook his head told me he was not a happy rabbi. He said, Bob, how's he doing? He had a German accent. Fine, I said. He's killing us, breaking our hearts. Did he tell you? He wants to be a farmer. It's a healthy life, Mr. Stein. It's a scandal. We're not praying for him to go to college so he can raise pigs and corn. Fingers will be pointed on our street. It's gonna kill my wife. [...] So we're losing him. Mr. McCoot. Our son is dead. We can't have a son living with pigs every day. (TM 239)

6.2.6.3. *Chinese*

According to Daniels, “[b]etween the beginnings of Chinese migration in 1848 and the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882, perhaps three hundred thousand Chinese entered the United States” (239). A significant wave of Chinese immigration took place during the California gold rush of 1849, thus, they preferably settled in the West (Daniels 239). “San Francisco’s Chinatown was the first and the most important: It was replicated in large cities across the United States as far away as Boston and, even though today there are more Chinese in New York than in San Francisco, the latter retains its cultural primacy” (Daniels 242). Chinese workers were largely employed in mining, agriculture, manufacturing shoes and clothing, service trades and many of them were laundry workers (Daniels 243). “In the 1860s as many as ten thousand Chinese workers were engaged in building the western leg of the Central Pacific Railroad” (Daniels 243) – along with the Irish. What distinguished Chinese from Irish railroad workers were (among other things) frugality and a healthier lifestyle in general:

Initially, Chinese employees received wages of \$27 and then \$30 a month, minus the cost of food and board. In contrast, Irishmen were paid \$35 per month, with board provided. [...] While Irish crews stuck to an unvarying menu of boiled food -- beef & potatoes -- the Chinese ate vegetables and seafood, and kept live pigs and chickens for weekend meals. To the dull palates of the Irishmen, the Chinese menu was a full-blown sensory assault. The newcomers seemed alien in other ways: they bathed themselves, washed their clothes, stayed away from whiskey. Instead of water they drank lukewarm tea, boiled in the mornings and dispensed to them throughout the day. In such a manner they avoided the dysentery that ravaged white crews.²³

Every Saturday McCourt spent time in the Forty-second Street Library in New York, pretending to conduct research for his dissertation. He was fascinated by Irish achievements in the U.S. as well as their hard labor. As a result, he discovered their efforts in building the Transcontinental Railroad and the competition with Chinese workers:

²³ *Workers of the Central Pacific Railroad*. PBS. 9 Aug. 2012
<<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/tcrr-cpr/r/>>.

Then I happened on accounts of the building of the Transcontinental Railroad, how the Irish and the Chinese, coming from opposite directions, competed, how the Irish drank and undermined their health while the Chinese smoked opium and rested, how the Irish didn't care what they ate while the Chinese nourished themselves on the food they knew and loved, how the Chinese never sang while they worked and how the Irish never stopped, for all the good it did them, the poor crazy Irish. (TM 178)

In another passage referring to the Chinese, McCourt emphasizes the rather poor circumstances many Chinese families lived in. At the same time, McCourt praises their diligence, vigor and determination to climb the social ladder through supporting their children in the best possible way. This quote also indicates the pride which Chinese parents felt when they succeeded in the fulfillment of the American Dream:

People from China were proud of him. He competed against fourteen thousand kids to get into this school. His father worked six days a week, twelve hours a day, in a restaurant in Chinatown. His mother worked in a downtown sweatshop. Every night she cooked dinner for the whole family, five children, her husband, herself. Then she helped them get their clothes ready for the next day. Every month she had younger ones try on the clothes of the older kids to see if they'd fit. She said when everyone was grown and none of the clothes fit anymore, she'd keep them for the next family from China or she'd send them right over there. Americans could never understand the excitement in a Chinese family when something came from America. (TM 193)

7. Frank McCourt: Trauma and Identity

Claire Lynch points out that an “[a]utobiography’s principal focus is identity, it is often concerned with existential concepts of self-definition, what it means to be a person, how to live a life and the how to write about it” (3). Furthermore, Lynch argues that “‘Who am I?’ is a question most effectively answered in the first-person by the self who poses the question” (Lynch 4). During his ‘miserable childhood’, McCourt had to endure traumatic events, which naturally shaped him as a person. In the prologue of *Teacher Man*, McCourt gives a brutally honest account of the psychological damage he had suffered through his miserable childhood:

If I knew anything about Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis I’d be able to trace all my troubles to my miserable childhood in Ireland. That miserable childhood deprived me of self-esteem, triggered spasms of self pity paralyzed my emotions, made me cranky, envious and disrespectful of authority, retarded my development, crippled my doings with the opposite sex, kept me from rising in the world and made me unfit, almost, for human society. (TM 1)

However, acrimonious and resentful this display of crippled emotions may sound, “McCourt’s method of narrating his childhood adds a curious twist to his nostalgic vein of life writing” (Mitchell 617). In an act of overcoming this miserable childhood, he returns to the past and recollects painful memories. “Yet, *Angela’s Ashes* extends its triumph through an odd kind of nostalgia. Though it condemns the horrors of the past, it displays an undeniable affection for the humor those horrors helped produce” (Mitchell 617). This discrepancy has split the readership into two factions: they either find the book “compellingly enduring or repulsively manipulative” (Mitchell 617). McCourt himself responded to such criticism in the following way:

In my twenties and thirties, I did not want to write about being poor. I had to overcome a lot of fear – overcome the shame.... It couldn’t have happened earlier because I didn’t have any balance. I didn’t have maturity. Also, I think if I had written this book thirty years ago it would have been an indictment, a condemnation – humorless. (Hughes 29, qtd. in Mitchell 618).

It took Frank McCourt a teaching career that would last thirty years to overcome this fear and above all the shame. In his younger years he was so inhibited and intimidated that he was not even able to exchange casual greetings such as a nonchalant ‘hi’:

All over America there are men who walk up to girls and say, Hi. I could never do that. I’d feel foolish saying Hi in the first place because I didn’t grow up with it. I’d have to say Hello or something grown-up. Even when they talk to me I never know what to say. I don’t want them to know I never went to high school and I don’t want them to know I grew up in an Irish slum. I’m so ashamed of the past that all I can do is lie about it. (*Tis* 220f.)

The Catholic Church in Ireland represents one of the major causes of his misery as a young boy. Its influence on society was enormous (cf. Chapter 4.2.3.1.) and at the same time traumatizing for many. Especially painful, mostly triggering only negative memories, were McCourt's school days in Ireland. Physical as well as mental abuse were common instruments of education in order to command respect of the pupils: respect for the schoolmaster, the Catholic Church and Ireland. The following passage describes the painful experiences young Frank McCourt had to endure and how closely Ireland's education system was linked to the Catholic Church.

In this context, it is helpful to add that

[t]he disproportionate textual space allocated to childhood within the narrative structure of most autobiographies suggests that the adult's instinct to 'protect' and 'provide' for their child self. McCourt's descriptions of hardship and neglect are not always, as his critics frequently suggest, self-pitying or attention-seeking. In fact, more often they are dispassionate, listing or reporting detail, as with the following description of his school masters: (Lynch 156)

They hit you if you don't know why God made the world, if you don't know the patron saint of Limerick, if you can't recite the Apostles' Creed, if you can't add nineteen to forty-seven, if you can't subtract nineteen from forty-seven, if you don't know the chief towns and products of the thirty-two counties of Ireland, if you can't find Bulgaria on the wall map of the world that's blotted with spit, snot, and blobs of ink thrown by angry pupils expelled forever. They hit you if you can't say your name in Irish, if you can't say the Hail Mary in Irish, if you can't ask for the lavatory pass in Irish. It helps listening to the big boys ahead of you, they can tell you about the master you have now, what he likes and what he hates. One master will hit you if you don't know that Eamon DeValera is the greatest man that ever lived. Another master will hit you if you don't know that Michael Collins was the greatest man. (AA97)

This detached voice of a child who cannot avoid physical abuse, still conveys "an element of humour [...] due to the ridiculousness of the extensive list of negligible reasons for punishment McCourt provides [...], the child's lack of direct complaint is more damning than an adult condemnation would be" (Lynch 156).

In *Teacher Man* the voice of the child narrator has been replaced by the voice of an aged Frank McCourt, more aggressively making accusations and complaints, yet at the same time granting forgiveness:

Mr. De Valera was a half-Spanish Gaelic fanatic (Spanish onion in an Irish stew) who directed teachers all over Ireland to beat the native tongue into us and natural curiosity out of us. He caused us hours of misery. He was aloof and indifferent to the black and blue welts raised by schoolmaster sticks on various parts of our young bodies. I forgive, also, the priest who drove me from the confessional when I admitted to sins of self-abuse and self-pollution and penny thieveries from my mother's purse. [...] his

refusal to grant me absolution put my soul in such a peril that if I had been flattened by a truck outside the church he would have been responsible for my eternal damnation. I forgive various bullying schoolmasters for pulling me out of my seat by the sideburns, for walloping me regularly with a stick, strap and cane when I stumbled over answers in the catechism [...]. (TM 1f.)

By comparing the two passages above about physical abuse, a transition from the author speaking through the voice of an innocent child, to a harshly criticizing adult can clearly be observed. Although “the child’s lack of direct complaint is more damning than an adult condemnation would be” as Claire Lynch (165) has already pointed out, in the prologue of *Teacher Man*, McCourt takes an unambiguous position as an accuser. This also shows McCourt’s maturing process and how he first had to recollect his painful memories, write them down, publish them and eventually come to terms with his traumatizing past. By processing these memories in such ways, he was able to overcome his sufferings and turn them into something positive.

McCourt’s healing process took several decades. The subsequent passages will highlight this process by portraying his development from an insecure character, inclined to self-doubt and self-deprecation, to finally accepting his past and obtaining closure.

After some time in New York, McCourt is determined to follow the American Dream, to improve his situation and to climb the social ladder. Every time, however, he experiences some sort of setback, he is tormented with doubt and feels vulnerable:

I’d be better off on the docks and the warehouses, lifting, hauling, cursing, eating hero sandwiches, drinking beer, chasing waterfront floozies. At last I’d be with my own kind, my own class of people, not getting above meself, acushla. I should have listened to the priests and the respectable people in Ireland who told us beware of vanity, accept our lot, there’s a bed in heaven for the meek of heart, the humble of soul. (TM 55)

He uses his poor childhood as an excuse for failure and blames the Catholic Church for his inability to rise in the world. When Alberta tells him that she has grown tired of his excuses, he realizes that he actually feels the same way. His miserable Catholic childhood seems to cast a shadow over everything in his life; It wants to be released, to be made public, to be written down:

Bad enough I spent my youth whispering sins to priests who yawned and made me promise never to sin again for fear of offending poor Jesus suffering up there on the cross for my sins. [...] She said she was sick of hearing about my miserable little Catholic childhood. I didn’t blame her. I was sick of my miserable childhood, too, the way it followed me across the Atlantic and kept nagging at me to be made public. (TM 171)

Again, as the following quote reveals, ‘old habits die hard’. McCourt admits to envy members of the middle or upper middle classes, represented by his students as well as their parents at Stuyvesant High School. Even though he has managed to progress in his life, he still feels the resentment, resulting from the shame and bitterness, induced by his upbringing. Although he cannot help himself and sneers, he is able to reflect these negative feelings:

I’m learning. The mick from the lanes of Limerick letting the envy hang out. I’m dealing with first- and second-generation immigrants, like myself, but I’ve also got the middle classes and the upper middle classes and I’m sneering. I don’t want to sneer but old habits die hard. It’s the resentment. Not even anger. Just resentment. (TM 243)

“By revisiting his painful past with a determined levity, [McCourt] mollifies the sting of the traumatic experiences, and thereby exercises control over the past” (Mitchell 618). Achieving this levity would be the result of a long and painstaking process of self-reflection and healing. The following passage from *Teacher Man* offers a dramatic account of such self-reflection. In this introspective moment, McCourt realizes that he cannot continue to live like this. He needs to ‘reappraise’ his life, to start afresh and most of all stop putting blame on everyone but himself. This epiphany marks a psychological turning point in his life:

Thirty-eight was on my mind. Aging teacher sailing to Dublin, still a student. Is that any way for a man to live? I forced myself onto a deck chair for a mid-Atlantic crisis meeting with myself, closed my eyes to shut out the ocean and the sight of the nurse. [...] If I had any kind of intelligence, beyond the mere sniffing survival skills, I would have attempted an agonizing reappraisal of my life. But I had no talent for introspection. After all those years of confession in Limerick I could examine my conscience with the best of them. This was different. Mother Church was no help here. On that deck chair I could barely venture beyond catechism. I was beginning to understand that I did not understand, and digging into myself and my miseries made my head hurt. A Thirty-eight-year-old in a mess and I didn’t know what to do about it. That’s how ignorant I was. Now I know you’re encouraged to blame everyone but yourself for everything: Parents; the miserable childhood; the church; the English. (TM 167f.)

Yet, from this epiphanic moment on, it would take another twenty-eight years for McCourt to publish his first memoir. Luke Gibbons offers a reasonable explanation for “the disparity between the time of setting and the time of publication” (Lynch 159) by stating that “[a]s the expanding literature on trauma, mourning and memory indicates, [...] the experience of pain and suffering may not coincide with its moments of articulation, often leaving a considerable time-lag before a catastrophe or a shock to the system achieves any kind of symbolic form” (Gibbons 95, qtd. in Lynch 150).

7.2. The American Dream: From Rags to Riches

Defining the American Dream can be very challenging. The American Dream is perceived as a concept which offers a variety of definitions “ranging from individual success to national hopes for justice and equality. Most people come to these shores in pursuit of some version of the American Dream. James Truslow Adams, who coined the phrase, wrote”²⁴:

[The American Dream is] that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, and too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. (*The Epic of America*, 1931²⁵)

James Truslow Adams may have coined the phrase ‘American Dream’ as it is known today, its concept however dates back to as early as the discovery of America:

From its very discovery, America became the country upon which the European imagination projected its cherished dream of a paradise on earth. When Columbus found what he took to be the “earthly paradise” the ancient notion of a brave new world had finally found its confirmation in reality, and the New World of America was celebrated as the realization of the Biblical Garden of Eden, the Golden Age of classical antiquity and the Arcadia of the Renaissance. (Freese 33)

America has been perceived as a land of hope and a utopian vision. “The encounter of the mythic and religious promises and the political and social expectations [...] bred [...] the complex pattern of convictions and penetrations known as the ‘American Dream’” (Freese 105). Peter Freese (105) argues that “the constitutive elements of this ‘Dream’ are”: the belief in progress, the belief in the general attainability of success, the belief in manifest destiny, the idea of the continual challenge of respective frontiers, the belief in the American form of government of the people as the sole guarantor of liberty and equality and the notion of the melting-pot and its historical mutations from cultural pluralism to multi-ethnicity (Freese 106).

²⁴ *The Institute on the American Dream*. 15.Aug. 2012.
<<http://behrend.psu.edu/academic/hss/amdream/amerindx.htm>>.

²⁵ qtd. on the website of *The Institute on the American Dream*. 15.Aug. 2012.
<<http://behrend.psu.edu/academic/hss/amdream/amerindx.htm>>.

When Frank McCourt was asked in an interview²⁶ whether he considered himself “the living proof of the American Dream” he answered that he was “beyond the American Dream”. McCourt also remarked that if somebody had told him ten years prior to the success of *Angela’s Ashes* that he would become a best-selling, Pulitzer Prize winning author, he would have bet ten thousand dollars against it. In another interview²⁷ McCourt stated that for him “[t]he American Dream boils down to self knowledge. As the poet said, “Know thyself”; that’s what matters in the long run. You can be a *Forbes* billionaire and know nothing about yourself”.

McCourt’s interpretation offers an individual definition of the American Dream. The question that arises however is, whether the American Dream can still be defined on a national basis. Many critics have pointed out that this dream is more of a nightmare:

[...] [O]ne need only consider the price paid for the ‘Dream’ and point out the discrepancies between its gorgeous promises and the glaring shortcomings of the reality to arrive at the other side of the coin, namely the ‘American Nightmare’”. (Freese 156).

The concept of the American Dream needs to be reconsidered; a new ‘Dream’ “can no longer centre on reckless self-fulfillment or the amassing of wealth at the expense of others” (Freese 172). Furthermore, Freese argues that the American Dream

[...] can no longer be built on the belief on an increasingly questionable technological progress, it has to abandon the concept of the chosen nation’s manifest destiny, and it must no longer be based on the mythic notion of a melting pot in which a new race of supermen is bred out of diverse ethnic ingredients. In order to become a viable ideal, the ‘Dream’ of the future must be less grandiose and more mature, a communal rather than an individual aspiration, and it must put ecological considerations before economic gain, multi-cultural coexistence before missionary zeal, and spiritual satisfaction before material affluence. (Freese 172)

The following quotes contain McCourt’s references to the American Dream and will show the author’s attitude towards it. In *Angela’s Ashes* young Frank McCourt expresses his dream

²⁶ “Frank McCourt discusses the American Dream”. *National Public Radio*. 20 July 2009. 13 Aug. 2012. <<http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=106688871&m=106697277>>

²⁷ Crane, Mary. “Frank McCourt on the American Dream”. *Forbes.com*. 22 March 2007. 12 Aug. 2012. <http://www.forbes.com/2007/03/21/frank-mccourt-dream-oped-cx_mc_dream0307_0322mccourt.html>

very vividly: “Day and night I dream of America” (AA 447). If he considers Ireland as a nightmare, America constitutes the opposite.

George O’Brien argues that

[i]n order that the American dream sustain and nourish the child, it seems necessary – judging by the way *Angela’s Ashes* is organized, that is – that it have an equal and opposite entity in which to be compared and contrasted. The name of this entity is Ireland, and of course it is a nightmare. When the child dreams of America, he speaks the naïve and plausible language of hope[:] (241)

[...] [S]omeday I’ll go back to America and get an inside job where I’ll be sitting at a desk with two fountain pens in my pocket, one red and one blue, making decisions. I’ll be in out of the rain and I’ll have a suit and shoes and a warm place to live and what more could a man want? He says you can do anything in America, it’s the land of opportunity. You can be a fisherman in Maine, or a farmer in California. America is not like Limerick, a grey place with a river that kills. (AA261)

This first manifestation of young Frankie McCourt’s American Dream quickly transforms into a nightmare in his second memoir. Having arrived in the United States, he faces the hardships of immigration. If the notion of the melting pot represents a valuable ingredient in the American Dream, at this point McCourt as a young immigrant, having earned a college degree, is still not part of the American Dream:

Assistant principals wondered how I managed to get a license with that brogue. Didn’t the Board of Education have any standards anymore? I was disheartened. No room for me in the great American Dream. I returned to the waterfront, where I felt more comfortable. (TM 56)

Even many years later, pursuing a teaching career, he assumes he has failed in the American Dream:

But here I was thirty-eight years old, lacking ambition to climb in the school system, adrift in the American dream, facing the midlife crisis, failed teacher of high school English, but hindered by superiors, principals and their assistants, or so I thought. I had the angst and I didn’t know what ailed me. Alberta said, Why don’t you get your Ph.D. and rise in the world? I said, I will. (TM 157)

During his time as a student at NYU, McCourt has to face the stereotypes associated with his Irish accent. He feels reduced and socially degraded because of his ethnicity. Contrary to the melting-pot notion of the American Dream, he experiences that there is no place for him in this ‘Dream’:

When they talk like that I don't know what to say because they have the power to lower my grade and damage my average so that I won't be able to follow the American dream and that might drive me to Albert Camus and the daily decision not to commit suicide. ('Tis 231)

The following quote alludes to the concept of success and progress which can only be achieved through strife and labor - a "conviction that anyone can pull himself up by his own bootstraps and 'make it' by observing the rules of the game and working hard enough" (Freese 108). "America [...] provides equal opportunity for everybody, and it is entirely up to the individual to make the best of his chances and to rise 'from rags to riches'" (Freese 108):

[...] a little weak in the eye and teeth department, a college degree and a teaching job and isn't this the country where all things are possible, where you can do anything you like as long as you stop complaining and get off your ass because life, pal, is not a free lunch. ('Tis 348)

The last quote, taken from the prologue of *Teacher Man*, summarizes McCourt's attitude to the American Dream in a perfect way. He describes an imagined, unrealistic teaching career, subliminally comparing it to the American Dream. If becoming a teacher would be part of this 'Dream', what would it look like? Naturally, he would have ended up in Hollywood. This sarcastic portrayal of the American Dream-like teacher serves as a perfect example for the mystification of the American Dream: the way it is imagined and the harsh reality to it:

But that would not be the end of the story. The real story would be how you eventually resisted the siren call to Hollywood, how after nights of being dined, wined, feted and lured to the beds of female stars, established and aspiring, you discovered the hollowness of their lives, how they poured out their hearts to you on various satin pillows, how you listened, with twinges of guilt, while they expressed their admiration for you [...]. [Y]our real reward [is] the glow of gratitude in the eager eyes of your students as they bare gifts from their grateful and admiring parents [...]. (TM 7)

Although in interviews McCourt considers himself as a living proof of the American Dream, his memoirs argue against it. It seems quite interesting that in reviews, interviews and secondary literature, McCourt and the concept of the American Dream are inseparable - it almost seems like a collocation. Closer observation however reveals that this comparison is only valid on a very superficial level. If we assume that going from 'rags to riches' offers sufficient justification to be considered as an example of the American Dream, fair enough. However, as previous sections of this chapter have shown, the elements which represent constituent parts of the American Dream, only exist on a mythical level. McCourt's memoirs

reveal, that many references to it bear negative connotations, even more so, alluding to personal failure. Perhaps McCourt's success should be regarded as an example of 'the luck of the Irish' instead: his unfortunate childhood, his tormenting self-doubt and above all his "doggedness" (TM 2) finally paid off and made him the "mick of the moment" (TM 2), "a late bloomer, a johnny-come-lately" (TM 3) on the book market and in Hollywood.

9. Conclusion

The main part of this thesis examined the presentation of stereotypes in cross-cultural encounters in Frank McCourt's memoirs. An analysis of stereotypes requires the examination of their origins. By taking a closer look at historical, social, political and economical factors in the respective countries, it becomes evident that British colonialism as well as anti-Irish sentiment closely related to nationalism in the United States, created many of these stereotypes. The character of the 'Stage Irish' contributed considerably to Irish clichés – some of them still lingering in people's heads even today. McCourt's memoirs however, not only present stereotypes alluding to Irish ethnicity, but also others referring to upper class, Americans, English, Protestants, Jehovah Witnesses, Muslims, Jews and so forth (El-Tom 78). Even though the author confirms various stereotypes, he skillfully manages "to transcend[...] them through the sharpness and precision of McCourt's observation and the wit and beauty of his prose" (King²⁸).

Especially in cross-cultural encounters, a variety of questions regarding identity arise. In many cases, cultural differences lead to in-between spaces which create hybrid identities. The concept of hybridity represents a significant factor in McCourt's case. Basically, it affected most of his life and triggered feelings of not belonging. As various passages in his memories show, McCourt felt alienated and frequently perceived himself as an outsider, no matter where he went. Psychologically, it put a strain on him and only in his later years he was able to accept his hybridity and realized that it was an attractive part of his identity.

For my second research question, I analyzed the construction of Irishness in the United States and its change between the arrival of the first Irish Famine immigrants and the beginning of the 21st century. Historically speaking, the emergence and the disappearance of Irish stereotypes is closely linked to immigration and poverty. In the seventeenth century most Irish immigrants to the U.S. were Scotch-Irish Presbyterians from the Irish province of Ulster. Mass emigration, caused by the Great Famine (1845 – 1852), evoked many negative associations with the Irish: they were poverty-stricken, starving and disease-ridden. In America, they were not welcome, they did 'not need to apply' for jobs and from a social point of view, they were treated like white slaves. The origins of this anti-Irish resentment in

²⁸ King, Nina. "PostArchives: Original Review of Frank McCourt's 'Angela's Ashes'". *The Washington Post*. 19 July 2009. 15 Aug. 2012.
<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/19/AR2009071901768.html>>.

America are to be found in England. There, in theatres, the character of the Stage Irish had first appeared and was transferred to the United States. The American Stage Irish immigrant represented – however in an ironic way – the growing, powerful Irish communities in American cities. Early representations of stage Irish in English theatres were characterized as drunks and savages who “mutilated the English language with Gaelic exclamations and curses. Despite their anger and villainy, they were little more than dumb animals who and when handled properly, really posed no threat to civilized man” (Dowd 17). In the eighteenth century a subtle change took place regarding the representation of the stage Irishman: he adopted more comic features and became very popular with audiences, who took a laughing at these Irish clowns (Dowd 17).

In the twentieth century, the Irish were able to redeem themselves and increasingly gained social and political power. Irishness can no longer be seen as a negative marker in modern American society: it has been “absorbed into a homogeneous white culture” (Dowd 4) and many Irish-Americans would find it hard to believe how differently they had been perceived a hundred years ago.

The third and last major part of this thesis analyzed McCourt’s trilogy in the light of the Bildungsroman. Therefore, it examined the psychological and moral development Frank McCourt has undergone, starting at his miserable childhood in Ireland, which is dramatically summarized in the prologue of *Teacher Man*:

That miserable childhood deprived me of self-esteem, triggered spasms of self pity, paralyzed my emotions, made me cranky, envious and disrespectful of authority, retarded my development, crippled my doings with the opposite sex, kept me from rising in the world and made me unfit, almost, for human society. (TM 1)

Thirty years of teaching in various New York high schools however helped McCourt to reflect on his past and to finally be able to tell his story. Writing *Angela’s Ashes* took on a therapeutic character and McCourt was able to accept himself.

The success of his first memoir has often been perceived as a story ‘from rags to riches’, which is certainly true in terms of financial gain and stardom. When it comes to the concept of the American Dream, many critics see him as the perfect example for it. Yet, at a second glance and particularly judging from his memoirs, it seems as if the American Dream managed to outrun him most of his life prior to the immense success of *Angela’s Ashes*.

Bibliography

Primary Literature:

McCourt, Frank. *Angela's Ashes: A Memoir*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996.

-----, *'Tis*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999.

-----, *Teacher Man*. London: Harper Perennial, 2006.

Secondary Literature:

Almeida, Linda Dowling. "Irish America 1940-2000." *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*. Ed. J. J. Lee and Marion R. Casey. New York: New York UP, 2006. 548-573.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso, 2003.

Angela's Ashes. Screenplay by Laura Jones. Dir. Alan Parker: DVD. Paramount Pictures and Universal Studios, 1999.

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Bischoff, Peter and Pater Noçon. "The Image of the Irish in Nineteenth-Century American Popular Culture." *Literary Interrelations: England, Ireland, and the World*. Vol. 3. Ed. Wolfgang Zach und Heinz Kosok. Tübingen: 1987. 61-75.

Brown, Thomas N. "The Origins and Character of Irish-American Nationalism". *The Review of Politics*. 18.3 (1956): 327-358.

Byrne, James P. and Padraig Kirwan and Michael O'Sullivan. Introduction. *Affection Irishness: Negotiating Cultural Identity Within and Beyond the Nation*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2009.

-----, *The Paddy Beyond the Pale: Thinking about Cultural Theory and Irish American Identity*. 14 Jan. 2011. <institute.emerson.edu/wip/byrne_WIP.doc>.

Connors, Margaret E. "Historical and Fictional Stereotypes of the Irish." *Irish-American Fiction: Essays in Criticism*. Ed. Daniel J. Casey and Robert E. Rhodes. New York: AMS Press, 1979. 1-12.

Crane, Mary. "Frank McCourt on the American Dream". *Forbes.com*. 22 March 2007. 12 Aug. 2012. <http://www.forbes.com/2007/03/21/frank-mccourt-dream-oped-cx_mc_dream0307_0322mccourt.html>.

Daniels, Roger. *Coming to America: A History of Immigration and Ethnicity in American Life*. New York: Harper Collins, 1990.

Darby, John. *CAIN Web Service. Northern Ireland: The Background to the Peace Process*. 14 Jan 2012. 12 July 2012. <<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/peace/darby03.htm>>

Delanty, Gerard. *Rethinking Irish History: Nationalism, Identity and Ideology*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998.

- Dinnerstein, Leonard, and David M. Reimers. *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration*. 5th ed. New York: Columbia UP, 2009.
- Divine, Robert, A. *America Past and Present*. 2. *From 1865: Reconstruction to the Present*. 4th ed. New York: Harper Collins, 1995.
- Dowd, Christopher. *The Construction of Irish Identity in American Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Duffy, Sean. *Atlas of Irish History*. 2nd ed. Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2000.
- Edwards, Owen Dudley. "The Stage Irish". *The Irish World Wide: History, Heritage, Identity*. Vol. 3. Ed. Patrick O'Sullivan. London: Leicester UP, 1994. 83-114.
- El-Tom, Abdullah. "McCourt's Angela's Ashes and the Portrait of the Other." *Irish Journal of Anthropology* 3 (1998): 78-89.
- Forbes, Shannon. "Performative Identity in Formation in Frank McCourt's Angela's Ashes: A Memoir." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 37.3 (Fall 2007): 473-496.
- Freese, Peter. *'America': Dream or Nightmare*. 2nd ed. Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 1991.
- Goodby, John, ed. *Irish Studies: The Essential Glossary*. By Alex Davies. London: Arnold, 2003.
- Grondahl, Paul. "Teacher Man' brings McCourt Full Circle." *Times Union*. 22 Jan. 2006. 1 Aug. 2012
<http://www.albany.edu/writers-inst/webpages4/archives/tu_mccourt_frank.html>.
- Hallissy, Margaret. *Reading Irish-American Fiction: The Hyphenated Self*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006.
- Herbst, Philip, H. *The Color of Words. An Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Ethnic Bias in the United States*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1997.
- Houghton, Gillian. *Ellis Island: A Primary Source of History of an Immigrant's Arrival in America*. New York: The Rosen Publishing Group Inc., 2004.
- Inkspell*. Ed. Nancy E. Zuwiyya. Binghamton City School District, Binghamton, New York. 2000-2003. 1 Nov. 2010
<http://inkspell.homestead.com/memoir.html#anchor_12484>.
- Jensen, Richard. "No Irish Need Apply. A Myth in Victimization." *Journal of Social History* 36.2 (2002): 405-429.
- Kelly, Fergus. *A Guide to Early Irish Law*. Early Irish Law Series 3. Dublin: Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies, 1988.
- Kenny, Kevin. *The American Irish: A History*. New York: Longman, 2000.
- , "Race, Violence, and Anti-Irish Sentiment in the Nineteenth Century." *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*. Ed. J.J. Lee and Marion R. Casey. New York: New York UP, 2006. 364-378.

- King, Nina. "PostArchives: Original Review of Frank McCourt's 'Angela's Ashes'". *The Washington Post*. 19 July 2009. 15 Aug. 2012.
<<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/07/19/AR2009071901768.html>>.
- Lee, J. J. "Introduction: Interpreting Irish America." *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*. Ed. J. J. Lee and Marion R. Casey. New York: New York UP, 2006. 1-60.
- , "Women and the Church since the Famine." *Women in Irish Society: The Historical Dimension*. Ed. Margaret Mac Curtain and Donncha Ó Corráin. Conneticut: Greenwood Press, 1979. 37-45.
- Lynch, Claire. *Irish Autobiography: Stories of Self in the Narrative of a Nation*. Oxford: Lang, 2009.
- Malcolm, Elizabeth. "Ireland". *Alcohol and Temperance in Modern History: An International Encyclopedia*. Ed. Jack S. Blocker, David M. Fahey and Ian R. Tyrrell. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003. 321-324.
- Martin, Francis X., and Theodore William Moody. *The Course of Irish history*. Lanham, Md. [u.a.: Published in association with Radio Telefís Éireann by Roberts Rinehart], 2001.
- Michaels, Walter, Benn. *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1987.
- Miller, Kerby A. *Emigrants and Exiles: Ireland and the Irish Exodus to North America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1985.
- Mitchell, James B. "Popular Autobiography as Historiography: The Reality Effect of Frank McCourt's Angela's Ashes." *Biography* 26 (Fall 2003): 607-624.
- Neary, Lynn. "Frank McCourt's Humor Transcended Tragedy". *National Public Radio*. 20 July 2009. 13 Aug. 2012.
<<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=106795160>>.
- O'Brien, George. "The Last Word: Reflections on Angela's Ashes". *New Perspectives on the Irish Diaspora*. Ed. Charles Fanning. Carbondale: SIU Press, 2000.
- O'Connor, Jenny. "Positioning Irish-America: Neil Jordan's American Irish and the Value of Interstice". *Screening Irish America*. Ed. Ruth Barton. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009. 356-382.
- O'Neill, Joseph R. *The Irish Potato Famine*. Minnesota: ABDO, 2009.
- Renes, Cornelis Martin. "The Quiet Man and Angela's Ashes: Hollywood Representations of Irish Emigration as Male Quest Narrative." *Estudios Irlandeses* 2 (2007): 93-106.
- Rightmyer, Jack. "Interview with Frank McCourt". *The Daily Gazette*. 22 Jan. 2006. 1. Aug. 2012
<http://www.albany.edu/writers-inst/webpages4/archives/gaz_mccourt_frank.html>.
- Shannon, William V. *The American Irish*. New York: Macmillan, 1964.

- Six, Ulrike. "The Functions of Stereotypes and Prejudices in the Process of Cross-Cultural Understanding – A Social Psychological Approach. *Understanding the USA: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Ed. Peter Funke. Tübingen: Narr, 1989. 42-62.
- Taylor, Nick. "A Short History of the Great Depression." *The New York Times* 10 July 2012. 10 July 2012.
<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/g/great_depression_1930s/index.html?inline=nyt-classifier>.
- The Internet Movie Database(IMBd)*. 29 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0145653/>>
- The Institute on the American Dream*. 15.Aug. 2012.
<<http://behrend.psu.edu/academic/hss/amdream/amerindx.htm>>.
- Thomas, Alexander. *An Action Psychological Approach to Cross-Cultural Understanding. Understanding the USA: A Cross-Cultural Perspective*. Ed. Peter Funke. Tübingen: Narr, 1989. 287-304.
- Trotter, Mary. *Ireland's National Theaters: Political Performance and the Origins of the Irish Dramatic Movement*. Syracuse UP, 2001. *Google Books*. 15 Jan. 2011
<http://books.google.at/books?id=zZJzQ5F-0E8C&pg=PA35&dq=%22stage+irish%22&hl=de&ei=oPkyTeaFFMON4gbJz_ysCg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=5&ved=0CEAQ6AEwBA#v=onepage&q=%22stage%20irish%22&f=false>.
- Von Doviak, Scott. "Angela's Ashes (1999)". Nov. 15 2010.
<<http://www.culturevulture.net/Movies/AngelasAshes.htm>>.
- Walshe, Shane. *Irish English as Represented in Film*. Frankfurt: Lang, 2009.
- Ward, A. *The Irish Constitutional Tradition: responsible Government and Modern Ireland, 1870 – 1960*. Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1994.
- Wells, J.C. *Accents of English: An Introduction*. Cambridge: CUP, 1982.
- Zuwiyya, Nancy. *Definition of a Memoir*. 2000. 17 Nov. 2010.
<<http://inkspell.homestead.com/memoir.htm>>.

Appendix: *Angela's Ashes* – The Film

The film *Angela's Ashes* was released in 1999 and directed by Alan Parker. Alan Parker as a director had previously been successful with movies such as *Evita*, starring Madonna in 1996, or *The Life of David Gale* in 2003. The cast in *Angela's Ashes* consists of Emily Watson (playing Angela) and Robert Carlyle (Malachy McCourt senior). The young Frank McCourt is played by three different actors: Joe Breen (young Frank), Ciaran Owens (middle Frank) and Michael Legge (older Frank) (IMBd). According to Renes this return-emigrant myth, unlike many screenplays displaying Ireland's 1930s and 1940s shows

[...] the other side of the mythical pastoral West: the dire slum reality of a city deeply sunk into the misery generated by the Free State's stifling class, religious and political divides and the economic hardships caused by the Depression and Second World War [...]. (97)

The City of Limerick is represented as “the Irish version of an urban ‘inferno’”: “problem-ridden, dehumanised, poor, bleak, grim, cold and rainy” (Renes 97).

According to Ebert (2000), temporal and physical distance enabled Frank McCourt to recreate

[...] a tough, disabling Ireland that feeds back into the safe American H(e)aven and makes for an equally nostalgic version or beautification of past hardships: “Mccourt may have had a miserable childhood, but he would not trade it for any other – or at least would not have missed the parts he retails in his memories” (qtd. in Renes 104).

Recently, and especially in the United States, a phenomenon has developed which can be characterized as a “craze for everything Irish” (*National Review*, 26 Oct. 1998, qtd. in Renes 104). Naturally, Hollywood saw McCourt's memoir as an opportunity to cash in on this trend (Renes 104). As a consequence Parker's “quick Hollywood adaptation” provides an image of Ireland “through the Hollywood prism”, reinforcing the concept of the American Dream (Renes 105). In the memoir, McCourt's witty, humorous, yet ironic description of a “‘miserable’ Ireland” serves as a “counterpoint”, whereas the self-reflexive McCourt as a child-narrator is “given less prominence in the film, in which imagery and voice-in-off only partially manage to replace the novel's ironic narrative voice” (Ebert 2000. qtd. in Renes 105). As a result, the reception of the movie was largely positive in the USA, but much less favorable in Ireland (Renes 105).

8.2. Transferring a Literary Text into a Film: Adaptation Theory

To focus on the filmic adaptation of McCourt's *Angela's Ashes* by Alan Parker I will take up Linda Hutcheon's concept of adaptation. She states that “three distinct but interrelated

perspectives” (Hutcheon 7) relate to “the process and the product” of what we call adaptation (Hutcheon 7):

Firstly, adaptation can be “seen as *a formal entity or product*” when it refers to an “extensive transposition of a particular work or works. This ‘transcoding’ can [also] involve a shift of medium or genre [...] or change of frame and therefore the context” (Hutcheon 7).

Secondly, “as *a process of creation* the act of adaptation always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation”, which has also been termed “both appropriation or salvaging, depending on your perspective” (Hutcheon 8).

Thirdly, concerning the “*process of reception*, adaptation is a form of intertextuality” (Hutcheon 8). When we experience adaptations as adaptations we recognize other works, which consequently is repetition with variation (Hutcheon 8).

When it comes to the fundamental question, whether some kind of literary works are “more easily adaptable than others” (Hutcheon 15), it seems that

[...] linear realist novels [...] are more easily adapted for the screen than experimental ones, or so we might assume from the evidence: the works of Charles Dickens, Ian Fleming and Agatha Christie are more often adapted than those of Samuel Beckett, James Joyce or Robert Coover. “Radical” texts, it is said, are “reduced to a kind of cinematic homogenization” (Axelrod 196:204, qtd. in Hutcheon 15) when they are adapted. (Hutcheon 15)

When dealing with adaptation as a process, we need to consider that adapters usually undergo a “process of appropriation, of taking possession of another’s story” (Hutcheon 17) and then make it their own. Hence, adapters first interpret and then create (Hutcheon 17).

The following two subchapters will explore whether the film has successfully avoided two of the clichés regarding modes of engagement defined by Linda Hutcheon’s *A Theory of Adaptation* or not.

8.2.1. Cliché 1: Only the Telling Mode (Narrative Fiction) Has the Flexibility to Render Both Intimacy and Distance in Point of View.

Critics often have different opinions on the issue if modern fiction owes something to film, or if it is rather vice versa when it comes to the use of “multiple points of view, ellipses, fragmentation, and discontinuity (qtd. in Elliot 2003: 113-14; Wagner 175: 14-16)” (Hutcheon 53). Some novelists may have techniques in mind, which are used in film during their creative process of writing. Such techniques may include close-ups, various camera

angles and shots. The essential question, however, is whether the “intimacy of the first person narrator [can] be achieved in performance [...] do techniques like voice-over or soliloquy work?” (Hutcheon 53). This question can also be extended to the use of close-ups etc. Robert McKee argues in his “bible for screenwriters” that films should never use “literary devices” such as voice-overs, for instance, because “that would be telling not showing” (Hutcheon 53). Other critics even call these devices disruptive since they draw attention to the words and not to the action (Hutcheon 54). Nevertheless, exactly this, i.e. the use of voice-overs, has been successfully done in various filmic adaptations in order “to make the character [...] the moral center of the work” (Hutcheon 54). Using the technique of voice-over is exactly what Parker does in order to transfer Frank McCourt’s perspective as the narrator.

Sometimes, writers emphasize the significance of the “inner life of characters, to psychic complexity, thoughts and feelings” (Hutcheon 56). Joyce was one of the forerunners, but notably, also McCourt applies the technique of stream of consciousness which – by some critics - has been labeled unrenderable in screen adaptations as the following example illustrates (Forbes 483):

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. (AA 23)

Nevertheless, this technique can also be considered as cinematic and a ‘precursor’ of the new media” (Hutcheon 56). The adverbial expression of time, for example, in literature such as “‘meanwhile’, ‘elsewhere’ and ‘later’ find their equivalent in the filmic dissolve as one image fades in as another fades out” (Hutcheon 64). Applying this method allows to merge time and space much faster than words could ever do (Hutcheon 64). In addition, time-lapse dissolve also synthesizes cause and effect, and this is one of the possibilities how the stream of consciousness technique, as well as the interior monologue became adaptable.

According to Mitchell (612), in *Angela’s Ashes*

[...] the reader could be tempted to assume that the “I” seems to have formed externally, as if McCourt’s subjectivity developed only through his interacting with others, rather than in concert with introspective reflection. For example he never allows us to access into the younger “Frank’s” cognitive processes through the device of an interior monologue, the hallmark of modernist technique.

Unfortunately, this is exactly what has happened in the film version. Where we should expect a child’s voice, we hear a voice-over featuring an adult male voice, reminding us of an aged

Frank McCourt talking about his youth. The replacement of a seemingly innocent voice of a child, conveying some sort of an unfiltered access to reality, leads to the effect many episodes rendered in the movie have a negative touch of judgment or even resentment. In the memoir, McCourt has ingeniously managed to make us laugh even in the face of adversity, in the film – especially throughout the beginning of it – we are almost exclusively confronted with misery, maybe even disgust and above all: rain, rain and rain. These images are only reinforced by the color technique used in the film, as Von Doviak points out in his review:

Using processed film stocks and lighting techniques to bleach all color from the picture, Parker conjures up a nuclear winter landscape that inadvertently (and inappropriately) evokes memories of Tim Burton's recent *Sleepy Hollow*. His studio-built, overly art-directed vision of squalor calls attention to itself and does a disservice to the material.²⁹

8.2.2. Cliché 2: Interiority is the Terrain of the Telling Mode; Exteriority is Best Handled by Showing and Especially by Interactive Modes

According to Hutcheon this cliché would suggest that modernist fiction for instance,

[...] exacerbated the division between print literature and cinema, in particular, by giving new significance to the inner life of characters, to psychic complexity, thoughts, and feelings. James Joyce may have claimed that his memory functioned like a “cinematograph,” [sic] but his classic modernist works have also made him, in some eyes, into the precursor of the new media [...]. Hutcheon 56

McCourt frequently applies the technique of stream of consciousness, where subject and world, just like the internal and the external merge. By applying this method it has become possible to leave the concept of linear logic (Dinkla 2002:30 qtd. in Hutcheon 56). Furthermore, the use of stream of consciousness as a cinematic device or even a new medium was said by many critics to be unsuitable for screen adaptation.

This second cliché also suggests that “film can show us characters experiencing and thinking, but can never reveal their experiences or thoughts, except through that ‘literary device of the voice-over’” (Hutcheon 58). Still, there are cinematic equivalents to be found, such as transporting the character’s inner thought to the viewer. Appearances, for instance, can reflect inner truths, other devices for achieving this are e.g. close-ups, which can reflect intimacy, slow-motion, rapid cutting, distortional lenses, lighting and of course sound, just to name a few. Music is able to create a depth and interiority “borrowed from the responses of our own

²⁹ Von Doviak, Scott. “Angela's Ashes (1999)”. Nov. 15 2010.
<<http://www.culturevulture.net/Movies/AngelasAshes.htm>>.

bodies as we listen to the insistent production of rhythms, tone colors, and changes in dynamics” (Kramer 1991: 156, qtd. in Hutcheon 60).

Music in Parker’s adaptation carries and emphasizes a specific tone in various scenes quite adequately. One of the funnier scenes in the movie takes place when Frank makes an attempt to wash his clothes and is left to wear one of his dead grandmother’s dresses for the time his laundry is drying outside on a clothes line. Aunt Aggie catches him in the bed and with a dazzled but at the same time funny expression on her face the rather uplifting song with the title *The Dipsy Doodle* begins to play, highlighting this very comical scene (Parker 1999: 106’). In contrast to this episode, throughout the dark scenes in the film, numerous shots of rainy Limerick are applied and the music is sensitively adapted to the sad, depressing atmosphere.

Another camera technique which is used in the film is the mirror-reverse shot, as for example, in the scene when Frank after discovering Mrs. Finucane’s death, goes upstairs and enters her bedroom. This scene actually represents a turning point in Frank’s life. He steals enough money to be able to afford a boat ticket to the United States (Parker 1999: 107’). Mirror shots transfer an image of actuality, which is an interesting technique adding truth to the memoir, claiming historical truth to some extent.

One of the last scenes in Parker’s *Angela’s Ashes* (Parker 1999: 112’), which is not part of the book, shows Frank immediately after the lunar eclipse, standing alone outside their house on a Limerick lane, suddenly having a vision of seeing his two younger “alter egos”: the two younger Franks played by Joe Breen and Ciaran Owens. This powerful image allows the viewer to access Frank’s thoughts for a brief moment. In addition, this vision foreshadows a new era which is going to start soon.

INDEX

1

1930s and 1940s, 40, 103
 1930s and 1950s, 0, 27
 1940s and 1950s, 0, 28
 1950s, 16, 28, 48, 49, 61, 91

A

abortion, 47, 48, 57
 abuse, 36, 96, 97
 accent, 25, 26, 37, 38, 51, 52, 53, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 76, 78, 84, 85, 86, 89, 93, 102
 African Americans, 1, 75, 76
 African-American, 18
 Alan Parker, 103, 104, 111
 alcoholic
 alcoholism, 34, 78
 alcoholism
 drinking, 1, 33, 69, 70, 71, 84
 alienation, 7
 American accent, 59, 60, 63, 85
 American Dream, 1, 3, 32, 72, 94, 97, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 110, 111, 114
 American nationalism, 20
 American Nightmare, 101
 American-Irish, 6, 18, 19, 65
 Angela's Ashes, 0, 1, 4, 5, 6, 19, 27, 34, 35, 43, 46, 47, 50, 53, 55, 95, 100, 101, 103, 104, 106, 108, 110, 111, 113, 114
 Anglo-American, 8, 18, 21
 Anglo-Irish Ascendancy, 39
 Anglo-Saxon, 18, 24
 anti-Irish sentiment, 10
 assimilation, 19, 23, 91
 autobiography, 3, 4

B

baby boom 48
 Battle of the Boyne, 56
 begorrah, 85
 Belfast 35, 51, 52, 53, 55
 Bhaba, 6, 10
 Bildungsroman, 3, 4, 76, 88, 110
 birth control
 contraceptives, 47, 62

Blacks

African Americans, 1, 76, 90, 92
 Book of Kells, 39
 brogue, 26, 52, 58, 60, 61, 62, 85, 86, 101
 Brooklyn 33

C

California gold rush, 93
 caricatures, 10, 12, 13, 15
 Catholic, 16, 17, 20, 24, 26, 27, 34, 35, 37, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 52, 55, 56, 57, 59, 60, 62, 69, 75, 79, 81, 84, 86, 87, 90, 91, 96, 98
 Catholic Church in Ireland, 27, 35, 40, 41, 44, 46, 47, 56, 96
 Catholicism, 0, 29, 38, 39, 43, 44, 59, 86, 87, 89
 Catholics, 16, 40, 41, 43, 44, 55, 56, 61, 62, 75, 86, 87
 Central Pacific Railroad, 94
 Chinese, 1, 36, 50, 80, 82, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95
 Chinese Exclusion Act, 93
 Christianity, 38, 39
 Civil Rights Movement, 23, 75, 93
 Civil War, 20
 cliché, 68, 69, 107
 Cold War, 48, 49
 Community College in Brooklyn, 77, 79
 Constitution, 27, 28, 40, 46, 47
 Constitution of 1937, 46
 construction of Irishness, 3, 109
 contraception, 44, 47, 62
 Counter Reformation, 39
 Cross-cultural, 5, 7, 55
 cross-cultural encounters, 3, 34, 37, 44, 51, 53, 55, 74, 82, 92, 108, 109
 cross-cultural understanding, 53, 54

D

De Valera, 27, 28, 97
 discrimination, 16, 29, 37, 54, 66, 68, 69, 75, 76, 92
 disease, 13, 16, 29, 31, 32, 66, 67, 109
 dissertation, 81, 88, 89, 94

diversity, 5, 20, 31, 91, 92
divorce, 47
dowry, 45
drinking, 33, 52, 65, 69, 70, 73, 74, 97

E

Easter Rising, 8
Economic War, 28
education, 14, 17, 27, 28, 40, 41, 46, 96
Ellis Island, 0, 31, 32, 33, 112
Emigration, 9, 29, 114
English, 0, 1, 11, 12, 13, 14, 24, 34, 36, 38,
39, 40, 42, 44, 52, 69, 70, 73, 79, 80, 81,
83, 87, 90, 91, 92, 99, 102, 109, 114
epiphany, 79, 98
Episcopalian, 65
ethnic discrimination, 14

F

Famine, 3, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14, 21, 24, 31, 36,
43, 45, 47, 67, 109, 113, 114
Fianna Fáil, 0, 28, 29
fragmented, 7
Free State, 35, 40, 104
From Rags to Riches, 1, 99

G

Gaelic, 13, 25, 39, 97, 110
Germany, 8, 28, 51, 58
Great Britain, 8, 11, 28
Great Depression, 0, 9, 30, 33, 48, 114
Great Famine, 109

H

High School, 52, 77, 78, 80, 81, 92, 98
hybrid identities, 22, 63, 109
Hybridity, 0, 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 23, 27, 34, 53,
63, 65, 82, 83, 88, 109
hyphenated, 6, 7, 22, 26, 61, 63, 88
Hyphenated Self, 0, 63, 112

I

identity, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 17, 18, 19, 20,
21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 31, 39, 48, 54, 59,
62, 63, 64, 69, 83, 85, 88, 89, 90, 91, 95,
109
Imagined Ethnic Communities, 0, 26
Immigration, 0, 7, 8, 9, 16, 19, 20, 21, 22,
23, 29, 30, 31, 32, 50, 68, 72, 93, 101,
109, 111, 112

immigration laws, 9
industrialization, 20, 30
intercultural exchange, 54
interview, 3, 4, 77, 100
Ireland, 25, 27, 28, 29, 31, 33, 35, 36, 37,
38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43
Irish accent, 26, 51, 58, 60, 62, 76, 83, 85
Irish brogue, 12, 26, 60
Irish hospitality, 68
Irish Woman and Sexuality, 0, 44
Irish women, 16, 46, 64
Irish-American, 0, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 15, 16, 17,
18, 19, 22, 23, 25, 26, 29, 34, 65, 69, 88,
111, 112
Irish-Americans, 8, 10, 18, 24, 61, 110
Irishness, 7, 8, 10, 14, 17, 18, 19, 34, 63,
65, 70, 83, 110, 111

J

J.C. Wells, 36
Jacobite succession, 40
James II, 56
Japan, 49
Japanese, 31
Jehovah Witnesses, 34, 90, 109
Jews, 1, 15, 34, 75, 90, 92, 93, 109
John F. Kennedy, 29, 88

K

Korean War, 0, 1, 49, 50, 51

L

Land of the Free 31
Language and Accent, 0, 1, 36, 57, 84
Limerick, 4, 6, 27, 33, 35, 37, 40, 41, 44,
46, 51, 53, 59, 64, 68, 72, 85, 87, 88, 89,
96, 98, 101, 104, 108

M

Malachy, 33, 38, 43, 52, 53, 57, 68, 103
melting-pot, 2, 80, 91, 100
memoir, 1, 2, 3, 4, 33, 34, 53, 76, 77, 79,
99, 101, 104, 106, 108, 110, 112
Methodist Church, 38
modernist, 7, 106, 107
multi-cultural classroom, 82
Multiculturalism, 1, 83, 90
Muslims, 34, 90, 109

N

National identity, 17, 20
nationalism, 9, 10, 11, 20, 21, 23, 26, 40, 108
Native American, 51
Native Americans, 0, 74, 76
naturalization, 31, 32
NINA-No-Irish-Need-Apply, 68
Norman Invasion, 39
northern accent, 33, 37, 38
Northern Ireland, 38, 42

O

Oath of Allegiance, 28
Old IRA, 33
Orange Order, 56
Orientalism, 35, 36
Original Sin, 47
Otherness, 25, 91

P

Pearl Harbor, 31
perspective, 4, 16, 41, 45, 53, 59, 77, 90, 105, 106
port of entry, 31
postcolonial, 2, 5, 6
post-famine immigrants, 25
poverty, 1, 13, 14, 16, 19, 29, 33, 34, 38, 46, 67, 69, 72, 73, 109
prejudices, 15, 16, 35, 53, 54, 55, 66, 83, 89, 114
Presbyterian Church,, 38
prevention of conception', 47
Protestant, 8, 39, 42, 43, 44, 52, 55, 56, 57, 69, 75, 81, 85, 87
Protestantism, 20, 37, 38, 40, 86, 87
Protestants, 24, 34, 35, 41, 43, 44, 55, 56, 57, 61, 62, 81, 86, 87, 90, 109
Puerto Ricans
 Puerto Rico, 0, 72, 73, 74, 79, 90, 91
Puerto Rico, 51, 72, 73

Q

Quakers, 43
quota of immigrants, 30

R

racial clash, 80, 91, 92
racial discrimination, 23, 92
racialized representation, 10

reality effect, 4, 5
Reconstruction, 20, 112
Red Scare
 Cold War, 49
Reformation, 39
religion, 17, 34, 37, 38, 39, 43, 53
role of women, 45

S

salad bowl, 19
school system, 5, 40, 78, 102
Second World War, 28, 30, 48, 50, 51, 104
self-reflection, 98
Sexuality, 0, 44
shame, 14, 52, 95, 98
ship fever, 67
simiam, 10, 15
sin, 35, 47, 56, 57, 86, 98
Sociolinguistic variation, 37
souperism
 souper, 43
Soviet Union
 Cold War, 49
Spanish-American War, 21, 72
spic, 73
St. Patrick's Day, 70, 71, 83
St. Vincent de Paul Society, 43
Stage Irish, 10, 14, 86, 108, 109
Statue of Liberty, 32
stereotypes, 3, 10, 12, 14, 16, 17, 19, 25, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 44, 53, 55, 57, 58, 60, 66, 70, 73, 74, 75, 83, 84, 86, 89, 92, 102, 108, 109
stereotypes, 10, 19, 108
storytelling, 2, 4
Stuyvesant High School, 77
substitute teaching, 52, 81
Swedish, 74

T

Teacher Man, 0, 1, 2, 76, 77, 78, 83, 85, 88, 90, 92, 95, 97, 98, 102, 110, 111, 112
The Catholic Church, 27, 35
the dole
 unemployment, 33
The Film, 1, 103
the North, 10, 33, 35, 37, 43, 49, 59
the Other, 0, 18, 25, 34, 35, 41, 55, 71, 87, 90, 91, 112
The Pale, 24

Tis, 0, 1, 2, 22, 25, 32, 38, 41, 47, 48, 51,
52, 53, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63,
64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75,
76, 85, 96, 102, 111
Transcontinental Railroad, 94
Trauma 1, 86, 95
traumatizing
 trauma, 40, 96, 97
Treaty of 1921, 28
Trinity College, 81, 87, 88
Tuberculosis, 67, 84

U

U.S. Army, 55, 58, 89
Ulster, 0, 39, 41, 42, 109
unemployment, 9, 27, 30, 33
Unionist politics, 37
United Kingdom, 13, 42
USA of the 1950, 48

V

Viking Invasion, 39

W

World War II, 0, 28, 31, 48, 49, 50

ABSTRACT IN GERMAN

In seinen Memoiren *Angela's Ashes* beschreibt Frank McCourt die schwierigen Umstände seiner Kindheit und Jugend. Seine Beschreibungen sind geprägt von bemerkenswerter Ironie und einem unverwechselbaren Erzählstil.

Angela's Ashes erschien 1996 und war McCourts erstes autobiographisches Werk. Es war sowohl bei Publikum als auch bei Kritikern auf Anhieb ein durchschlagender Erfolg. So schien es hunderte Wochen in internationalen Bestsellerlisten auf und wurde im Erscheinungsjahr mit dem *National Book Critics Award* sowie im Jahr darauf mit dem *Pulitzer-Preis* ausgezeichnet. Viele Rezensenten äußerten sich begeistert über McCourts heiteren bis pathetischen Tonfall, in dem er es verstand, teils entsetzliche Erlebnisse in purer Armut zu beschreiben.

Sein Nachfolgewerk 'Tis erschien 1999. Es knüpft nahtlos an *Angela's Ashes* an. Dieser zweite Teil von McCourts Memoiren beschreibt die turbulente Zeit nach seiner Ankunft in den USA. Als junger Immigrant in New York, der Stadt seiner Träume, versucht er verzweifelt, mit diversen schlecht bezahlten und körperlich teils äußerst belastenden Jobs in seiner neuen Heimat Fuß zu fassen.

Es folgte eine Zeit voller Selbstzweifel und Minderwertigkeitsgefühle für McCourt.

Sein Dienst in der amerikanischen Armee ermöglichte ihm jedoch, durch ein Förderprogramm ein Lehramtsstudium an der New York University zu absolvieren. Das Buch beschreibt die klassischen Hürden und Tiefschläge eines Einwanderers in den USA. Andererseits schildert es auch den Werdegang eines Mannes, der so zu seinen größten Talenten fand, nämlich jenen des Lehrens und Erzählens. Es lebt von der Diskrepanz zwischen den Idealen des "American Dream" und dem leidvollen Werdegang des Erzählers. Die poetische Kraft des Werks speist sich aus der Fähigkeit des Autors, eine gleichsam kunstvolle wie lebendige Balance zwischen diesen Antipoden zu finden.

Teacher Man, 2005 erschienen, bildet den Abschluss der autobiographischen Trilogie von McCourt. In episodischer Form beschreibt er darin seine dreißigjährige Laufbahn als Highschool-Lehrer und schildert deren Höhen und Tiefen.

Diese Arbeit untersucht einerseits das Genre der Autobiographie unter postkolonialen Gesichtspunkten mit besonderem Fokus auf der hybriden Identität des Autors und seinem Umgang mit Stereotypen in interkulturellen Begegnungen. Kulturelle Unterschiede können zu einem derart starken Gefühl der fehlenden Zugehörigkeit führen, dass sich hybride Identitätsformen ergeben. McCourt ist von diesen geprägt und hat sich Zeit seines Lebens als Außenseiter wahrgenommen. Erst mit reiferem Alter konnte er seine hybride Identität akzeptieren und diese künstlerisch kanalisieren.

Zweitens wird die Entwicklung des Bilds der Iren in den USA zwischen der Großen Hungersnot in Irland (1845-1849) und dessen Wandel im Laufe des 20. Jahrhunderts beleuchtet. Historisch betrachtet ist das Entstehen und Verschwinden von Vorurteilen und Klischees gegenüber Iren eng mit Massenauswanderung und Armut verbunden. Der Ursprung irischer Stereotypen ist sowohl im britischen Kolonialismus als auch von einer ausgeprägten Diskriminierung der irischen Bevölkerung in den USA zu suchen. Dies wird besonders am sogenannten "Stage Irish" deutlich, eines zuerst in England als Bühnenfigur und in karikierten Form in den USA etablierten Bilds des Iren als Trunkenbold und geächteter Einwanderer. Im 20. Jahrhundert jedoch konnten sich die Iren aufgrund zunehmenden sozialen und politischen Einflusses in den USA rehabilitieren und etablieren.

Doch nicht nur Iren, sondern auch diverse andere Nationalitäten und Religionen bevölkern McCourts Werke in stark klischeehafter Form.

Drittens wird McCourts Oeuvre anhand der Charakteristika eines Bildungsromans analysiert und die Frage aufgeworfen, welche Persönlichkeitsentwicklung beim Autor in moralischer und psychologischer Hinsicht anhand seiner Identitätssuche festzustellen ist. Ein zentraler Aspekt ist hierbei seine Lehrtätigkeit, die er stets nutzte, um seinen Schülern Geschichten und Anekdoten aus seiner Jugend zu erzählen. Diese Rolle als Erzähler und die damit verbundene positive Resonanz lösten mit der Zeit seine innere Zerrissenheit. Als Schlusspunkt dieser Entwicklung kann die Niederschrift der zuvor so oft an Publikum erprobten Geschichten gesehen werden, was für McCourt in gewisser Weise eine heilende und versöhnliche Wirkung hatte.

Davon ausgehend wirft die vorliegende Arbeit zuletzt die Frage auf, ob sein Werdegang als Beispiel für den klassischen "American Dream" herangezogen werden kann. Kritik, Publikum

und Wissenschaft führen McCourts Werdegang immer wieder als Musterbeispiel für den gelebten amerikanischen Traum heran. Eine intensivere Beschäftigung mit seinen Memoiren zeigt jedoch, dass sich dieser Traum bis zur Veröffentlichung ebendieser nie wirklich erfüllte. Sein in den Büchern beschriebenes Leben mit vielen Rückschlägen, wenig Eigenmotivation und vielen Zufällen an sich ist eher ein Gegenbeispiel zu den wesentlichen Charakteristika des "American Dream", dessen Erfüllung sich vor allem durch unbedingte Strebsamkeit als Grundbedingung definiert.

Curriculum Vitae



Persönliche Angaben

Name:	Sonja Schöntag
Geburtsdatum:	15.3.1976
Geburtsort:	Eisenstadt
Staatsbürgerschaft:	Österreich
E-Mail:	sonjaschoentag@yahoo.com

Ausbildung und Stipendien

2011 - dato	Bachelorstudium Lehramt für Sonderschulen, PH Baden
2008	Abschluss des 1. Studienabschnitts, Zuerkennung eines Leistungsstipendiums
2006 - dato	Diplomstudium Anglistik & Amerikanistik (Diplomarbeitsphase), Vertiefungsmodul Keltologie, Universität Wien
1999 - 2000	Bachelorstudium Information Management Queen's University Belfast, Nordirland
1997 - 1999	Fachhochschul-Studiengang Informationsberufe in Eisenstadt
1990 - 1994	Bundesgymnasium, neusprachlicher Zweig, Zehnergasse, Wiener Neustadt
1986 - 1990	Bundesgymnasium, Frauengasse, Baden

Studienbegleitende Tätigkeiten

2003 - dato	Nachhilfelehrerin für Englisch
1999 - 2000	GE Capital Bank - Service Center Eisenstadt
1998	Praktikum: MMO, Media Market Observer in Wien. Abteilungen: Marktforschung, Marketing, Monitoring, Promotion.
1997 - 1998	Freie Mitarbeit im Verein GIN (Gemeinwesenintegration und Normalisierung); Betreuung geistig und körperlich behinderter Menschen
1994 - 2000	Servicetätigkeit in der Gastronomie

Berufserfahrung

Jan. 2011 – dato	Stadtschulrat für Wien, Vertragslehrerin im SPZ Zinkgasse
2009 – 2011	IFL / Dr. Rampitsch, Kursleiterin für English
2009 – 2011	Europe Assistance: Einsatzbetreuerin
2004 - 2006	Austrian Airlines Group, Flugbegleiterin
2003 - 2004	Altys Austria c/o Cisco Systems, Wien. Bereich: Facility Management, Assistenz
2002 – 2003	Hilton, Fort Collins, Colorado Bereich: Events, Bankette, Restaurant

Sprachkenntnisse

Deutsch - Muttersprache

Englisch - exzellente Kenntnisse

Französisch - gute Kenntnisse

Italienisch - Grundkenntnisse, Textverständnis

(Neu)Irisch - Grundkenntnisse, Textverständnis

Altirisch - Grundkenntnisse

Bretonisch - Grundkenntnisse

Latein - großes Latinum

Auslandsaufenthalte

1999 – 2000 Belfast, Nordirland; Republik Irland

2000 – 2003 Colorado, USA