

## Constructing Dialogues, (Re)Constructing the Past: 'Remembered' Conversations in Frank McCourt's *Angela's Ashes*

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### Keywords:

constructed  
dialogue,  
fictional  
dialogue,  
conversational  
dialogue,  
autobiographical  
writing,  
fictionality

Abstract: This article explores the uses and functions of dialogue in Frank McCourt's memoir *Angela's Ashes*. Taking conversational dialogue and fictional dialogue as points of comparison, the article argues that dialogue in autobiographical writing is essentially constructed, albeit not in the same way as fictional dialogue is. Dialogue as a means of dramatisation raises questions regarding factuality and fictionality. In McCourt's memoir, dialogue is shown to serve numerous functions: characterisation and stereotyping; self-positioning and indirect stance-marking; the creation of verisimilitude, humour and reader involvement.

### 1. Introduction

Dialogue has its roots in everyday communication – whether it is in face-to-face communication, over the telephone or through social media, in informal or institutional settings (e.g., law courts, medical surgeries, examination boards, etc.), between two interlocutors or in a group comprising several participants (multiparty talk). As an abstraction it becomes a ubiquitous discourse type that can appear in spoken or written form (or both) in many non-literary contexts, e.g., in artificial intelligence, journalism, philosophy, psychology, or history, to name only a few. It can also be found in the three major literary genres drama (Herman 1995), prose fiction (Thomas 2012) and poetry (Bischoff, Kinzel and Mildorf forthcoming). In this article I want to turn to autobiography as one area of (life) writing<sup>1</sup> where, to my knowledge, the employment of dialogue has hitherto not received much systematic investigation. In fact, it is telling that the *Encyclopedia of Life Writing* (Jolly 2001) does not even have a separate entry for 'dialogue.' And yet, it seems to me that dialogue raises some interesting questions not only as to which functions it might assume in autobiographical writing but also as regards the troubled notion of 'fictionality,' which has recently been given renewed attention in narratology (Nielsen, Phelan and Walsh 2015). After all, as Smith and Watson point out:

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<sup>1</sup> Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2010: 4) define "life writing" as an umbrella term for all kinds of writing that take a life into focus. By contrast, "autobiography," as its etymology suggests, is a special form of "self life writing" (Smith and Watson 2010: 1).

Life writing and the novel share features we ascribe to fictional writing: plot, dialogue, setting, characterization, and so on. [...] Further complicating matters, many contemporary writers deliberately blur the boundary between life writing and the kinds of stories told in the first-person novel that some call “faction,” others “autofiction.” (2010: 9-10)

One autobiographical text which blurs the boundaries between life writing and fiction is Irish-American writer Frank McCourt’s memoir *Angela’s Ashes* (1996). I want to use this text as a test case for exploring the hypothesis that dialogue contributes significantly to creating hybrid narrative genres which straddle the fact/fiction divide and which thus no longer sit easily with either the one or the other category. Since autobiography as a non-literary prose genre has often been compared to fiction (Smith and Watson 2010: 9-12) forms and functions of *fictional dialogue* will be one point of comparison for my discussion of dialogue in autobiography.

At the same time, I think it might be helpful to draw on the notion of “constructed dialogue” (Tannen 1989) used in linguistics to describe the use of dialogue in narrative and non-narrative conversational discourse (see also the contributions on “reported talk” in Holt and Clift 2007). In *Talking Voices*, Deborah Tannen writes:

In many, perhaps most, cases [...] material represented as dialogue was never spoken by anyone else in a form resembling that constructed, if at all. Rather, casting ideas as dialogue rather than statements is a discourse strategy for framing information in a way that communicates effectively and creates involvement. (Tannen 1989: 110)

In comparing the ways in which dialogue in autobiography and in *conversational storytelling* can be said to be “constructed,” I wish to foreground points of convergence between two discourse genres which, unlike autobiography and fiction, share similar epistemic stances and referential claims. Thus, even though dialogues in conversational storytelling and in autobiography may be “constructed” they still ultimately relate to the real world differently than dialogue in fiction does. Storytellers in these contexts do not as a rule have the same poetic license to create something entirely from their imagination – or at least such poetic license may be less expected by the recipients of their stories.<sup>2</sup> As Smith and Watson (2010: 10) put it: “We might helpfully think of what fiction represents as ‘a world,’ and what life writing refers to as ‘the world.’” I will return to this point below. One could of course also compare autobiographical writing to similarly related discourse genres such as history writing or biography (see Smith and Watson 2010: 5-9, 13-15). However, in contrast to these genres, autobiography and conversational storytelling share the important factor that their storytellers are usually personally invested in the telling and that their

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<sup>2</sup> Reading audiences’ negative reactions to hoaxes in autobiographical writing are a case in point (see Smith and Watson 2010: 17), as they illustrate how ‘truth’ and ‘authenticity’ – although they may be contested notions in much contemporary theoretical thinking – are still of great relevance for many people in leading their everyday lives.

identities are at stake in how they negotiate their stories (Norrick 2000). By conceptually connecting a written form of life writing to conversational storytelling, which can – and often does – contain elements of life narrative, I also follow the example of Harold Rosen (1998), who argues that much can be gained from viewing written and spoken forms of “autobiographical discourse” together rather than as separate entities.

I will take the following steps to advance my argument in this article: after briefly providing some background information about Frank McCourt’s memoir, I will discuss theoretical issues connected to questions of ‘fictionality’ as mentioned above, since they form the conceptual framework for my analysis. I will then delineate the two points of comparison against which I want to develop my discussion of dialogue in autobiography and, more specifically, in McCourt’s memoir: dialogue in novels and in conversational storytelling. My subsequent discussion of how McCourt presents dialogue in his memoir and what potential functions it can assume will draw on some of the functions presented earlier for novels and conversational storytelling. However, I must add the caveat that, given the limited scope of a research article, I cannot, of course, present all possible functions that the various dialogues presented in *Angela’s Ashes* might have, nor can my discussion claim validity and generalisability for other examples of autobiographical writing.

## 2. McCourt’s memoir: Text and context

In his memoir, Frank McCourt recounts his early years in New York up to the point when his family moves back to Ireland after the death of his baby sister and his father’s failure to maintain his job on account of his alcohol problem. The bulk of the narrative presents McCourt’s childhood and adolescence in Limerick, concluding with his return to America at the age of nineteen. The memoir attracted much attention for the grimness and poverty it describes. The generic label “memoir” already indicates that the book takes a segment of a life into focus and suggests that the narrative has a strong historical dimension, since a memoir typically situates a person historically and, at least in theory, “directs attention more toward the lives and actions of others than to the narrator” (Smith and Watson 2010: 274). Although ‘autobiography’ and ‘memoir’ are today used interchangeably, one perceived difference between the two genres lies in the extent to which they offer an internal or external perspective on the person whose story is told. This is potentially of interest for a discussion of the role of dialogue, since dialogue can also be said to externalise characters’ thoughts and emotions in their interactions with others (see section 5.6. below). However, even this distinction between external and internal perspectives is not always clear-cut, and one can concur with Rosen (1998: 9), who critically asks: “How is it possible to speak of one’s past without also speaking of those who shared it?”

McCourt’s memoir won the Pulitzer Prize and was turned into a major motion picture (1999), co-written and directed by Alan Parker. Moreover, the book’s international success has led to what Mark Quigley (2013: 170) calls a “McCourt

industry” entailing “two documentaries, two touring stage-shows, and three more volumes of memoir from McCourt and his brother, Malachy.” Furthermore, the book has instigated a considerable body of scholarly articles, most of which focus on its representations of Irishness (see, among others, Hamm 2002, McClinton-Temple 2013, Ní Éigeartaigh 2004, Robinson 2000).<sup>3</sup> Other articles take into consideration rhetorical and text generic aspects (see, for example, Cañadas 2006, Lenz 2000, Mitchell 2003, Sullivan and Goldzwig 2004). One approach that corresponds to my own concerns in this article is James Phelan’s (2005) narratological discussion of McCourt’s memoir, which is also intricately connected to questions of ‘fictionality.’ In the next section, I will therefore elaborate on Phelan’s work as a backdrop for my own analysis.

### 3. Dialogue, autobiography and fictionality

Phelan discusses McCourt’s life story under the rubric of “restricted character narration” because the narrative makes extended use of a limited perspective through the younger Frank’s eyes. Of the three narrative functions Phelan identifies in his book *Living to Tell About It* – reporting, interpreting, evaluating – only that of reporting is consistently employed in McCourt’s text. There is perceptible unreliability along the other “axes of communication,” which readers are expected to spot to infer the real state of the narrated affairs. As Phelan (2005: 80) puts it:

With unreliability, the implied author asks us to reconfigure what the narrator reports, interprets, or evaluates; with restricted narration, the implied author, in effect, limits the narrator’s agency to only one of the three axes of communication – and the narrator’s discourse may or may not be unreliable on that axis. If the narration is reliable, the authorial audience does not need to reconfigure it but does need to supplement it by inferring what the implied author wants to convey along the restricted axes.

This restriction through the implied author has ethical implications for our reading of McCourt’s memoir, Phelan argues, because we might easily accuse McCourt of “cheating” if “we were to decide the ironies of [an] anecdote are too neat to be credible” (Phelan 2005: 74). After all, what we realise is that “Mccourt is obviously constructing Frankie to serve certain purposes, and he is obviously filling in gaps in memory, even refashioning events and inventing dialogue to serve the same purposes” (Phelan 2005: 72). Phelan’s argument here resembles Smith and Watson’s, who maintain:

When life narrators write to chronicle an event, to explore a certain time period, or to enshrine a community, they are making “history” in a sense. But they are also performing several rhetorical acts: justifying their own perceptions, upholding their reputations, disputing the accounts of others,

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<sup>3</sup> The theme of Irishness has also engendered some controversy. Ní Éigeartaigh (2004-5: 81), for example, criticises McCourt’s depiction of his childhood in Limerick as a “clichéd representation of Ireland marked by Hollywood” and ascribes to it neo-colonialist tendencies.

settling scores, conveying cultural information, and inventing desirable futures, among others. (Smith and Watson 2010: 13)

I will argue that character dialogue in *Angela's Ashes* is also constructed to serve wider purposes related to the writing of McCourt's memoir, e.g., ridiculing persons or even turning them into caricatures, creating recognisable types or offering the reader linguistic 'colour' as regards the narrated past. One could call these global (in contrast to local) functions of dialogue. On the level of the verbal interactions among McCourt's 'characters,'<sup>4</sup> *local dialogical functions* may include informing, arguing, complaining, establishing rapport, love-making, etc. just as one can find them in everyday communication. After all, dialogue in autobiography can, at least on a very fundamental level, be said to originate from real-life verbal interactions or at least to come close to what such interactions *might have been like*. Smith and Watson also make this clear when they argue that life narrators "inevitably refer to the world beyond the text" and "are expected to remain faithful to their personal memory archives" (Smith and Watson 2010: 12).<sup>5</sup> However, on a more abstract level, I argue with Phelan that dialogue in autobiography also asks readers to 'infer' what the dialogue might represent on a deeper or more 'hidden' layer of meaning or, in Smith and Watson's terms, which "rhetorical acts" dialogue is made to perform more *globally*. This rhetorical focus raises questions concerning the presented dialogue's 'authenticity' or 'truthfulness.'

Autobiography studies have long acknowledged the fact that in many ways the generic boundaries between life writing and novels can be blurred even though the two kinds of writing also remain distinct as regards their referential systems and the storyworlds they create (Smith and Watson 2010: 9-12). In this respect, autobiographies pose a problem for what Henrik Skov Nielsen, James Phelan and Richard Walsh (2015) call "Fictionality Studies," especially if they deliberately cross the boundaries to fiction. Nielsen, Phelan and Walsh (2015: 62) seek to extend the notion of fictionality beyond the literary realm by distinguishing "between, on the one hand, fiction as a set of conventional genres (novel, short story, graphic novel, fiction film, television serial fiction, and so on) and, on the other hand, fictionality as a quality or fictive discourse as a mode." They understand fictionality as "the intentional use of invented stories and scenarios" (62) and distinguish between "global and local fictionality": "[g]lobal fictions can contain passages of nonfictionality, and global nonfictions can contain passages of fictionality" (67). Applied to autobiographies, this would mean that one could consider them non-fiction texts on a global level while there may well be some leeway for fictionality on a local level, e.g., in the recreation of persons, events, spatiotemporal dimensions and, of course, dialogue. Nielsen, Phelan and Walsh, however, also suggest that 'fictionality' itself is not gradable

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<sup>4</sup> I use the term 'character' here because I want to stress the idea that, although the people mentioned in McCourt's memoir correspond to flesh-and-blood personae in the real world, they are also rhetorically created in the textual construction that the memoir ultimately is and thus come to resemble fictional characters.

<sup>5</sup> A recent study which basically deconstructs the 'archive' metaphor in a diverse range of memory studies is Brockmeier (2015).

because what someone says in a given discourse context will always either be true/factual or invented/fictional. I argue that dialogue in particular is one narrative element that potentially thwarts any attempt at such neat categorisation in autobiographical writing because its truthfulness or untruthfulness cannot ultimately be determined (see also my discussion of “constructed dialogue” in conversations below).

Let us assume that a life narrator – analogously to a conversational storyteller – not only replays a previous dialogue in quoting it directly but uses a different wording here and there, says slightly more or less than what was actually said, or takes some liberty in presenting another person’s tone of voice, for example. This would undoubtedly begin to ‘fictionalise’ the past speech situation, but it would not make it ‘fictional’ in the sense of ‘invented.’ After all, the conversation – or at least some version of it – may still have taken place in the real world rather than belonging to a fictional storyworld. Even if we assume that a dialogue presented in an autobiography never really took place, it would not be ‘invented’ in exactly the same way that fictional dialogue is invented.<sup>6</sup> We could (and probably would) still expect the interlocutor to be a person existing in the real life world of the narrator or at least to be someone to whom the author of the autobiography was actually connected in some way or another (for a similar argument, see also Rosen 1998: 12-13).<sup>7</sup> So, if dialogue is employed in an autobiography in such a manner as to remind one of fictional dialogue, or of “constructed dialogue” as used in conversations, the question arises why this is done. Which functions can dialogue assume in autobiographical writing? To answer this question, I will first outline my two points of comparison: fictional dialogue and dialogue in conversations.

## 4. Points of comparison

### 4.1 Fictional dialogue

One of the key functions of dialogue in novels is dramatisation. Changing the mode from ‘telling’ to ‘showing’ is comparable to shifting gears when driving a car: one can accelerate the ride or slow it down – depending on how the dialogue is designed, which topics it revolves around, how it relates to the

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<sup>6</sup> Fictional dialogue may of course sometimes refer to ‘real’ dialogue, for example, in historical novels or novels which use a collage technique involving newspaper cuttings and the like. Likewise, a dialogue’s reference or non-reference to the real world can be a tricky question in other forms of dialogue, too: for example, are Plato’s Socratic dialogues real or invented? For a typology, see Kinzel and Mildorf (2014: 16-19).

<sup>7</sup> We could stretch the thought experiment further by thinking of a scenario where a real-life author relates an imagined conversation with an impossible interlocutor or a conversation that took place in a dream, etc. However, even then it would still be possible to say that there is a referential link to the real-life author – if only to his imagination or psychology. One may note here that the literary genres ‘Dialogues with the Dead’ or imaginary conversations between historical personae as in Walter Savage Landor’s *Imaginary Dialogues* (1824) pose somewhat similar problems for categorisation from the other side of the fact-fiction divide (see also Keener 1973 and Nemoianu 2012).

surrounding frame text, whereabouts in the plot it occurs, which characters are involved in it, etc. The alternation of and interplay between narrative comment and dialogical passages significantly contribute to a novel's overall structural and stylistic design. Fictional dialogue does not necessarily have to be introduced by embedding constructions or *inquit* formulae. In fact, pure dialogue novels are typically divested of any embedding constructions, which poses great challenges for the contextualisation and understanding of characters' conversations in such texts (for further discussion, see Mildorf 2013, 2014a). Furthermore, although fictional texts cannot immediately replicate pauses and utterances' suprasegmental features, texts can point towards such features by verbal or typographical signs. Conventionally, the use of inverted commas – whether single or double – signals a shift to direct speech. As we shall see, Frank McCourt occasionally resorts to non-embedded dialogue presentation for dramatic effect in his memoir. Interestingly, he also does not use inverted commas. This sometimes leads to a blending of the character narrator's voice with that of another character and blurs the boundaries between direct speech presentation and indirect reported speech, or between speech and thought presentation (see also Buchstaller 2014: 53).

Furthermore, adjectives and adverbs qualify the context-dependent tone of voice of a speaker, and typographical signs like dashes and dots may indicate speech cut-offs, pauses or hesitation in speech (Leech and Short 2007: 128-134). Such typographical markers also demarcate dialogue as independent units with their own focal structures even though, again, these focal structures cannot be replicated in their sound qualities. Having said that, readers are able to – at least to a certain degree – *imagine* intonation contours, stress patterns and voice qualities in analogy to speech patterns they are familiar with in real life. However, the nexus between cognition and (fictional) dialogue still requires further interdisciplinary research (see Mildorf 2014b), as do investigations into the notion of 'voice' as both a narrative-theoretical category and a conglomeration of characteristic auditory phenomena including pitch, volume, intonation patterns, timbre and voice quality (cf. Blödorn, Langer and Scheffel 2006 and Delazari 2016).

Another important function of fictional dialogue is characterisation. In his classic study *Speech in the English Novel*, Norman Page lists six types of relationships between characters' speech and their overall function in a novel:

- [1] Speech as identification: that is, dialogue in which a limited range of easily-recognized characteristics is found. [...]
- [2] Speech as parody: the use of dialogue in which certain features of speech well-known outside the work of fiction are exaggerated for purposes of comedy and or satire. [...]
- [3] Realistic speech: in which an attempt is made to suggest with some precision certain features of speech encountered in real life and appropriate to the character in question [...]

[4] Conventional speech: non-realistic dialogue in which qualities of speech are to be understood as representing, symbolically or metonymically as it were, qualities of character.

[5] Token-speech: the use in dialogue of accepted 'equivalents' to represent features which for some reason cannot be represented realistically.

[6] Neutral speech: stylistically undifferentiated, non-idiosyncratic dialogue which serves some other purpose than contributing to characterization.  
(Page 1988: 98-99)

Now, assuming that an autobiographical text aims at offering an 'adequate' or at least a recognizable version of the world it presents, one would expect dialogue to also serve the function of *verisimilitude*, i.e., of presenting a semblance of reality. In other words, one would also expect "realistic speech" to be of importance, e.g., the presentation of idiosyncratic speech patterns, of dialectal colouring, etc. However, such features may be difficult to capture in writing, and authors may therefore resort to what Page calls "conventional speech" and "token-speech." We will see examples of both in McCourt's dialogues. "Speech as parody" will also be shown to play a major role in the memoir.

Finally, there is the question of selection. One could argue that a major difference between fictional dialogue and dialogue in autobiography must be the fact that fictional dialogue only exists in the examples actually presented in a novel. By contrast, dialogue in autobiography can only represent a selection from various real-life conversations, and it is not necessarily evident whether a presented dialogue captures the entire original dialogue (if there was such a thing) or just parts of it. Where do dialogues really begin and end? Głowiński (1974: 7) posits that even in the case of fictional dialogues we read them as if they were taken out of a larger context of further dialogues and that we conceive of characters as being constantly ready to talk. Be this as it may, dialogues in autobiography clearly pose a challenge in that we can never be sure whether they present 'the actual thing' and, if so, how much and which parts of it.

## 4.2 Dialogue in conversation

As I already mentioned at the outset of this article, what is particularly noteworthy in linguistic discussions of dialogues in real-life conversation is that they are generally assessed as approximations to the original speech situation at best, and complete inventions at worst. Buchstaller (2014: 49-50), for example, contends that "there is plenty of evidence that quotes are very rarely verbatim representations of the original speech act" (see also Holt 2007: 47). From a linguistic perspective, quotes are obviously not the same as dialogue since they can merely capture single utterances. Furthermore, speech can be reported as direct speech, indirect speech or free indirect speech and even in some deictically more complex mixtures of these three (Vandelanotte 2009). Obviously, prosody plays an important role in this regard as speakers usually mark off reported direct speech prosodically and thus not only 'animate' the presented persons but also convey their speech activity types and their affective stance (Günthner 1999: 704). Finally, the boundaries between thought and

speech presentation need not be obvious, e.g., when quotatives such as “I was like...” are used (Haakana 2007: 172). Nevertheless, Buchstaller’s claim about quotations equally applies to constructed dialogue. She defines quotation as “a performance whereby speakers re-enact previous behaviour (speech/thought/sound/voice effect and gesture) while assuming the dramatic role of the original source of this reported behaviour” (Buchstaller 2014: 54). The terms “performance,” “enact” and “dramatic role” are interesting in this context, as they point towards a conceptualisation of speakers as actors fulfilling a quasi-theatrical role in conversation. Thornborrow and Coates (2005: 13), for example, also talk about “performances of self” in the context of conversational storytelling. This conceptualisation can already be found in Irving Goffman’s (1959) use of the metaphor of theatrical performance to explain human behaviour in social contexts. Similarly, Monisha Pasupathi (2006), in her discussion of how storytellers collaborate in constructing and performing selves, uses the notion of a “dramatic mode” in contrast to a “reflective mode” in narrative, i.e., a mode which dramatises rather than reflectively assesses past events. This idea of theatrical performance is interesting for autobiography studies to the extent that autobiographical writing can also be conceived of as a (somewhat more elaborate) performance of one’s past self as well as of the present self in the act of ‘remembering’ that past self (Smith and Watson 2010: 214-218). Shannon Forbes (2007: 494) argues that “it can be helpful when reading *Angela’s Ashes*, to think of the memoir as a collection of performances McCourt presents through systematic, complex, and varying linguistic structures and narrative techniques.” Dialogue is precisely one such linguistic structure in narrative that supports autobiographical self-performance. However, one must not forget that the term ‘performance’ applies to autobiography (and in fact to all writing) only metaphorically. In this regard, autobiography differs from conversation, where interlocutors are ‘performers’ in a slightly more concrete sense because they are physically present in an interaction. Charles Goodwin (2007: 27) describes such interaction as “a situation in which participants are building relevant action together through talk while attending to each other as *fully embodied actors*” (my emphasis).

When dialogue is employed in an autobiography the dramatisation becomes most noticeable in the shift from the ‘telling’ mode to the ‘showing’ mode. The author seemingly retreats into the background to let other people ‘speak for themselves,’ as it were, and he may convey an implicit evaluative stance in the very way he chooses to render conversational exchanges in retrospect. In this context, it is interesting to note that Phelan (2005: 68) adds an “implied authorial I” to the four types of ‘I’ identified by Smith and Watson (2010: 71-78): the “real or historical I,” the “narrating I,” i.e., the person telling the story, the “narrated I,” i.e., the person whose story is told, and the “ideological I,” i.e., a general concept of personhood available to the narrator. The “implied authorial I” is described by Phelan (2005: 69) as “the one who determines which voices the narrator adopts on which occasions – and the one who also provides some guidance about how we should respond to those voices.” Pasupathi (2006: 142) contends for the dramatic mode in conversational storytelling that listeners may find themselves “in the position of simultaneously supporting the story and the proffered version of the self.” Moreover, as Clift and Holt (2007: 13) point out,

the “reduction of responsibility for a reported utterance” may allow for verbal transgressions such as the presentation of racial discourse or speech that offends ‘good taste’ and may be used to evaluate and criticise others in an indirect way. Something similar is potentially at stake in autobiographical dialogue, I would argue, because a (re)created scene can guide or channel our sympathies in a certain direction without our immediately noticing it.

The reasons for storytellers’ creativity in presenting dialogue can partially also be attributed to constraints on the ability of speakers to faithfully represent aspects of an original conversation (e.g., other speakers’ accents, tones of voice, etc.), and to limitations regarding their memories (Buchstaller 2014: 50). These issues have immediate relevance for the discussion of dialogues in autobiography because here, too, it is debatable how much writers actually remember of original speech situations, which may have taken place a long time ago, and how accurately they do so. This creates an interesting paradox: like direct reported speech in conversations, dialogue in autobiography can be said to have the function of “not simply recalling a locution but also giving evidence about its form and content” (Clift and Holt 2007: 12). In other words, one function is to create ‘authenticity.’ However, as we have already seen, the presented dialogue is likely not to be ‘authentic’ at all. This paradox can partially be resolved if we accept the argument that “[a]ny utterance in an autobiographical text, even if inaccurate or distorted, characterizes its writer,” as Smith and Watson (2001: 12) have it. Put differently, Frank McCourt’s specific uses of dialogue may offer us an insight into his own evaluative stance on situations in the past and into how he retrospectively relates to other people in his life. I will return to this point in my analyses of selected dialogues from *Angela’s Ashes*.

## 5. Frank McCourt’s *Angela’s Ashes*

In this section, I will focus on several global functions of dialogue as it is presented in McCourt’s memoir: characterisation, self-positioning, dramatisation, evaluation and criticism, as well as dialogue’s relationship to introspection. Although I draw on ideas from Conversation Analysis (see above), my analytical framework is rooted in discourse analysis more broadly conceived. After all, the kind of dialogue investigated here is no longer situated in a face-to-face communicative situation and, as we shall see, is highly stylised to suit the purposes of the *written* genre of the memoir.

### 5.1 Fictionalising dialogue

What strikes one immediately when reading Frank McCourt’s memoir is the fact that it contains many dialogues, and the detail in which they are presented raises questions as to their epistemological status. Could McCourt possibly have remembered all those conversations? This question becomes even more pertinent when we are presented with dialogue that McCourt could definitely not have had any first-hand knowledge of, namely dialogical exchanges which took place while he was not there or even before he was born. One example can be

found near the beginning of the memoir. After Frank's father, Malachy McCourt, made a woman called Angela Sheehan pregnant, Angela's cousins Delia and Philomena, together with their husbands, Jimmy and Tommy, go to the speakeasy that Malachy regularly frequents to persuade him to marry Angela. Part of their conversation is presented as follows:

Delia said, We don't know what class of a tribe you come from in the North of Ireland.

Philomena said, There is a suspicion you might have Presbyterians in your family, which would explain what you did to our cousin.

Jimmy said, Ah, now, ah, now. 'Tisn't his fault if there's Presbyterians in his family.

Delia said, You shuddup.

Tommy had to join in. What you did to that poor unfortunate girl is a disgrace to the Irish race and you should be ashamed of yourself.

Och, I am, said Malachy, I am.

Nobody asked you to talk, said Philomena. You done enough damage with your blather, so shut your yap.

[...]

Teeth or no teeth, odd manner or no odd manner, you're gonna marry that girl, said Tommy. Up the middle aisle you're going.

Och, said Malachy, I wasn't planning to get married, you know. There's no work and I wouldn't be able to support . . .

Married is what you're going to be, said Delia.

Up the middle aisle, said Jimmy.

You shuddup, said Delia. (Mccourt 1996, 15-16)

I argue that it is precisely this kind of rendition of a conversation that may or may not have taken place this way but certainly *could have taken place* in the real world which calls into question Nielsen, Phelan and Walsh's (2015) rather rigid definition of "fictionality." The detail in what the characters say, the turns they take in response to one another can on some level be considered 'invented.' However, unlike fictional dialogue, this dialogue operates on the strong pretence that it captures some real-life verbal interaction. And because these people really existed and because they may very well have had a conversation similar to the one presented here one cannot simply discard this as an invention and hence as fictitious. Nor can one entirely ignore the creative-imaginative construction behind this dialogue. Drawing clear demarcation lines between fact and fiction becomes problematic, I would argue, because dialogue as a special discursive mode in the storytelling repertoire functions as a "signpost of fictionality" (see Cohn 1990), but does so in a textual genre which purports and is generally taken to be non-fictional. In this regard, dialogue's function in autobiography resembles that of the aforementioned "constructed dialogue" (Tannen 1989) in conversational interactions.

The ‘fictionalisation’ of the dialogue cannot only be seen in its content but also and especially in its rhetorical design, which no longer makes it look like ‘real-life’ conversation. Not only has the dialogue largely been stripped of its markers of orality such as prosody, false starts and repairs, speech cut-offs, and the like<sup>8</sup>; the dialogue also appears to be extremely stylised because phrases are repeated across the characters’ utterances and thus create a pattern. For example, the prepositional phrase “up the middle aisle,” which is fronted in the sentence “Up the middle aisle you’re going” and thus receives emphasis, is first spoken by Tommy but is then also picked up by Jimmy. The phrase is juxtaposed with Tommy’s implicit command “you’re gonna marry that girl,” to which Malachy responds “I wasn’t planning to get married.” The participle “married” is then again repeated by Delia, in whose similarly implicit command (or threat?) “Married is what you’re going to be” the participle appears at the front of a reversed pseudo-cleft construction (see Collins 1991: 139-153). It is thus emphasised and discursively signals an oppositional turn, as Delia demands a course of action which Malachy is not entirely willing to take.

The way the dialogue is laid out more generally already suggests a larger rhetorical pattern. Thus, the *inquit* formulae used to introduce the characters’ direct speech are always placed sentence-initially at the beginning of this excerpt (“Delia said...,” “Philomena said...,” “Jimmy said...”) whereas they appear in mid-sentence or sentence-final position at the end of this excerpt (“...said Malachy...,” “...said Delia,” “...said Jimmy.”). This syntactic parallelism, together with the repetition of lexical items, renders the passage formulaic, which is at odds with the ‘disorderliness’ that the original speech situation must have been marked by. Even if the dialogue presents a truthful account of what was said, the author of an autobiographical text obviously always makes a selection and to a certain degree chooses his way of presenting his selection to the reader. In that sense, dialogue in autobiography foregrounds the author’s stylistic choices, and one may ask which additional functions the dialogue is meant to assume. In the present example, one of the main goals does not seem to be to give a verbatim rendition of the verbal exchange but to present the characters’ language in such a way as to highlight their most typical character traits.

## 5.2 Dialogue and characterisation: Typification and verisimilitude

One key function of dialogue in fictional texts is indirect characterisation. Characters give away their personal traits in and through their verbal interactions with others. Since autobiography presents real-life persons, who already have a certain personality, this function may not at first glance seem to be of great importance. However, the way we perceive others is always an interpretation, and one could say that one way for authors of autobiography to offer their interpretations of people they have met is by means of dialogue. In the excerpt above, seemingly simple discursive features do a great job of telling

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<sup>8</sup> There is only one interruption, which is typographically marked by three dots, when Delia cuts short Malachy’s excuses for why he does not want to marry Angela.

us something about the speakers. Thus, Malachy's frequent use of the interjection "och," which is repeated four times in the entire exchange as presented by McCourt, suggests a sense of helplessness in a situation where Malachy clearly must have felt beset by Angela's cousins. The interjection also matches Malachy's evasive answers, e.g., when he offers the group drinks instead of committing himself to marrying Angela. By contrast, the "och" may also be an expression of Malachy's laid-back attitude. In his state of drunkenness he does not seem to care too much about Angela's honour, just as he does not seem to care too much about whether his children go hungry later in the memoir. The cousins are also stereotyped linguistically. Their repeated commands that the others should stop talking, e.g., when Delia tells her husband three times to "shuddup" or when Philomena rather impolitely demands of Malachy: "shut your yap," categorise them as rather forceful and commandeering women, an image that corresponds to the epithet "the great-breasted ones" (Mccourt 1996: 15). The function of the dialogue here is not merely to give evidence about the way Angela's cousins forced Malachy into marriage but also to convey an idea of what these cousins were like, at least from Frank McCourt's perspective. In this context, it does not matter whether the linguistic depiction is 'truthful' or 'realistic.' Rather, it is meant to capture the characters' perceived core qualities.

The same applies to the linguistic rendition of ethnic and social backgrounds, which can be subsumed under the function of creating verisimilitude. Thus, a barman's New York accent is given as: "Jeez, Pete, I didn't ax ya to tell me history o'da woild, did I? Naw, kid [...] I never hoid a name like dat Malachy" (Mccourt 1996: 29). Mrs. Leibowitz, the Jewish neighbour, says to Frankie: "...Zat is one sick baby. I know from sick babies. I work in hozpital. [...] You and little Malachy. Nice Chewish name, have piece cake, eh?" (Mccourt 1996: 38). And the Italian grocer, Mr. Dimino, addresses Frankie by saying: "Hey Frankie, c'mere. Watch out crossing da street. Dem twins hungry again?" (Mccourt 1996: 49). McCourt presents on a graphemic level perceived 'typical' speech patterns such as /z/ or /d/ for the speakers' variant of the 'th'-sound, /oi/ for the diphthong that replaces the vowel [ɜ] in the barman's accent, or /ch/ as a representation of Mrs. Leibowitz' voiceless pronunciation of the voiced affricate [dʒ] in "Jewish." Furthermore, grammatical features such as the 'wrong' usage of prepositions or articles mark the characters' speech as 'foreigner talk,' thus also providing local colour for the depiction of the linguistic variation to be found in a metropolis like New York. One could classify this kind of speech presentation as "realistic" in Norman Page's (1988) sense. However, since the presentation is limited to a few (stereo)typical features it could also fall into the category of "token-speech." It is important to remember that presenting spoken language in writing is well-nigh impossible, and even transcripts used in linguistic research are merely conventionalised and symbolic approximations to an original speech situation (Bailey, Maynor and Cukor-Avila 1991: 14). Therefore, rather than asking about the 'adequacy' of quasi-realistic speech presentation one ought to ask about its possible functions.

### 5.3 Dialogue and self-positioning: Solidarity vs. distance in McCourt's narrated communities

Given the difficulties in presenting spoken language, it is hardly surprising that McCourt's dialogues are at best approximations to what people must have sounded like. However, what *is* surprising is the fact that speech presentations sometimes appear to be inconsistent. For example, an Irish accent or even dialectal forms are not necessarily used for all the characters of whom one might expect such language, or at least not to the same degree. Instead, token samples of 'Irish English' often seem to be reserved to those persons who stand for a certain kind of 'Irishness.' Class, regional origins and, above all, educational background, seem to be distinguishing criteria to signal membership in a group in McCourt's memoir.

A good example can be found when McCourt describes his experience of stealing apples and milk because he often goes hungry as a child. His reflections about what might happen if he was caught out also contain (imagined) direct speech, in this case in the form of a quotation rather than a dialogical exchange:

If they see me they'll be running to the woman of the house, Oh, madam, madam, there's an urchin beyant that's makin' off with all the milk and bread.

Beyant. Maids talk like that because they're all from the country, Mullingar heifers, says Paddy Clohessy's uncle, beef to the heels, and they wouldn't give you the steam of their piss. (Mccourt 1996: 378)

The lexical item "urchin," the pronunciation of 'beyond' as something like "beyant" and the reduction of the 'ing'-ending in "makin'" are meant to characterise the speech of Irish maid servants. Interestingly, this direct speech is immediately juxtaposed with a metalinguistic comment made by another person, Paddy Clohessy's uncle, who thinks that maids speak like that "because they're all from the country." This rather derogatory assessment is further emphasised by the epithet "Mullingar heifers." McCourt displays by means of direct speech how people within the community he lived in set themselves off from others linguistically – depending on where they originally came from and what they did – and thus created either a sense of solidarity or distance.<sup>9</sup> More interestingly, however, McCourt himself seems to be distancing himself from that very community he describes by putting into the mouth of Paddy Clohessy's uncle words which are equally parodic: his language is marked by colloquialisms and vulgarity. In this context, it is noteworthy that McCourt's own direct speech is mostly devoid of any dialectal colouring, i.e., "neutral speech" (Page 1988: 99) is used to depict McCourt's language. To a certain degree, this may be McCourt's attempt at creating a linguistic 'comfort zone' for himself as

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<sup>9</sup> This phenomenon is, for example, treated in speech accommodation theory (Giles and Smith 1979). Speakers' styles are either marked by "convergence," i.e., "the processes whereby individuals shift their speech styles to become more like that of those with whom they are interacting" (Giles and Smith 1979: 46), or they are marked by "divergence," i.e., speech "shifts away from the interlocutor's style" (Giles and Smith 1979: 52).

someone who experienced exclusion and stigmatisation because he had been born in America but then moved to Ireland in his early childhood.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, neutral speech allows McCourt to steer clear of too rigid a self-classification.<sup>11</sup> One might also speculate that the use of neutral speech is a concession to an international readership, which may otherwise have difficulty understanding the Irish vernacular if used more holistically. A third function, I would argue, is to create a distance to the past, especially to events and people in Ireland. As Mitchell (2003: 618) contends, “writing from the perspective of an Irish-American rather than that of a lifetime native of Limerick, McCourt positions himself at a comfortable yet controversial distance from his boyhood home.”

Put differently, the contrast between “neutral speech” on the one hand and “realistic speech” or “token-speech” on the other is often, albeit not exclusively, deployed to convey a critical stance. This can also be seen in the following example, where McCourt ‘quotes’ his uncle directly to subsequently present what his parents thought about this language:

[...] He tells me, That’s me mug and don’t be drinkin’ your tay oush of ish.

Oush of ish. That’s the Limerick slum talk that always worried Dad. He said, I don’t want my sons growing up in a Limerick lane saying, Oush of ish. It’s common and low-class. Say out of it properly.

And mam says, I hope it keeps fine for you but you’re not doing much to get us oush of ish. (Mccourt 1996: 378)

Again, one Irish person, in this case McCourt’s father, objects to the language use of some other Irish person because that language is ‘inferior’ and marks the speaker’s lower social position (“Limerick slum talk”). Implicitly, McCourt’s father places himself above this social group, believing that he and, hence, his immediate family are better educated and therefore superior to the rest of the extended Irish family. Angela’s response to her husband is interesting in this context since she employs the very language that he detests. Not only does she criticise her husband’s lack of support for the family (he drinks and squanders the little money the family has); she also draws attention to the pointlessness of her husband’s arrogant attitude in view of their own family’s low position and poverty. Her use of the same “Limerick slum talk” becomes a powerful weapon in talking back at him because it undermines his authority on such matters. McCourt, in turn, can use this kind of verbal exchange to indirectly settle the score with his father in retrospect. Dialogue allows criticism to be waged by

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<sup>10</sup> For example, when the family arrives in Limerick, two boys notice the children’s American accent, and on learning that they are indeed American, they comment on this by saying: “God, they’re Americans” (Mccourt 1996: 67), which one could interpret as derisive or contemptuous, especially since the boys “stared at” (ibid.) Frankie and his siblings. However, without further information on the prosody of this utterance it is difficult to determine once and for all what exactly the boys’ comment expresses.

<sup>11</sup> From a postcolonial perspective, one could argue that neutral speech offers McCourt a “third space” from which to observe and evaluate his hybrid position. For readings of Angela’s Ashes against the background of postcolonial theories, see, for example, Quigley (2013) and Villar Argáiz (2007).

means of indirection (although McCourt does occasionally criticise his father more openly in the memoir<sup>12</sup>). In the next section, I will discuss two examples from Frank McCourt's memoir to illustrate how character dialogue is used to indirectly convey McCourt's critical evaluation of past events and of the people involved in those events.

#### 5.4 Dialogue and evaluation: Marking the author's stance

In chapter sixteen of *Angela's Ashes*, McCourt describes a situation during his adolescence when he works as a telegram boy in Limerick. One day, he is sent to deliver condolence telegrams to Mr Harrington, an Englishman whose Irish wife has just passed away. On arriving at the Harringtons' home, Frank is met with insults by the obviously drunk Mr Harrington: "You'll want to see her, of course. You'll want to see what you people have done to her with your damn tuberculosis. Race of ghouls..." (McCourt 1996: 413). Shortly after that, Mr Harrington rather forcefully 'offers' Frank some sherry:

[...] You'll need a drink, of course. You Irish quaff at every turn. Barely weaned before you clamor for the whiskey bottle, the pint of stout. You'll have what, whiskey, sherry?

Ah, a lemonade will be lovely.

I am mourning my wife not celebrating the bloody citrus. You'll have a sherry [...]. (McCourt 1996, 413)

Mr Harrington commits a number of "face-threatening acts" (Brown and Levinson 1987) in this conversation: thus, the first question he is presented as putting to Frank is whether he is Irish (McCourt 1996: 412). Of course we cannot know whether this represents the very beginning of their verbal exchange or whether, in reality, some other turns preceded this question. The fact that McCourt chooses to 'replay' the dialogue from this point suggests that he wishes to foreground the absolute *irrelevance* and arbitrariness of Mr Harrington's question for the communicative situation at hand. Mr Harrington then uses the information of Frank's national identity to run off a series of insults against the Irish and, by implication, against Frank. He unjustly blames his wife's illness on the Irish, who, he implicitly claims, typically suffer from tuberculosis (note the use of the possessive pronoun "your" in "your damn tuberculosis"). He also repeats a number of clichés concerning the Irish, e.g., their heavy drinking. This claim is ironically refracted by the fact that Frank asks for "a lemonade" but is then effectually forced to drink alcohol – or at least so we are made to believe by the way the dialogue is presented to us. Harrington ignores Frank's suggestion that "a lemonade would be lovely." His assertion "You'll have a sherry" may be read as performing the *illocutionary act* of a

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<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, by adopting the naive child's perspective throughout most of the narrative, McCourt generally mitigates his criticism of others and thereby manages to bring out the humorous or ludicrous side of things (Mitchell 2003). This can be seen as another effect of the indirection which results from the narrative's restriction to the "reporting function" (Phelan 2005; see section 3 above).

suggestion, promise, command or even a threat. John L. Austin (1962: 94-108) distinguished among three communicative acts: the *locutionary act*, which refers to the literal meaning of what is said; the *illocutionary act*, i.e., the linguistic action actually intended or performed with a locution; and the *perlocutionary act*, i.e., the action resulting from an illocution or the effects created with an illocutionary act. Without any clues as to how Mr Harrington spoke those words we can only make guesses about their illocutionary force. However, I would argue that the way McCourt contextualises this dialogue in its written version strongly suggests rather more forceful than jovial or polite action on Harrington's part. Similarly, Harrington later infringes on Frank's freedom of action again; he not only makes Frank drink and also eat a ham sandwich, which Frank immediately vomits into the deceased Mrs Harrington's rosebush (McCourt 1996: 414), but he also uses physical violence in his attempt to make Frank stay to keep watch with him for an hour (McCourt 1996: 415). Just before that, when Harrington leaves the house to buy some whiskey in the pub, he even locks Frank in with dead Mrs Harrington to make sure he does not leave.

On returning from the pub, Mr Harrington catches Frank in the process of trying to baptise his dead wife with sherry (which in itself is an absurd thing to do). The dialogue accompanying all this ludicrous action, which verges on the burlesque, is very interesting linguistically:

[...] Did you touch her? Did you? I'll wring your scrawny neck.

I— I,—

Oi, Oi, speak English, you scrap.

I was just, a little sherry to get her into heaven.

Heaven? [...] Oh, Christ, I can't stand it. Here, more sherry.

Ah, no, thanks.

Ah, no, thanks. That puny Celtic whine. You people love your alcohol. Helps you crawl and whine better. Of course you want food. [...] Here. Ham. Eat.

Ah, no, thanks.

Ah, no thanks. Say that again and I'll ram the ham up your arse. (McCourt 1996, 414)

The speech cut-offs in Frank's turns at talk in the second and fourth line, which are typographically marked by dashes and a comma respectively, indicate Frank's insecurity at that moment. He is at a loss as to how to explain himself and probably fears repercussions. Mr Harrington, by contrast, continues to bully Frank also on the verbal level. He threatens to use violence and insults Frank by assigning to him negative epithets. He also speaks in an abrupt, commanding tone, which is typographically captured in periods after single words or noun phrases ("Here. Ham. Eat."/ "Here, more sherry.") and in extremely short sentences.

The most striking feature in this excerpt is the phenomenon of "echo dialogue," i.e., an exchange where "one of the interlocutors repeats the whole or a part of

the other interlocutor's utterance or rejoinder in such a way as to form a meaningful conversation" (Nikulin 2006: 180). Here, the pragmatic function of the echo dialogical construction is not as positive, though. In the first instance, Harrington repeats Frank's words to imitate and thus to ridicule Frank's accent. This underlines the racial stereotyping and racist behaviour we saw right from the beginning of the scene. The double repetition of "Ah, no, thanks" denigrates and ignores Frank's declining of further offers of alcohol and food while at the same time mocking Frank's speech. One could interpret this repetition as a dismissively ironic remark if one reads it against Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber's (2012) *echoic account of irony*. Wilson and Sperber describe echoic uses of language as follows: "some attributive uses of language are primarily intended to achieve relevance by showing that the speaker has in mind a certain thought held by others [...] and wants to convey her attitude and reaction to it" (2012: 129). Harrington's ironic echo would then rest on his tacit assumption that Frank only pretends he does not want any more alcohol but in fact craves for more because he is Irish ("You people love your alcohol.").

All in all, the dialogue here helps create a rather negative image of Harrington as a drunkard, racist and bully. On a surface level, Harrington himself is to blame for the image we form of him simply because of the way he acts and speaks. However, consider how carefully the scenic presentation is crafted down to the smallest linguistic details – which again, in all likelihood, do not correspond one-to-one to the language that was used in the actual conversation. What we perceive here is the way in which the "implied authorial I" (Phelan 2005: 68) communicates his own evaluation of Harrington and of his past experience in an indirect manner. It is fair to assume that this specifically negative rendition of Harrington as a person by means of character dialogue does not simply pursue the goal of giving a faithful account of that situation and of what Harrington was like. Rather, its purpose seems to be to create the (stereo)type of an English oppressor, which corresponds to a more outspoken remark at the beginning of the memoir, where McCourt refers to "the English and the terrible things they did to us for eight hundred years" (McCourt 1996: 9). Since the dialogue is furthermore presented in an ironic tone, we cannot but feel for Frank in that situation and reject Harrington's obnoxious behaviour and injustice. In that sense, the scenic rendering of this past moment co-opts us more subtly into taking sides than a direct narratorial comment would have done (see also Pasupathi 2006).

### 5.5 Dialogue as Criticism: Humour and Ridicule

The example of Harrington already shows that one of the most distinctive marks of *Angela's Ashes* is McCourt's use of humour, which draws on Irish literary traditions (Lenz 2000) and helps to alleviate the traumatic experiences presented in the memoir (see Mitchell 2013: 616). Dialogue plays a central role in creating a sense of humour because here people's comical potential can be shown by exposing their weaknesses or flaws. As I already mentioned, oftentimes a person of authority is ridiculed this way. One example can be found in a scene in which the telegram boys sit at the post-office waiting for work. Miss

Barry, an acrimonious woman who oversees the boys, allows them to talk but not to laugh. One of the boys, Mackey, makes the following remark about Miss Barry: “What that oul’ bitch needs is a good rub o’ the relic, a good rub o’ the brush. Her mother was a street-walking flaghopper and her father escaped from a lunatic asylum with bunions on his balls and warts on his wank” (McCourt 1996: 404). Mackey does not attack Miss Barry directly but speaks about her in vulgar slang to the other boys. The sexual references can be seen as a special form of bragging and as displays of the adolescent’s verbal power and virility in front of his peers. In this regard, the little speech is reminiscent of the ritual game of “playing the dozens,” which originated in communities of young Afro-American men and involves verbal insults directed especially against the interlocutor’s family, most notably his parents (Wald 2012). Here, the only difference is that the insult is not immediately directed at the ‘opponent.’ However, Miss Barry may have heard the comment, or she may assume that what Mackey has to say to the others must be bad. At any rate, she offers a commentary in return, which leads to the following exchange:

[...] Your mouth is a lavatory. Did you hear me?

I did, Miss Barry.

You have been heard on the stairs, Mackey.

Yes, Miss Barry.

Shut up, Mackey.

I will, Miss Barry.

Not another word, Mackey.

No, Miss Barry.

I said shut up, Mackey.

All right, Miss Barry.

That’s the end of it, Mackey. Don’t try me.

I won’t, Miss Barry.

Mother o’ God give me patience.

Yes, Miss Barry.

Take the last word, Mackey. Take it, take it, take it.

I will, Miss Barry. (McCourt 1996, 404-405)

Mackey cleverly drives Miss Barry to the point of exasperation by ‘overdoing’ politeness. He, for example, exaggerates the use of formal address<sup>13</sup> by mentioning Miss Barry’s name at every turn and by seemingly complying with whatever she says. Superficially, therefore, Mackey signals deference. Miss Barry’s reaction, however, and particularly her unnerved tone as can be ‘heard’ in the frantic repetition of “Take it” point to the fact that she has very well understood the real purpose of this dialogue, namely to wind her up and to expose her to ridicule in front of everybody. The repetition of the address term –

<sup>13</sup> On the pragmatics of direct address more generally, see Norrick and Babel (2005).

here used as an empty formula – gives the dialogue a ritualistic quality and again corresponds to verbal games such as “playing the dozens.” It also echoes the more global repetitive patterns in McCourt’s narrative (see Matiko 2000 and section 4.1. above). At the same time, the exaggerated use of politeness features to undermine power differentials can also be found in humoristic texts such as P. G. Wodehouse’s Jeeves and Wooster stories (for a discussion, see Mildorf 2012). Once again, one forms the impression that McCourt crosses the boundaries between fact and fiction for stylistic effect here.

### 5.6 Replacing introspection: Speech and thought

As the examples have hitherto shown, dialogue in autobiography – rather than simply offering a ‘realistic’ rendition of what was said on some occasion – can be used to express criticism in an indirect way. Other people’s attitudes can be captured in what they say and can thus also be exposed to readers. Likewise, dialogue in conversational stories can be employed to say something about other people’s thoughts and feelings at a given moment, or indeed about one’s own emotional disposition at that moment (Buchstaller 2014: 50; Mildorf 2008). In McCourt’s memoir, the boundaries between direct speech and direct thought presentation are often blurred, not least because there is no clear typographical marking or consistent use of *inquit* formulae. The following example illustrates some of the effects this might create. In this dialogue, Angela voices her disappointment and despair about the fact that Frank has been turned down by the Christian Brothers and thus is barred from good schooling.

[...] Listen to me, she says. Are you listening?

I am.

That’s the second time a door was slammed in your face by the Church.

Is it? I don’t remember.

Stephen Carey told you and your father you couldn’t be an altar boy and closed the door in your face. Do you remember that.

I do.

And now Brother Murray slams the door in your face.

I don’t mind. I want to get a job.

Her face tightens and she’s angry. You are never to let anybody slam the door in your face again. Do you hear me?

She starts to cry by the firs, Oh, God, I didn’t bring ye into the world to be a family of messenger boys.

I don’t know what to say, I’m so relieved I don’t have to stay in school for five or six more years.

I’m free. (Mccourt 1996, 364-365)

While it is quite obvious that Angela’s turns at talk must have been addressed to Frank, i.e., they were actually spoken out loud, Frank’s responses are a lot more

ambiguous. Did he really say those words in return or did he simply form responses in his mind, never really uttering them? Both options are technically possible but I would lean towards a reading that interprets Frank's turns as mental responses. For one thing, Frank 'answers' to comments and questions which do not always necessarily require a real answer. For example, when Angela states rather than asks whether Frank remembers another occasion on which he was turned down by the church, he 'replies' in the negative: "Do you remember that. / I do." This seems somewhat odd, given that the full stop (rather than a question mark) at the end of Angela's turn suggests that she did not formulate a proper question here. Frank's next response potentially threatens the communicative situation because he expresses his relief about the fact that he need not go to school: "I'm so relieved I don't have to stay in school for five or six more years. / I'm free." This sentiment of course does not correspond with Angela's. Her body language gives away her anger, which could be interpreted as her reaction to what Frank has just said. It could equally point to her general sense of anger at the arrogant behaviour of the clergymen they have encountered. The imperative form she then uses ("You are never to let anybody slam the door in your face again.") underlines her sense of anger and rebellion.

Generally speaking, the fact that Angela repeatedly requests that Frank listen attentively ("Listen to me," "Are you listening?" and "Do you hear me?") suggests that he might give the impression of being inattentive, which in turn would support the interpretation that he does not respond but quietly takes in what his mother has to say. Frank's "I don't know what to say" and his subsequent commentary also fit in nicely with this reading because it is hard to imagine that Frank would have actually said these words to his mother in a situation where she was already distressed. It is more likely that these words express his secret thoughts about the current situation and thus point to an emotional dilemma: while Frank does not wish to further hurt his mother's feelings, he is secretly quite happy about not having been accepted by the Christian Brothers. In retrospect, McCourt can employ dialogue not only to depict this and other, similarly conflict-laden situations, but in fact to stage these very conflicts in a more immediate way. In this regard, I would disagree with Mitchell (2003: 614), who argues that McCourt flouts the autobiographical convention of introspective writing in order to create a more complacent and catching memoir. There is introspection, I would argue, but it is employed much more subtly here. Dialogue as one fictionalising technique becomes a means of indirection, which helps McCourt voice his criticism and communicate his evaluation of past events between the lines, as it were.

## 6. Conclusion

In my analysis of dialogue in Frank McCourt's memoir *Angela's Ashes*, I hope to have shown how the book's extended use of dialogue or direct 'quotation' serves a variety of purposes such as the creation of verisimilitude, characterisation (including ridiculing and stereotyping) and evaluation or stance-marking. It also renders the story more dramatic. The alternation between

'showing' and 'telling' modes gives the text a more dynamic quality and potentially allows the reader to 'participate' more immediately in McCourt's past life experiences. In addition, dialogue fictionalises McCourt's memories of his past alongside other fictionalising techniques such as restricted character narration and unreliability. I argued that dialogue is as much 'constructed' here as it is constructed in everyday storytelling in the sense that it hardly offers verbatim renditions of original speech situations. However, I also cautioned against an assessment of the presented dialogues as merely 'fictional,' since they are not inventions in the same sense that fictional dialogue is invented. In this context, I discussed some of the problems autobiographical dialogue poses for recent 'Fictionality Studies' as proposed by Nielsen, Phelan and Walsh (2015). The main question I tried to answer was what the use of dialogue might tell us about how McCourt positions himself vis-à-vis his narrative. In this context, I have drawn on James Phelan's discussion of McCourt's use of restricted character narration. This narrative technique can be seen as a means of indirectly conveying what McCourt as the "implied authorial I" wishes to communicate to his reading audience beyond what he tells us on the surface level of his memoir. Thus, one could say that by using constructed dialogue (and other fictionalising techniques) on the intradiegetic level of the memoir, the author conveys, on an extra- or even meta-diegetic level, his evaluation of past events and of 'characters' in his life story. However, in contrast to the more common introspective mode of writing in autobiographical texts, introspection here becomes externalised, as it were. This also means that readers are asked to figure out for themselves what McCourt may have wanted to communicate. As the controversial responses to *Angela's Ashes* reveal, this is by no means an easy task, nor one that will ever yield pat answers.

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