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Irish-American Identity in Frank McCourt's Work

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Z á s a d y p r o v y p r a c o v á n í :

1. Studentka s využitím relevantní sekundární literatury nejprve uvede do širšího historicko-kulturního kontextu problematiky migrace (irské imigrace do USA) a jejích specifik; bude definovat pojmy jako migrace, kulturní šok, asimilace, autobiografie. Dále uvede zvoleného autora a jeho dílo do literárního kontextu obecně americké literatury a specificky literatury irsko-americké. 2. Jádrem práce bude analýza zvoleného díla především z hlediska toho, jak zachycuje zkušenost migrace, postavení chudých přistěhovalců, asimilace, návratu do domoviny, apod. Dotkne se také vztahu románu a autobiografie, případně románu s autobiografickými prvky. Literárně kulturní analýzu studentka opře o relevantní kritické zdroje a své závěry vhodně doloží odkazy na primární díla. Dílo také pojedná s ohledem na jeho kritickou recepci a vliv. 3. Závěrem studentka shrne svůj rozbor a pokusí se vyslovit obecnější závěry o literární prezentaci obecně problematiky migrace u zvoleného autora a to, jak zapadá do celkového kontextu americké literatury.

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Prohlašuji:

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Souhrn:

Práce pojednává o irsko-americké identitě zobrazené v literárním díle Franka McCourta, románu *Andělin popel*. Autor diplomové práce definuje pojmy lidské migrace a asimilace a dotýká se s nimi souvisejícími problematiky rasismu, diskriminace, etnicity, náboženské rozdílnosti, udržování vlastní národní identity a touze po návratu do rodné vlasti.

V první, teoretické, části je studována historie irských přistěhovalců do Ameriky. Jejich neuspokojivé životní podmínky jsou důkazem předsudků místních obyvatel vůči nově přichozí irské diaspoře. Dále se diplomová práce věnuje otázkám identity, jejího zachování a předávání dalším generacím.

Irská identita je zachycena v literárním díle *Andělin popel*. Autor uvádí autobiografické dílo Franka McCourta do širšího literárního kontextu a krátce rozebírá dílo z literárního hlediska.

Jednotlivé otázky přistěhovalství jsou rozpoznány na vybraných korespondujících případech z uvedené knihy. Autor uvádí čtenáře do situace ve třicátých letech dvacátého století a představuje Spojené státy americké a Irsko v tehdejší době. Autor práce líčí historické a kulturní spojitosti mezi těmito dvěma a jinými státy a jejich důsledky v mentalitě tehdejšího obyvatelstva.

Na závěr jsou přístupy k přistěhovalcům postaveny do kontrastu, vyjadřujíc tak rozdílnost identit jednotlivých států.

Abstract:

The thesis concerns Irish-American identity mirrored in Frank McCourt's memoir *Angela's Ashes*. The author defines terms such as human migration and assimilation and touches the closely connected issues of racism, discrimination, ethnicity, religious diversity, cultural continuity and the desire to return home.

In the first, theoretical, part the history of Irish immigrants arriving to America are studied. Their poor living conditions prove the prejudices and stereotypes of the local population holding towards the new Irish diaspora. Further on, the thesis deals with the question of identity and its maintaining and passing it on the next generation.

The Irish identity is recorded in the mentioned memoir, *Angela's Ashes*. The

author of the thesis sets Frank McCourt's autobiographical work into a wider literary context and shortly analyses the memoir from a literary point of view.

Individual issues of immigration are matched with corresponding cases found in the memoir. The author presents to the reader the picture of Ireland and the United States of America in 1930s and depicts the historical and cultural connections among these two nations and their relations towards other countries.

In conclusion, the different approaches of different nations towards immigrants are put into contrast to express the disparity of identities of individual nations.

Klíčová slova:

Irsko-americká identita, imigrace, asimilace, předsudek, Frank McCourt, *Andělin popel*.

Key words:

Irish-American identity, immigration, assimilation, prejudice, Frank McCourt, *Angela's Ashes*.

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1. Introduction

The Irish-American identity is a great phenomenon and the number of people avowing the identity is immense. Yet what exactly does it mean when a person professes to be a member of this huge community? This paper will examine both cultures partaking to create this identity, further it will discuss certain eras of American and Irish history, their relations to each other and to other nations. Special attention will be paid to describing the complex process of immigration from one country to another. All of the aforementioned will be matched to concrete examples found in the literary work of the author Frank McCourt who himself is classified as an Irish-American writer.

Frank McCourt's autobiographical novel *Angela's Ashes* was celebrated as a great success when it was published. Despite its incredulous prophecy that it would only intrigue middle-aged depressed women, McCourt's novel appealed to a wide range of readers, myself included. Reading *Angela's Ashes* inspired me to engage in learning more about the two different countries and their cultures.

The first part of my diploma paper concerns migration. I will define the role of immigrants in a complex matter and the impact of human immigration both historically and geographically. Furthermore the motives for the immigrations will be defined.

The following section will analyse the complexity of the whole process of assimilation. The separate aspects of adaptation are touched such as racism, discrimination, religion, ethnicity, cultural continuity and the immigrants' desire to return home. My theoretic section concerns Irish immigrants arriving to America and the Americans immigrating to Ireland. McCourt's travel across the Atlantic Ocean was rather unique as the majority of immigrants were flowing in the opposite direction, into the United States. Hence there are not many records of this kind of immigration.

The next part of my work defines and addresses the Irish identity, focusing on characteristics of Irish literature and analysis of McCourt's memoir *Angela's Ashes*. This section also includes a polemic on the book's genre. *Angela's Ashes* provoked a discussion on the author's combination of historical facts with fiction that upset some readers. This chapter is directly followed by the study of specific cases of migration, assimilation and patterns of behaviour typical for the two mentioned nations.

The goal of my thesis is to find features of Irish and American identity in the memoir *Angela's Ashes* and to arrive to a clear comparison of those two contrasting

cultures that together form the Irish-American identity.

2. Migration

2.1 The Settlement and the Position of the Irish Diaspora

Migration, the great phenomena of human history as we know it, concerns physical movement by human beings from one area to another. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* describes human migrations as:

Permanent change of residence by an individual or group, excluding such movements as nomads and migrant labour. Migrations may be classed as internal or international and as voluntary or forced. Voluntary migration is usually undertaken in search of a better life; forced migrations include expulsions during war and transportation of slaves or prisoners. The earliest humans migrated from Africa to all the continents except Antarctica within about 50,000 years. Modern mass migrations include the Great Atlantic Migration from Europe to North America, a total of 37 million people between 1820 and 1980. (Safra, 1224)

The pressures of human migrations, whether as outright conquest or by slow cultural infiltration and resettlement, have affected the grand epochs in history under the form of colonization, migration has transformed the world (such as the prehistoric and historic settlements of Australia and the Americas).

Michael Martin and Leonard Gelber emphasize the importance of this human movement in their *New Dictionary of American History* (299): “In American history immigration has played an unusually significant role in aiding the development of the United States”. They continue to list some of the motives for immigrants to forsake their country:

The causes of immigration have always been much alike, stemming from religious persecution, the desire for economic improvement, political inequality, and occasionally sheer adventurism. (Martin, Gelber, 299)

Migration therefore occurs for many reasons. E.S. Lee names various reasons in his article “A Theory of Migration”: economic opportunities (higher standard of living, chance of getting a better job, medical care, education, security and lower crime), political conditions (political fear, religious discrimination, family links -visiting member of family who migrated because of a political regime) or enjoyment (adventure or better chance of courtship). (Lee, E. S., 1966)

This demographic movement is a complex process very closely inter-connected

with other topics. One cannot talk about migration without touching topics such as assimilation, racism, discrimination, identity and ethnicity, religion and a desire of the immigrants for returning home. All immigrants have their own individual experience with the above mentioned and this paper will pay a special attention to all of them.

Diaspora is a term for people from one country scattered over the world. To leave their country they were either forced or they abandoned their homeland voluntarily. World-known examples of diaspora are for instance the African diaspora or the Jewish diaspora.

The Irish diaspora consists of Irish immigrants and their descendents. The largest number of Irish immigrants settled in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and the mainland of Europe. As this thesis concerns the Irish diaspora in the United States the following data will focus on the history of the Irish immigrants to the North America. Migration as mentioned before has a great impact on the country's culture in general but as Russel King mentions in his work *Atlas of Human Migration* the Irish migration tends to stand out thanks to its huge numbers. He defines the Irish diaspora thus:

It happens to be one of the largest movements of humankind that only one country has ever experienced. The Irish were driven away from their own country by poverty and starvation and in the New World they were looking for asylum and wealth. This mass migration had an gigantic impact on the Irish mentality and influenced their culture and traditions. In its consequences the population of Ireland naturally radically fell down (King, 138).

McAuley confirms this theory of uniqueness. Although he acknowledges that emigration affected many nations he emphasises the very specific Irish experience with human migration:

Emigration is far from a uniquely Irish story and emigration from Ireland is a far from singular experience. However, at the very least the longevity of that experience and the large percentage of Irish people that encountered emigration mean that it has indelibly stamped itself on Irish social structure and culture.(McAuley, 3)

The Irish came to America in two waves. Jay P. Dolan describes the process of immigration of the Irish to America. First the Scotch-Irish arrived in 1740's. The majority of these immigrants were the Ulster Protestants who came to Ireland during the 17th century when the Irish Protestants offered them land trying to attract more settlers

of the same religion. The originally Scottish settlers were offered very convenient deals on renting land but when in the 18th century the owners wanted to increase the price radically, the second and third generation of the Scotch-Irish decided to leave. (Dolan, X)

A century later in 1840's the Catholic Irish landed on the coast of the United States. Their reason for abandonment of their motherland was different. Starvation after a Potato Famine made them cross the Atlantic Ocean in order to look for a better standard of living. In 1845 Ireland was stricken by potato crop failure which changed the whole country into a wasteland. (Dolan, 36-38) The livelihood of the Irish peasant depended on potatoes as it was the biggest export of the country. The families depended on growing potatoes and when there were none for four years famine set in. As King suggests:

The slow reaction of the British caused a death of more than half a million of Irish people. Those who survived the disaster gained a sour hatred towards their neighbour and instead of migrating to England their loaded ships (often called "Coffin ships") landed on the coast of the United States of America." (King, 140).

When the Irish reached their longed-for destination, they tended to settle right where they disembarked. Kevin Kenny describes the settlement in *The American Irish*:

Cities such as Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Charleston and New Orleans all developed substantial populations of impoverished and indigent Irish immigrants long before the great influx of Irish refugees from the famine of the late 1840's. (Kenny, 70)

Kenny puts the emphasis on the fact that even before the famine there was a large number of Irish immigrants settling in America. Nevertheless after the famine the Irish immigrants were literally flowing into these cities. (see Appendix 1):

Three million more arrived between 1845 and 1891. In 1861 approximately 1,611,000 Irish-born lived in the United States representing 5.12 per cent of the total population; by the turn of the century census enumerators counted 1,615,419 Irish-born in the United States or 2.13 per cent of Americans. In 1910 this reached 4,504,360 Irish-born or with one parent born in Ireland. (O'Day, 403)

The population of today's Irish diaspora in the United States climbs up to an astounding 80 million people which is approximately fourteen times more than the population of Ireland itself. (Dolan, 40) (see Appendix 2)

The Irish immigrants belonged since their arrival to a social group near the bottom of the hierarchy. Their social position was low, they were looked down on, they were doomed to low-paid menial jobs, if they were lucky enough to get any at all and as a consequence they were poor, living in slums and almshouses. Kenny describes the immigrants' situation:

Measured by the indices of almshouse admissions, diseases, housing and criminality, it is abundantly clear that the Irish in antebellum America were very poor. By all accounts they were the poorest social group in the country other than African Americans and Native Americans. (Kenny, 61)

Although the Irish found themselves near the bottom of the social ladder, their position never was as low as the situation of the African Americans, for instance. The decision in 1857 excluded black Americans altogether from protection under the Constitution. In the states of the Old Northwest moreover, blacks were excluded not only from citizenship but from the right to settle at all. The position of the Irish immigrants went higher through the years as the idea of a 'white race' began to apply also to them, whereas other immigrants suffered from this.

American statute law dating from 1790 held that only 'free white' people could become citizens, thereby excluding the Chinese from naturalization when they began to arrive in large numbers from the mid-nineteenth century onward. (Kenny, 69)

During the Civil War, the Irish became useful as they were the bodies that could outnumber the Southerners. Dolan characterises the attitude of the Americans towards the Irish. However, camaraderie during the war did not change the opinion of the Americans towards the Irish in the late 19th century. By the 1870s and 1880s, many Irish, some of them new immigrants, still occupied the slums of East Boston. However their position got better through the years. At the level of political, civil and legal rights, however, the Irish faced few restrictions. Irish immigrants were eligible for citizenship after a five-year waiting period and, when they became citizens, male Irishmen could vote. (Dolan, 107-110)

The following chapters concern the problems the Irish immigrants had to confront because of their low social position. The historical evolvment of the Irish diaspora will be studied in chapter 5.3 'A Picture of Ireland where the historical sequence of events corresponds to the analysis of McCourt's work.

Dangerous and/or low-paid jobs were the only jobs the Irish immigrants were able to obtain. In the second half of the 19th century the Irish in America were still treated with scorn. Employers searching for new staff would place signs with NINA scrawled across the front. NINA spelled out stands for No Irish Need to Apply (see Appendix 3). Shameful but at that time common signs would often be seen next to the No Dogs Allowed signs.

The history of the American Irish in the workplace during this period can be summed up in two words: menial labour. As Paul S. Boyer puts it: “The poor Irishman, the wheelbarrow is his country.” (Boyer, 268) Not every Irish immigrant was consigned to manual work but the great majority, both men and women, were. The Irish were digging, demolishing and building. Kenny lists a number of jobs the Irish were hired to do:

They worked as carters, draymen, teamsters, stage drivers, stablemen, boatmen, hucksters and paddlers. The Irish displaced free blacks from many unskilled positions, especially from work as waiters, servants, coachmen, white-washers, carpet shakers, chimney sweeps and boot-blacks. They were often employed as temporary out-workers and pieceworkers, rather than being employed in a factory. (Kenny, 62)

The Irish were primarily, due to their limited possibilities to get better jobs, caught in a vicious circle. The low paid jobs leading to poor living conditions might have contributed to a series of issues such as alcoholism and the spreading of disease. The principle reason for the Irish only being able to enter unqualified jobs is that they arrived without any particular skills.

The Irish were consigned to particular jobs in part because of prejudice and in part because they arrived in the United States with few skills or resources compared to the native-born or to other immigrants. The more substantial of the Irish Catholic immigrants arrived in the United States in a position to do well and usually fulfilled their expectations; but the majority lacked the resources to leave the cities where they landed and soon settled into lifetimes of menial labour. German immigrants, by contrast, arrived to America with greater skills and resources and were more likely to come in family groups; they were much more likely than the Irish to move on from their port of arrival, whether New York or New Orleans, and settle in the rural interior. (Kenny, 62)

The lack of vacancies and increasing number of immigrants willing to work for little money caused tension among some ethnicities. The extent to which the Irish were

in direct competition for jobs with blacks in the pre-famine period differs from chronicler to chronicler. African Americans and Irish immigrants did vie with each other though. Black workers were often used as strike breakers to end strikes by Irish labourers. “Yet the Irish typically succeeded in displacing black labour quickly, so that some historians have suggested that their chief source of labour competition thereafter was actually new Irish immigrants rather than African Americans.” (Kenny, 66)

2.2 Discrimination, Poverty and Racism

Racism was a grave issue for the Irish immigrants. During the second half of the 20th century social science recognised a new approach to see the term “race”. Modern race relations models have redefined the term “race”, which we now assume is injected with social meanings that differ from one place to another and from one period to another. Steve Garner describes the problem of how the general public considers “race“:

It constitutes a social construction with real material and cultural implications. “Race” relations create a reductive public policy paradigm that makes a number of assumptions about people’s identities, including the idea that their racial identity is always the most important social identification. (Garner, 42)

Garner explains how the nineteenth century’s obsession with somatic differences and the construction of pseudoscientific hierarchies based on particular differences established body-centric racism as the norm. (see Appendix 4) Irish immigrants in the nineteenth century were depicted both textually and visually in racially inferior terms (see Appendix 5). (Garner, 52) Kenny agrees with Garner and describes how contemporary society saw the Irish:

The images are stark and at first sight shocking: swarthy, low-browed, simian Irishmen, standing only a level or two above the animal kingdom, and apparently sharing the same degree of racial degradation attributed by contemporaries to African Americans. Yet, by the end of the nineteenth century, Irish immigrants or their descendents achieve equality with other native-born Americans. African Americans, on the other hand, had been liberated from slavery but were still subject to a variety of racial controls. (Kenny, 67)

Steve Garner describes in his essay two kinds of racism, only one of them being within reason. He explains that looking at people differently because of their origins is not necessarily offensive. People simply show the ability to distinguish differences. The

pejorative meaning was added later on:

All societies have ways of making distinctions between “us” and “them”, between in-groups and out-groups. This argument sees racism as something within reason, something necessary for survival. Yet an excess of prejudice marks the realm of the deviant individual. According to the latter, capitalism gave birth to racism as the system’s hierarchy in the phase of European expansion was legitimized by reference to “race”. (Garner, 51)

The term “racialization” is closely connected. Racialization refers to a process of the discursive production of racial identities. “It signifies the extension of dehumanizing and racial meanings to a previously racially unclassified relationship, social practice, or group.” (Omi, Winant, 1986) A group of people is seen as a “race”, when it was not before. “At time it can thus constitute a series of acts imposed on others as part of an unequal power relationship.” (Wolfe in Garner, 42)

Racialization is what the Irish immigrants were exposed to during their long process of assimilation. The Irish newcomers were distinguished from the Americans based on a “race” where colour was not the viewpoint. Garner calls it in his essay “a racism without race”.

Luke Gibbons, in his work *Transformations in Irish Culture* discusses the way in which the Irish in America were constructed as non-white.

What the Irish immigrant brought with him from the homeland were not the habits of authority fostered by the colonizer but, in fact, a bitter legacy of servitude and ignominy akin to that experienced by native and African Americans. Indeed, from the colonial perspective, the racial labels ‘white/non-white’ did not follow strict epidermal schemas of visibility or skin colour so that, in an important sense, the Irish historically were classified as ‘non-white’, and treated accordingly. (Gibbons, 175)

“The Irish occupy a position of structural instability within the social relations of racism and ethnicity.” adds Mairtin Mac An Ghaill in his article called “Beyond a Black-White Dualism”. He alleges that the Irish immigrants had to “become white” (Ghaill, 106).

O’Tools argues that while the idea of the Irish becoming white is persuasive, the whole cultural process involved was far more complex. There was a different kind of pressure working on the Irish. As immigrants they were attempting to assimilate into a dominant Anglo culture. As nationalists they were attempting to extract themselves from a dominant Anglo culture. (O’Tool in Ghail, 111)

In one context they were pushed towards a desire to be seen as part of 'the white race' which also included the English. In another words they were pulling against that very notion, attempting to establish a distinct identity in which the possession of a white skin was not in itself a unifying factor sufficiently strong to over-ride differences of culture, religion and race. Those contradictory impulses don't exclude the notion of the Irish becoming white but they do suggest that it does not do full justice to the ambiguity of modern Irishness. (O'Toole, 2000, 22)

Whiteness then became an unexamined area which needed to be studied. During the development in the 1980s and 1990s Ignatiev came up with an interesting question, what it meant to the Irish to become white in America. He suggests that:

It did not mean that they all became rich, or even "middle-class" ...to this day there are plenty of poor Irish. To Irish laborers, to become white meant at first that they could sell themselves piecemeal instead of being sold for life, and later they could compete for jobs in all spheres instead of being confined to certain work; to Irish entrepreneurs, it meant that they could function outside of segregated market. To both of these groups it meant that they were citizens of democratic republic, with the right to elect and be elected, to be tried by a jury of their peers, to live wherever they could afford, and to spend, without racially imposed restrictions, whatever money they managed to acquire. In becoming white the Irish ceased to be Green. (Ignatiev, 4)

Ignatiev's opinion is supported by Kenny in *The American Irish* where he questions the degree to which the Irish 'became white'. At the level of popular stereotype, the Irish were widely portrayed in racially inferior terms.

At the level of employment, they were undoubtedly confined to manual labour in the period before 1870, filling positions that the native-born and even other immigrants would not touch. Working in these occupations inevitably carried certain racial connotations, reinforcing the imagery of the Irish as inferior. (Kenny, 48)

At the level of political, civil and legal rights, however, the Irish faced few restrictions. Irish immigrants were eligible for citizenship after a five-year waiting period. Then the Irishmen could vote. What becomes then of the debate if the female half of the Irish population is incorporated into the facts? Irish women worked mostly as domestic servants. How did Irish-American women, and hence the Irish-American community as a whole 'become white'?

If the Irish immigrants themselves were supposed to attach a racial label, what would it be? Self-evidently, they were white, yet how they actually felt adopting this

label? “To adopt the label ‘white’ in America was to automatically define oneself as non-black, and so it quickly became clear that the best route to acceptance as fully ‘white’ was at the expense of those defined as black.” (Kenny, 48) Therefore by distinguishing themselves from black the Irish actually ‘became white’.

Fintan O’Toole comes with a theory of the Irish in America being both ‘native’ and ‘white’. He refers to the fact that in popular American plays the Irish are ‘coloured people’ unsuitable for marriage to authentic whites. “Historically, the Irish have a complex, ambivalent involvement in both American and European colonialism and imperialism and their accompanying forms of racism – being both ‘native’ and ‘white’.” (O’Toole) Their ambivalence comes from the fact that the Irish in this categorization are not either/or, they are both/and. “They are natives and conquerors, aboriginals and civilizers, a savage tribe in one context, a superior race in another.”(O’Toole)

Contrary to Kenny who stated that Irish came a long way to become equal to Native-born Americans, Ghail declares: “whatever the relative collective social mobility of the Irish; they have never been fully accepted as insiders, for example, by the WASP establishment in the USA.” (Ghail, 107)

3. Assimilation

3.1 History

Encyclopaedia Britannica describes the meaning of assimilation of people in a certain society:

Assimilation in sociology and anthropology refers to a process whereby individuals or groups of differing ethnic heritage are absorbed into the dominant culture of a society. The process of assimilating involves taking on the traits of the dominant culture to such a degree that the assimilating group becomes socially indistinguishable from other members of the society. As such, assimilation is the most extreme form of acculturation. Although assimilation may be compelled through force or undertaken voluntarily, it is rare for a minority group to replace its previous cultural practices completely; religion, food preferences, proxemics (e.g., the physical distance between people in a given social situation), and aesthetics are among the characteristics that tend to be most resistant to change. Assimilation does not denote “racial” or biological fusion, though such fusion may occur. (*Britannica*, ‘assimilation’)

The process of assimilation continually evolves. The history shows different

cases of development. For instance the Irish diaspora in the United States went through two different procedures. The first wave of Protestant Scotch-Irish immigrants assimilated much sooner than the second wave of ‘ post-famine’ Catholics. “It has often been said that the Scotch-Irish assimilated easily into American life because they fitted the bill so closely, conforming to the national stereotype of rugged individualism,” (Kenny, 34) whereas Catholics were a subject to prejudices and discrimination for a long time after their arrival. Professor Kilbride sums the Irish assimilation: “The Irish significantly assimilated in South Africa, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and in the United States, although the degree of ethnic identity remains strong there. (Kilbride, 7) Ghail proposes the idea that unlike elsewhere, for instance in Great Britain, in the United States the Irish could re-invent themselves and identify with the Americans. (Ghail, 111) Kenny supports this theory when he writes:

[O]ne of the classic patterns of American immigration history is that ethnicity is discovered or invented in the new homeland, rather than being carried across the ocean from the old. Having an ethnic identity, far from being an impediment to assimilation, has been for most immigrants a defining characteristic of becoming American. (Kenny, 27)

There are different kinds of ethnic assimilation. They vary depending on the system, and according to the degree which the immigrants were accepted into a particular society. They have been given different popular names such as ‘melting pot’ or a fairly modern idea of a ‘salad bowl’. Melting pot presents America as a crucible wherein the European nationalities would be transformed into a “new race” (one race). The term owes its origin to the title and theme of Zangwill’s play *The Melting Pot* (1908). (*Britannica*, ‘Melting pot’). ‘Salad bowl’ on the other hand works differently. In this case each newcomer is encouraged to maintain his or her customs and cultural traits. Only by the diversity of each member a new society can be created.

O’Day offers one of the possible divisions of ethnic assimilation. He comes up with a model of three subsets: Anglo-conformity where the incomers adopt the prevailing values of their hosts; the already mentioned melting pot introducing a new host culture; and cultural pluralism in which different identities coexist. It can be seen already that the Irish Diaspora conformed to all, yet also deviated from each of these.(O’Day, 2009, 322-323)

Ghail, who also recognizes the emergence of created systems of assimilation,

offers another model of ethnic assimilation in his essay “Beyond a Black-White Dualism”: “diaspora (cultural dispersal), hybridity (mixed cultures) and syncretism (pluralistic forms of cultural belonging) that are being manufactured among a younger generation of the Irish diaspora – the second generation.” (112) Zhou sees pluralist perspective as “an alternative framework which perceives American society as composed of a collection of ethnic and racial minority groups, as well as the dominant majority group of European Americans.” (Zhou, 72-73)

Cultural pluralism is not being applauded by Reitz and Sklar though. They put the terms ‘assimilation’ and ‘cultural pluralism’ in a contradictory relationship. “Although the system should be harmless,” they say, “maintaining ethnic identity causes problems to the immigrants and their social position.”(Reitz, Sklar, 233) They claim that cultural pluralism does not fully function in the United States. For if it existed in America, there would be no penalties for ethnic maintenance:

The rise of cultural pluralism in recent decades could have reduced or even eliminated any economic costs of ethnic attachments. Some argue that cultural pluralism, not assimilationism, now characterizes immigrant-receiving countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia. A society that values cultural pluralism would not impose any penalties for the maintenance of ethnic attachments or distinctive behaviours. (Reitz, Sklar, 234)

Carlson and Swartz also take into consideration a woman’s position in a culturally pluralistic system. Even more doubts are expressed over the interaction of race and gender. They remark that women in minority groups could be even more vulnerable than men to the costs of ethnicity. That is not only because some traditional cultures may assign lower status to women than others, but also because patterns of ethnic retention seem to vary by gender, because the enclave economy provides fewer opportunities for women than for men, and because the impact of race on earning is clearly gender-specific. (Carlson, Swartz in Reitz, Sklar, 236)

3.2 Ethnicity and Identity

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica ethnicity refers to the identification of a group based on a perceived cultural distinctiveness that makes the group into a “people”. This distinctiveness is believed to be expressed through language, music, values, art, styles,

literature, family life, religion, ritual, food, naming, public life, and material culture... (*Britannica*, 'ethnicity').

Reitz and Sklar declare that ethnic attachments vary by level of education. They tend to be stronger for those with less education and lower occupational status and earning, particularly for women. An identifiable ethnic accent and religious affiliation is much more widespread among those with less domestic education, for both men and women. Their community life is more salient. Middle-class immigrants are relatively more likely to carry ethnicity in their heads and be "nominal" members of the ethnic group. These immigrants think ethnic backgrounds are of high importance. (Reitz, Sklar, 253)

Maintaining one's ethnic identity in a foreign country leads to different results. Being loyal to a person's ethnicity can serve a good cause. Separating from one's origins and leaving ancestry behind is not natural. Minority members are encouraged to be in touch with their fellow members. Zhou suggests that frequent interactions with co-ethnics within an ethnic community could help young ethnic group members to develop a sense of identity that would ease bicultural conflicts. (Zhou, 86)

On the contrary, being ethnically distinctive brings about certain disadvantages. Visible aspects of ethnicity are basis for discrimination. They may include race in combination with other factors associated with birthplace or culture. Reitz and Sklar resolve the question of negative outward indications of ethnic groups. They explain that persons who do not "fit in", "conform," or "assimilate" receive discriminatory treatment:

In the mainstream economy, ethnic or racial harassment might focus on the most visible signs of difference. Outward indications of the ethnic attachments of "foreigners" may alienate members of the controlling majority ethnic group, unrelated though these may be to economic function. This points to the retention of visible ethnic behaviour and social activities as most costly. Speaking English with a foreign accent is difficult to hide, and using a foreign language in public places is the most notoriously "annoying" ethnic behaviour. (Reitz, Sklar, 236)

Immigrants in the United States of European origin confront significant economical pressures toward cultural and behavioural assimilation. Based on a research done by Reitz and Sklar there is a slight difference in the disadvantages of retaining

certain aspects of European ethnicity between men and women. However both genders are according to Reitz and Sklar penalized. European-origin immigrant men pay an economic price for retaining use of the ethnic language that is significant in relation to overall earnings and in relation to the value of substantial amounts of human capital such as education. European-origin immigrant women pay a significant price for maintaining ethnic networks. These costs arise in mainstream work settings and are moderated by positive and negative enclave effects. (Reitz , Sklar, 237)

Maintaining a person's ethnic identity has not been openly proven to be neither harmful nor innocuous. While the subjective identification of minority-groups might not in itself increase exposure to direct discrimination, it might limit economic horizons, as Reitz and Sklar presume:

A minority community perspective may frame the goal setting process. Those who identify with a minority group may set circumscribed goals for themselves. The counterargument of cultural pluralism advocates it that a secure minority identity may be a positive force fuelling personal drive and ambition. (Reitz, Sklar, 237-238)

3.3 Cultural continuity

Culture, "a set of socially acquired values, beliefs, and rules of conduct" (*International Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*, 'culture') people generally tend to carry with them. Their culture can thus be influenced by a different surrounding, or people can through some time influence the locality surrounding them. O'Day believes that while 'Irish' people in some parts of the world overwhelmingly have declined to be categorized as ethnics, celebrations of Irishness in the forms of culture, patronage of theme pubs not-to-mention St Patrick's Day, flourish. (O'Day, 2009, 318)

Kenny recounts that in the nineteenth-century Scotch-Irish routinely exaggerated the role played by their forebears in founding the American nation. One area where they do seem to have had a considerable influence is on American speech patterns and popular music. Recent linguists have detected signs of the Scotch-Irish legacy from western Pennsylvania southward through the Appalachian backcountry. (Kenny, 28) Such a pattern of behaviour is called inward influence and there are there are more examples to be found.

The type of agriculture that still endures in some parts of the United States is grain-and-livestock agriculture; a mixture of tillage and pasture that was orientated toward subsistence rather than monetary profit. One habit for instance is that of scattered homesteads Dunaway concludes that the Scotch-Irish settlement patterns in the colonial backcountry were in several respects strikingly similar to those in contemporary Ulster. Their forms of settlement were well suited for adaptation to the new American environment. In both places, individual homesteads were widely dispersed rather than being clustered in villages. This pattern rather than English-style farm villages, became the norm in the backcountry. Another domestic-based tradition that crossed the Atlantic was the distilling of whiskey and its consumption in prodigious quantities. (Dunaway in Kenny, 30-31)

The tendency then is for maintaining, reviving and inventing aspects of the culture to resist the processes of normalising. Kenny talks about such traditions when he describes the process of 'locating' the Irish diaspora. "*Riverdance* was both a redefinition and reclamation of Irish tradition; and although it began life as an interval act at the Eurovision Song Contest *Riverdance* contradicted the notion of Ireland as a European country, placing it instead firmly in an American context. Hickman thinks there is a worth-mentioning irony in the intimate connection between the death of dancing in Ireland and emigration, and the connection between emigration and the survival of Irish dancing as an element of American popular culture. (Hickman, 18)

However, after spending long years in a foreign country the process of assimilation starts working on people. Traditions passed on from generations to generations start to fade away and people loose touch with their ancestors' Irishness. O'Day's opinion is that: "[T]he majority of the Irish abroad were consumed by apathy about the affairs of the homeland" (O'Day, 2009), which leads to a proverbial losing of identity.

To characterize a national identity is very difficult, almost impossible. A person's qualities are individual and cannot be generalized to the whole nation. Nonetheless, there are several character features emerging to surface when talking about Irish identity.

As a consequence of immigration, the Irish identity outside the borders of Ireland adapted to the situation. Ghail claims that there has been a shift from a closed

mono-cultural sense of Irishness to an emphasis on Irishness as a diasporic identity, marked by a process of social openness, expansion and cultural enrichment. (Ghail, 109)

The cultural contribution to Irish diaspora in American culture is great according to Philip L. Kilbride. Irish immigrants and their descendents have made a momentous impact on the culture of the United States. Prominent examples would include: in literature, such giants as Henry James and Eugene O’Neil who can be compared with those who focus on Irish themes such as Peter Quinn and Frank and Malachy McCourt; in academia, writers of classics such as William James in Psychology and James Moody in Anthropology, and he continues listing more. (Kilbride, 8)

4. Irish-American literature and *Angela’s Ashes*

4.1 Irish-American literature

Irish people have shown a great tendency to become fine writers. They are known for their voluble style and articulacy. As Frank McCourt mentions in one of his book reviews: “We were always a confessional people, we Irish, but only as long as the listener was a priest in the box or a pal nodding after a night of knocking back pints.” (McCourt, 1995) This tendency to open their hearts to a friend or to a complete stranger became a theme in Irish-American literature and set their popular genre: a memoir, where the author describes some difficult part of his or her life they had to overcome.

As being suggested by Susan Tetlow Harrington, Irish-American literature tends to share a very similar blueprint. Authors depict their difficult childhood, far from perfect family life and altogether burdensome journey to become a successful person. Frank McCourt’s Pulitzer Prize winning bestseller *Angela’s Ashes* does not differ from other ‘Irish Question’ books in theme too much. Memoirs such as *The Craic* by Mark McCrum or Timothy O’Grady’s *I Could Read the Sky*, Thomas Keneally’s *The Great Shame* etc. use the charm of immediate family history, managing all treacherous obstacles life prepared for the protagonist, celebrating the success grown from impecunious childhood, the silent suffering of a child watching an alcoholic father destroying family happiness, a mother’s assurance that their faith will help to get over

any problem. (Harrington, 59)

The truth is that the topic of an Irish immigrant family coming to America was transformed into novels and memoirs excessively frequently. Sawhill suggests that the 'Irish immigrant coming to America' theme was so worn out, that publishers started to call it a 'Cinderella story of the decade'. Nevertheless, as Sawhill says: "*Angela's Ashes*, though carrying the same motives [...], differs from other moaning memoirs." (Jones Jr., Sawhill, 25)

Both McCourt's parents undergo the journey to longed-for America, settle down and start their new lives. But after only a few years, they set out on another journey. Right when immigrants of all sorts are streaming to America to find their dream, the family of McCourts is leaving their dream behind to come back home to Ireland, the home that the American-born children never saw but only heard about in their father's stories. Most Irish-American immigration-themed books are focused on the harsh living conditions in Ireland and the complicated 'way up' in America. Frank McCourt on the other hand chooses to show the contrast the other way round. He starts with depicting the process of assimilation in New York followed by migration to the meanwhile estranged home town of Limerick. They experience not one but two migrations.

Another aspect of *Angela's Ashes* that differs from the majority of other Irish-American memoirs is the style of narration. The memoir, owing to both views of an innocent child and a distance of a grown-up man is freed of a suffering tone and self pity. His surprising immediateness and light humour walk the reader through his sometimes very serious stories of growing up in New York and Limerick.

The Irish sense of family unity is supported by Frank's important bond with his siblings as well as a portrait of a complex relationship with his father based on a somewhat hardly explicable respect for him.

The genre of *Angela's Ashes* has been repeatedly discussed. By the time of publication *Angela's Ashes* was referred to as an autobiography by Frank McCourt himself. Over time however, and with the clarification of facts, *Angela's Ashes* became known more as a memoir. The following discussion on the genre of *Angela's Ashes* shows argumentation for its categorization. Also the critical readers' response described below shows the importance of determination of the book's genre.

4.2 Novel and Autobiography

4.2.1 Genre and authorship

History has shown that some writers choose to alter historical facts in their own works. What motivates a writer to combine reality with fiction? When the author adjusts facts he is toying with the relationship between himself, the reader, and history itself. Within each literary genre there are different consequences, both advantageous and disadvantageous, that emerge when the author chooses to remain loyal to historical accuracy or chooses to alter the facts at their own discretion.

Angela's Ashes is an example of a literary work where the author (Frank McCourt) altered the facts. His decision not to remain faithful to historical reality resulted in several consequences, notably disapproval by the public. Because of his decision not to identify the book's genre in its title, some readers felt strongly offended by the fictional elements of the book.

Literature is divided into several categories: fiction, non-fiction and semi-fiction. J.A. Cuddon describes fiction in his *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* as "a vague and general term for an imaginative work, usually in prose." (Cuddon, 320) "It is the species of literature which is concerned with the narration of imaginary events and the portraiture of imaginary characters, fictitious compositions." (*The Oxford Dictionary*, def. 1) In other words fiction stands on invention as opposed to fact represented in non-fictional literature. On the other hand, fiction may carry a truthful message. In the same way non-fiction may sometimes be misled with non-accurate facts. In spite of given rules and stated definitions some of the genres tend to merge together. They bypass the rules while slowly causing a literary erosion by not sticking to the characteristics they have been given.

"A fact is truth attested by direct observation or authentic testimony; reality." (*The Oxford Dictionary*, 651-652, def. 4). David Crystal indicates that the difficulties the editor has to face when deciding what counts as a fact, hence what he or she can include in their book:

At the first glance, the answer is obvious: there are facts about objects and animals (what are the characteristics of X?), people (who is X?), places (where is X?), and times (when did X happen?), and these facts can be numerical (how many X? How often X happen?), verbal (how to describe X?), and tabular (how to classify X?).

At the second glance, the situation becomes more complicated (and more

interesting). There are facts about fictions (X in mythology or literature) and fiction about facts (disputes over the longest or largest X). There are situations where we cannot decide whether something is fiction or fact (the changing politics of country X). There are near-facts (estimates of X), transient facts (world records about X), qualified facts (the majority of X), and contrived facts (neat classifications of X). (Crystal, V)

Therefore there is a very thin line between the literary categories. They tend to “cross over into the other’s territory.” (Steinfels, 8)

Autobiography for instance falls into the non-fiction category. “Autobiography suggests a truthful account, fact based, and the true history of one’s life.” (Eakin, 113) Cuddon describes autobiography in his dictionary as “an account of a person’s life by him- or herself.” but he proceeds by affirming that:

[M]emory may be unreliable. Few can recall clear details of their early life and most are therefore dependent on the other people’s impressions, of necessity equally unreliable. Moreover, everyone tend to remember what he or she wants to remember. Disagreeable facts are sometimes glossed over or repressed truth may be distorted for the sake of convenience or harmony and the occlusions of time may obscure as much as they reveal. (Cuddon, J.A. 63).

Memoir, on the other hand, allows the reader to be affected with his/her own feelings. Cuddon further adds that from early on in the 17th century it became more and more the practice to keep a diary or a journal, and to compile memoirs; and soon the more or less ‘straight’ autobiographical narrative became common-place. (Cuddon, 64) Other related genres seemingly floating between fiction and non-fiction would be autobiographical novel together with bildungsroman, autobiographical fiction and fictional autobiography or a memoir novel.

Authors are the creators of their own stories allowing them to construct their own fictional narratives. However what leads an author to not remaining loyal to the facts?

If the author decides to stay loyal to the facts he can benefit from several aspects such as higher plausibility or authenticity. He also adds power to a true story that attracts the reader so much. Nonetheless he is running the risk of not having his story as startling and his readers not so enthralled.

The advantages of altering the facts are quite obvious. Fabrication and exaggeration makes stories more dramatic and the readers more thrilled, yet the writer

has to bear in mind that such modifying of facts can have severe consequences. Nigerian born poet and novelist Ben Okri makes clear the productive force of narratives when he writes:

Nations and peoples are largely the stories they feed themselves. If they tell themselves stories that are lies, they will suffer the future consequences of those lies. If they tell themselves stories that face their own truths, they will free their histories for future flowerings. (Okri, B., 21)

Such a reaction to altering the facts is, for instance, a confusion of the wider public. The general public becomes confused and misled by what they read. Wallin is aware of these grave consequences and points out the danger of leaving them uncorrected:

Errors whether unintentional, fictional, or wishfulfilling, or minor or major, if left uncorrected soon become a part of the accepted lore of the profession. Unchallenged errors possess a preservative tendency and sometimes a tendency to accumulate fictional accretions, just as the rolling snowball gathers anything in its wake that will cling to its surface. Even minor mistakes ought to be expunged from the record for the sake of historical accuracy. (Wallin, J.E.W, 197)

A good example of the general public being confused is Kurt Vonnegut's novel *Salughterhouse-Five* (1969). As Rigney acknowledges it was a popular and critical success when it first appeared and has had a notable impact on popular perceptions of "the bombing of Dresden". Vonnegut's novel, however, was criticized by historians because of its inaccuracy. Vonnegut got his numbers wrong by committing the error of replacing 30,000 or so victims with about 130,000 and in doing so he contributed to putting Dresden on the map as the greatest massacre in European history (Rigney, 24).

Besides public confusion another consequence is the reader's response. When facts in a book are inaccurate, getting a non-flattering response is more likely to happen. The readers do not like to see a fact they are familiar with presented from an unflattering side even though it might serve literary purposes. Readers get offended when they read about something or someone they know and the writer only shows the unflattering quality.

When the author decides not to remain loyal to the reality, who is it then benefiting from the altering of facts? It is the writer who profits from the inaccuracy. Describing reality from the writer's point of view offers the author his or her own

version of history. The writer, to make the situation look at its worst, presents himself as a survivor who overcame the obstacles and became stronger; a hero. Margaret O'Brien Steinfels discusses the accuracy of facts in her essay. She claims that authors in autobiographies and memoirs create a history where the writers are the story's long suffering heroes or heroines. To accomplish it everybody else is destined to be described in a bad way and so the writer is creating fictive characters. (Steinfels, 8)

James M. Buchanan claims that autobiographies cannot remain loyal to reality, because the writer's motivation to write an autobiography is to be appreciated by the readers, otherwise he or she would not have to publish a book, a private journal would satisfy the writer's literary needs. Therefore, he lacks objectivity in describing his life and the truth is overpowered by his need of affection from the readers. (Buchanan, 509)

Ann Rigney asserts that there are not only accurate historical aspects to consider when analyzing a literary text but linguistic and artistic aspects to be considered as well. She points out that even though the historiographical and artistic aspects of literature play different roles, they are closely connected. She continues to claim that the two aspects cannot be compared to one another because there needs to be a common standard where neither of the aspects will be flavoured, because of the given aspect's point of view. If the historiography is taken as the standard, for instance, everything that is ever written will only be the second-best. (Rigney, 5-6)

Frank McCourt combines historical facts with fiction. *Angela's Ashes* has been designated as too subjective and, although McCourt's book is generally recognised as an autobiography. Shannon Forbes assigns to Frank McCourt many identities within *Angela's Ashes*: the innocent child, the judgmental adult, the talented storyteller, the brilliant survivor but also the cynical autobiographer, the merciless fabricator and the unbiased chronicler. (Forbes, 473)

He also goes further and suggests that because of McCourt's narrative method the book should be entitled *Angela's Ashes: A Memoir*. Forbes claims that McCourt's narration is full of a degree of subjectivity that is beyond what is acceptable for an autobiography. By choosing a term memoir the author absolves himself of any accusation that his account may be "untrue" because the term "memoir" can suggest subjectivity rather than objectivity. (Forbes, 473)

On the other hand, McCourt defends himself in interviews by saying that

everything he wrote is true. “I’ve been writing in notebooks for forty years or so. I have notebooks filled with stuff about Limerick, about growing up there, catalogues, lists, snatches of conversation, things about my mother and father...and finally I had to write it. (McNamara, 13)

4.2.2 Allegiance to the accuracy of the story

Whether an autobiography or a memoir, *Angela’s Ashes* is based on a true story. It is also a story of immigration, where the family immigrates in “the opposite” direction. The story de facto begins with Frank’s family leaving the United States for their parents’ homeland in Ireland. James B. Mitchell describes the success that *Angela’s Ashes* had with the American readers:

For the Americans who form the bulk of McCourt’s readers, this is an unusual, even unthinkable twist-on emigration from America to Europe—that appeals to American readers’ sensibilities because of the initial implication that leaving America is disastrous for the family, since most Americans assume emigration travels in only one direction—from elsewhere to the United States. (Mitchell, 612)

The memoir is appealing to the American reader since it is based on true facts and they find it intriguing that such events also happened.

Using real facts benefitted the author because the readers found the story interesting. But what happens when the author does not remain faithful to the facts? There are a few places in the memoir where the author changes the ‘voice’ of the narrator. The narrative technique is switched from the ‘performance as innocent child’, to an omniscient narrator, and a ‘performance as fabricator’ technique. For instance it occurs when Frank is an infant, most likely only a few days old, while in his mother’s arms at his christening:

At Philomena’s house the sisters and their husbands ate and drank while Angela sat in a corner nursing the baby and crying. Philomena stuffed her mouth with bread and ham and rumbled at Angela. That’s what you get for being such a fool. Hardly off the boat and you fall for that lunatic. Angela cried harder and Delia took up the attack, Oh, stop it, Angela, stop it. You have nobody to blame but yourself. If I was you, said Philomena, I’d made sure there’s no more children. He don’t have a job, so he don’t, an’ never will. So ... no more children, Angela. Are you listenin’ to me? I am, Philomena. (*Angela’s Ashes*, 19)

It is impossible for McCourt-as-Author¹ to be narrating this scene from his firsthand memory; this is obvious, and it is therefore unlikely that McCourt is asking readers to believe he is.

In addition, the narrative also assumes fiction-like qualities when breaks the narrative in order to insert a letter, as happens in the following example, when McCourt presents correspondence from Angela's cousins:

Dear Aunt Margaret,
I take pen in hand to write you this letter and hope this finds you as it leaves us in the best of health. My husband Tommy is in fine form working away and Delia's husband Jimmy is in fine form working away and we hope this finds you in fine form. I am sorry to tell you that Angela has not been the same since lying in the bed with her face to the wall. To make matters worsen we think she's expecting again and that's too much altogether. (*Angela's Ashes*, 45)

Forbes adds that it is highly unlikely that McCourt even had access to this letter or even knew it was ever written (it being composed when he was four years old), let alone the means to reproduce it verbatim decades later in his book. (Forbes, 481)

Angela's Ashes found different responses of the readers and a few were not welcoming to the historical alterations that McCourt used. Some readers expected the book to be an autobiography, as historically accurate as possible, and were disappointed by the fact that it blended facts and fiction. Margaret O'Brien Steinfelds, upset after reading the memoir, claims that he replaced his real mother with a fictive one:

I bought the book, hoping to learn more about Angela, the eponymous matriarch. The reason I hoped to learn more was that I knew Angela McCourt. In one of those difficult periods of young motherhood, with a child energetic enough for four adults, I rejoiced when Mrs. McCourt, as she was called in our household, appeared at our apartment door two or three afternoons a week to give the mother a child a reprieve. She was formidable; her mere physical and psychological presence said, "No nonsense." As I left the house, her young charge would follow me to the door screaming of abandonment, etc. She'd turn to me and say, "Don't worry." To him she'd give a look: This was not the sort of behaviour that she'd put up with. (Steinfelds, 7-8)

As the story unfolds, she remarks with a surprise, the take-charge woman of her memory turns out to be weak, weepy, and fatalistic. She sits as a passive witness to her fate, beginning with the choice of Malachy McCourt as a husband and moving on to the

¹ Further referred to as McCourt only.

deaths of three of her seven children. Angela is on the periphery while Malachy, the father who gets drunk every night, is drawn to her health wreathed in clouds of cigarette smoke “seemingly as much a victim as her children of this feckless man who spends his pay on drink.” (Steinfels, 8)

The important question then is whether it is appropriate to combine fiction, non-fiction and semi-fiction. To avoid any confusion, McCourt should have clearly stated the genre to avoid readers’ confusion. Inaccuracy of facts in an autobiography, which certainly belongs to non-fiction, is more severe than inaccuracy in an autobiographical novel or a memoir.

On the other hand, writers are not chroniclers. They create their stories independently of reality. Artists in general possess poetic license and so are free to alter facts. Such license may cause a controversy insulting those who resent the altered version. Davies states that it is a term to denote the distortion of facts. The license is intended to be tolerated by the reader. (Davis, T.C. 57-81). “It is useful for filling in gaps, whether they are factual, compositional, historical or other gaps.” (Goodsell, D.S., Johnson, G.T., 5).

Whether the authors use poetic license consciously or unconsciously, intentionally or unintentionally, the reader should be indulgent. He or she should understand that writers are not historians. Truth is hard to measure and all forms of literature are only second-hand in comparison to the actual histories they tell. Even if every book was full of only one hundred percent true facts, the reader would lose missing the speculation on what is true or not. He or she would not be able to theorize whether it happened or not, if it could have happened and if it could have happened in their own lives.

4.3 Analysis

Frank McCourt’s story of childhood can be described in many words. Malcolm Jones Jr. reduces his report to a brief summary: “*Angela’s Ashes* looks like an encyclopedia of Irish cliché- the alcoholic pa, the long-suffering ma, the wee lads without a crust between ‘em.” (Jones, 130) Schleier recounts McCourt’s work as “a story of a life of terrible poverty, of empty stomachs, flea-infested housing, of clothing too threadbare to keep out the chill.” (Schleier, 1999) Although the author himself describes his book as

“epic of woe” reviewers are quick to cite the striking dualities in *Angela’s Ashes*. Mary Gordon, quoted on the book’s jacket, find McCourt’s tale both “sombre and lively.” John Elson calls it “spunky” and “bittersweet”. (Elson, 74) Malcolm Jones, Jr. locates much of *Angela’s Ashes’* appeal in the author’s exquisite sense of timing: “The genius of the book is that the tears and laughter are rarely separated by so much as a comma.” (Jones, 67)

Angela’s Ashes is a coming of age memoir, where the main character Frank “grows, matures and understands the world in adult terms” (Prestwick, 3) and his childhood is ruled over not only by misery and Catholicism by also by the Depression. Frank’s story begins in Brooklyn, where his mother Angela meets Malachy. After becoming pregnant she eventually marries him. Malachy fails as a father, with no feeling for responsibilities he drinks his wages away and leaves his wife with his growing family of sons. Their short residence in America is hastily ended after a death of Frank’s baby sister. Angela’s depression and negligence compels her relatives to ship the family back to Ireland where the family is not getting on any better: Angela miscarries a baby, Frank’s two brothers die and Malachy turns back to alcohol to drown his sorrows.

Thanks to Frank’s good humour most of the difficult situations are described with a hint of adventure and comedy. When the family home is flooded during winter the parents decide to announce that the family leaves the first floor being called ‘Ireland’ and move to warm and dry second floor they call ‘Italy’.

Although still struggling with money because of father’s alcoholism Angela gives birth through the years to another two boys, Michael and Alphie. Frank does well at school and receives his Confirmation as a good Catholic. Right after being confirmed he falls ill with typhoid fever and stays in hospital for a few months. He meets a seriously ill girl who introduces him to Shakespeare. When cured Frank comes back to school and his story-telling skills are discovered for the first time.

With the coming of World War II many fathers leave for England to find work in order to send money back home. Malachy McCourt eventually goes as well. However he disappoints the family one more time by not sending a single shilling. Young Frank therefore starts his set of jobs, helping out with coal delivery, working in the post office or assisting Mrs. Finucane with recovering debt letters. Working makes Frank feel

responsible and useful. He sets a goal for himself to save enough money to be able to provide his family with enough food and proper clothing.

However Frank tries to help out with household, the McCourts still get evicted from their Ireland-Italy lodge and are forced to live with Angela's cousin Laman. Angela starts sharing the bed with her cousin, an arrangement Frank is not able to get over and leaves the family.

His sexual life begins to complicate as well. The guilt he is made to feel for masturbating is topped by a sexual relationship with a girl Theresa who in the end dies of consumption. Her death leaves Frank grieving and thinking he is responsible for her passing.

After saving enough money to leave for his dreamt-of America he is left with his wonderful expectations that partially come true the very first day of his arrival.

Angela's Ashes is deemed autobiographical and so would be considered as prose. Therefore Gustav Freytag's analysis of dramatic structure is applicable. There are clear distinctions of five parts of plot or acts: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and dénouement.

The exposition is provided with very short description of Frank's family history; meeting of the parents, reasons for their migration and presentation of geographical information. McCourt provides a very limited exposition introducing the characters and situation. The reason can be the very young age of Frank, the narrator who does not know much about his parents' history. The manner in which the story is narrated recalls the technique of *in medias res* where the story is opened with a dramatic act. The family's departure from the United States is seen as the inciting moment that triggers the series of events as it sets the story into a very particular direction.

Frank's behaviour towards his father sets the scene for the rising action. Frank's father's lack of accountability starts to worry Frank and clashes with his respect for his father. As Frank grows into a young man, he naturally starts to think for himself. He begins to see his father's vices, their effect on the family and its well-being. However he still sees him as a strong father figure that he has always looked up to. His inner fight between morality and love for his father confuses him. His train of thoughts leads him to determine his own goal to make a success of himself in America.

The story reaches its climax when Frank steals money from Mrs. Finucane

who recently passed away. He throws away letters providing proof of other people's debts after which act he goes to confession to receive absolution from his sins. He leaves the sins he has witnessed or assisted to commit in Ireland hoping to start a new life with a clean slate.

The falling action comes as a reaction to the climax and contains the moment of final suspense. Clearing of bad conscience offers Frank a resolution. He is assured of his bright looking future and ready for his escape.

In the dénouements of classical comedies the protagonists from lower social backgrounds succeed. At the end they find themselves to be better off than at the beginning of the story. In tragedies, the protagonist, usually of a noble background, falls to a lower position. Frank in *Angela's Ashes* manages to run away from poor Limerick and arrives in the United States to live his American dream. *Angela's Ashes* is not a play but as prose, it combines both tragic and comic elements. The story concerns a serious topic and the protagonist faces many obstacles throughout his life journey, however, he eventually finds himself in a better position than at the beginning.

4.5 Narration and Language

Angela's Ashes can be recognized for a very specific style of narration, the child's voice, the innocent eye through which we see the world of young McCourt. Susan Tetlow Harrington even assigns the memoir's popularity to McCourt's hypnotic writing style (Harrington, 58). Daniel M. Murtaugh agrees that the sharpness with which it recaptures the language of childhood is the most striking quality of the memoir. He depicts the author's language as musical and genuine and powerful:

Words first come to us wrapped in a penumbra of unshared connotation. The voices that first spike them, the places where we first heard them, even the smells that attended them all stick to their semantic core. Their relative scarcity makes each carry more meaning, like a musical theme. As they are joined by reinforcements, as they share out their weight of meaning, their semantic range narrows to the denotations that we carry beyond the family, the playground, and the neighbourhood. McCourt recaptures the lost, musical density of childhood language, and it redeems the sadness of his story. (Murtaugh, 125)

Adult speakers do not use the language of childhood. The use of this kind of language in Frank McCourt's memoir highlights the fact that the era of McCourt's

childhood has already passed. By using the child's voice he estranges himself from the person who he used to be. Some events of his life changed him. McCourt's childhood is vastly different from the experience of the majority of his readers. By going back in memory to his childhood he emphasizes that this era of his life has passed and unlike the language it is not to be brought back to life.

The author himself said he discovered his way of writing from watching his granddaughter Chiara as she played: "She was so intent on what she was doing, with no hindsight, no foresight." (Parker, 2). From this arose his immediate, urgent present-tense voice.

Frank McCourt is generally recognized as a great story teller. His skilfulness is partially attributed to his Irish background for Ireland has been known for its rich oral tradition. J. Madison Davis is of the same opinion when he says: "The Irish reverence for the power of words has long been celebrated. Shakespeare, Jonson, and Sir Philip Sidney all referred to the legend that Irish rats could be rhymed to death." (Davis) McCourt himself claims that he became a storyteller in the classroom during his long career as literature and creative writing teacher (Didcock). A teacher's responsibility is to engage students into a lesson, to grasp their attention by using various techniques. McCourt uses such techniques in writing, varying them to get the readers' attention.

Denis Donoghue discerns McCourt's Irish identity in his style of writing and compliments it in his book review for the *New York Times*:

For the most part, his style is that of an Irish-American raconteur, honourably voluble and engaging. He is aware of his charm but doesn't disgracefully linger upon it. Induced by potent circumstances, he has told his story, and memorable it is. (Donoghue, 15)

McCourt does not feel the need to rewrite his story with an excess of emotion. His memoir concerns serious and very sorrowful matter, however it is not redundantly sentimental. Some parts of McCourt's memoir are even very factual. For instance, when Frank as a small boy describes the death of his siblings he could dwell upon the description of the effect the deaths had on his emotional state and thus urge them onto the readers' feelings. Instead Frank simply states how and when the event happened in a very matter-of-fact style. His short descriptions are very effective and induce an unforced sadness yet not depression upon the reader.

Besides being recognized for a specific style of narration, *Angela's Ashes* has

also received attention for the peculiar language McCourt chose to use. It has been described as “lyrical but penetrable” (Malcolm, 113) or “rhythmical with soft Irish lilt” (Harrington, 58). McCourt’s memoir is full of dialogues, “an intensely antiphonal language play, including the Irish preference for answering questions not with a “yes” or “no” but with such phrases as “He is,” “I won’t,” “I do,” and “’Tis.” (Harrington, 58).

The choice of language helps to evoke the impression of authenticity. Even from a written form of the language readers can recognize the Irish or American accent. Identified accent evokes a specific feeling in a reader and helps to create a desired atmosphere. Furthermore not only readers but the characters themselves are disposed to a diversity of accents. The reader can then observe what the characters’ reaction to each accent is.

The most explicit reaction is noticeable with children because of their spontaneity. Their ears are disposed not only to diverse accents but sounds in general. Frank’s reaction to varied sounds has also been mirrored in his memoir. McCourt captures the sensory impressions he had as a child by using the literary device of onomatopoeia. “Mccourt notes sounds as they would have seemed to him as a little boy. Onomatopoeia reflects the childlike quality of these impressions.” (Prestwick, T-6) For example, Frank notices that “Mam snores hink, Dad snores honk.” (*Angela’s Ashes*, 49) He also observes, “The cows mooed, the sheep maaed, the goat ehed, the birds twittered in the trees, and the beep beep of a motor car cut through everything.” (*Angela’s Ashes*, 48).

The *Catholic Insight* magazine describes McCourt’s language as a language of contrasts. It says that as literature, it presents some difficulties, stemming from certain discordance between the voice the author uses and the sensibility that he brings to bear:

His voice is that of the boy from the slums - repetitive in its coarseness, casual in its irreverence, saucy yet provincial. In contractions, his sensibility is that of the mature artist – worldly, resourceful, and ever striving for effect. This discordance contributes to an overall impression of autobiography dressed as a novel. It is as though Holden Caulfield had read James Joyce. (*Catholic Insight*)

The review sees the contrast between the simple form and deep content as a negative aspect. The lucid straightforward autobiographical way of Frank’s narration is criticized as unnatural and unsuitable for the poetic and artistic thinking of a now mature McCourt. Nonetheless such contrast does not have to be a negative facet. McCourt’s

way of narrating is full of contrast, hence readers find the memoir engaging.

As mentioned above *Angela's Ashes* won its popularity by pressing the soft spot of the readers when writing in the present tense from the perspective of a young boy. However, as the small boy is growing up his language capacity changes and so does his concept of the world. Frank's speech skills progress along the whole memoir therefore the reader has the chance to experience more than just one narrating performance.

The personas through which mouths McCourt speaks to the audience differ from one another vastly. While the author speaks from a point of view of a little boy he hardly ever expresses his own opinions. It is left to the audience to discover the true meaning of an implied opinion of a young boy. Little Frank factually describes events from an outside point of view rather than being on centre stage. He holds the function of an objective observer.

On the other hand, when the author narrates the story through an adult Frank, his opinions are shaped strongly. Mature Frank is looking back after many years and has the possibility of comparison and judgement with time. The adult Frank usually embellishes his speech with very wry humour, contrasting with the bleakness of his subject matter, such as in his opening passage of the memoir:

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. (*Angela's Ashes*, 1)

Having lived through his childhood and most of his adult life already, Frank has the advantage of being able to look back, review and judge his existing experience. His conclusions often come out as strongly shaped statements profoundly appealing to the readers.

Throughout the memoir, the author reports on his trouble as he does here with good-natured humour. Without self-pity he offers the reader a deeper, more adult perspective on those events.

Besides the Child narrator and the Adult narrator there are other narrative performance techniques to induce the right atmosphere and show a suitable attitude. Shannon Forbes found in McCourt's memoir altogether six different narrative performances: Frank's Performance as Child, as Adult, as Other Characters,

Performance as Fabricator, as Judge and Performance as Other. (Forbes, 473) In her essay she analyses all of them.

As an adult Frank McCourt lives in America and talks to the American readers. He describes “the Irish experience” from his point of view hence he brings subjectivity to his memoir. Introducing pieces of Irish history and culture to the American audience brought the memoir more popularity with the readers in the United States than with the Irish readers. Irish residents have either lived through the same time or have heard about the same era through different sources. Two immigrant stories Frank’s recounting of can be two completely different experiences. McCourt’s life journey may differ a lot from other people’s impression of the time. *Angela’s Ashes* was not accepted in Ireland with such liking mostly because people did not agree with everything they found written in the memoir.

However for American readers Frank’s story is interesting and engaging. Frank’s description of tough “Irish experience” is new and uncommon. The Americans appreciate that McCourt introduces to them a brief immigrant history in an intriguing way even though they cannot relate to the story for its obvious cultural differences. However the American readers recognize in *Angela’s Ashes* the theme of an American dream coming true and they applaud Frank’s life success.

According to Shannon Forbes, Frank’s narrative Performance as Adult is characterized by its use of past tense, looking back to evaluate and judge. His evaluation suggests the superiority of the American experience over that of the Irish. From a cultural perspective, it is the performance that is more in alliance with American readers than Irish readers, thus fostering the idealization of an American culture while still promising the intrigue of the “Irish experience”. McCourt speaks directly to the audience, promising entertainment and making the reader’s time “worthwhile”. (Forbes, 476)

Shannon Forbes further describes the Performance as Other Characters. Unlike with the Performance as Adult, McCourt as the author is virtually absent. No quotation marks suggest “the absence of an opinionated author in control of the story, as though readers are witnessing these characters’ behaviours firsthand and not through the evaluative screen of the memory of McCourt as author. (Forbes, 477)

In the Performance as Other Characters McCourt offers an objective attitude.

Readers are not influenced by McCourt's views and thoughts. He lets readers to create their own image of characters and events. He allows them to think for themselves. Performance as Other characters offers the reader experience as if the reader themselves were characters in the story only observing the events.

The Child narrative Performance is regarded by Forbes as the core narrative performance of the memoir. He then describes McCourt's narrative technique as specific for the chosen language that is age-appropriate. Readers, in being older than the three or four-year-old McCourt narrator, are able to comprehend more than the child narrator and consequently feel better equipped to draw conclusions about these scenarios where the innocent McCourt narrator does not have the age or experience to judge. McCourt as a child is speechless, telling readers, "I don't know what to say. I don't know what I did." This three-year-old McCourt does not know what physics surrounding a seesaw incident caused Malachy's injury, though readers themselves know precisely the cause of the accident. (Forbes, 478)

The Child voice withdraws many feelings in readers. Firstly, little Frank brings humour that readers can find in-between the lines. In situations for instance, when Frank cannot explain certain causes of events being too young to understand. Secondly, Frank's conduct induces compassion in readers. Frank finds himself often in situations when he is confused or he is not understood by others and adult characters tend to patronize him. Readers generally sympathize with the little boy. Childhood is an era of life which everybody went through and remembers how tough it can be. Readers of any age and nationality can relate, perhaps not with the story per se which is very different from the most childhoods, however the reader can relate to the boy's feelings.

McCourt-as-Author employs an omniscient, third person narrator to tell the story as he "remembers" it. According to Forbes the narration seems almost fictive, more akin to the discourse one would find in a novel. (Forbes, 480)

For this technique it is difficult to define *Angela's Ashes*' genre. Alleged fabrication prevents classification of *Angela's Ashes* as an autobiographical genre for which McCourt regards his work. Therefore academics incline towards categorizing *Angela's Ashes* as a novel with autobiographical aspects, or as a memoir.

In consonance with Forbes, McCourt as an adult narrator is often critical, judgmental, and cynical. He has chosen to perform Angela as a weepy victim to her two

cousins, who McCourt performs as heartless, selfish, unsympathetic, self-righteous. He is no less merciless to his aunt Aggie in his performance as Judge when he calls her “a great fat cow”. (Forbes, 481)

McCourt’s judgemental technique, the same as the Performance as Adult, is very subjective. Frank could have described his mother and her sisters more neutrally, however he decided to be critical of such characters.

By the Performance of Other Forbes means certain aspects of McCourt’s identity. This technique is utilized in every single passage in the memoir to fashion a particular identity in relation to himself. He describes himself as an honourable child, letting readers into his thoughts, later as a charitable boy and by the end as a responsible and power young man. (Forbes, 477)

These identities can also be understood simply as stages of Frank’s life. Some academics classify *Angela’s Ashes* as a Bildungsroman, a genre that follows psychological and moral growth of a protagonist by focusing on a part of his life. Such a “formation novel” usually describes stages of the protagonist’s life ergo it is understandable that the character changes his views as he is looked upon differently by his peers.

In addition Forbes says that throughout the entire memoir, McCourt performs very specific identities and uses very specific linguistic structures and narrative techniques to establish these identities. Not once is each performance technique employed in precisely the same way; there is always variance in method and structure. (Forbes, 476-484)

The variation of narrative performances enriches the memoir in views. Their opinions are influenced by some techniques while the other techniques leave the final character or situation judgement on the readers. They feel different with each narrative point of view and are not inattentive.

4.7 Humour

Frank’s childhood was marked by many grave events. Living in poor conditions, continuously starving, and being mistreated by authorities, are mirrored in his memoir in a special way. Frank McCourt though did not write his memoir immediately after his escape from Ireland when his memories were fresh and his feelings strong and bitter. He waited a long time to gather his thoughts and put them into writing. He talks about his

childhood from a distance which offers him the possibility of being objective. Frank shows little bitterness, grudge or regret.

Helena Schneider emphasizes the lack of bitterness in the book which “seems almost a detachment from the experiences described.” Frank McCourt says in an interview: “If I had not been detached I would have gone mad. I prefer some kind of distance – it gives other people a chance to speak; other people apart from myself.” (Schneider, 15)

Frank apparently benefits from postponing the writing of his memoir. He used the time given to learn to see his story from different perspectives and managed to understand the story as a whole. Similarly as a dream, when people see themselves from a perspective of a third person and can objectively judge not only other people’s behaviour but theirs too.

Eric P. Levy notices how Frank deals with serious events in his memoir. McCourt uses humour as a defence mechanism. He humorously trivializes sad or difficult situations. (Levy) For instance when little Frank loses a tooth while eating candy he says: “There’s pain on one side and delicious toffee on the other and I remember what my Uncle Pa Keating would say, There are times when you wouldn’t know whether to shit or go blind.” (*Angela’s Ashes*, 144)

This literary device is called comic relief and can be found throughout the whole memoir. It is the kind of humour that works its way into the tragedy of McCourt’s childhood at all time. The memoir is frequently interspersed with wit and gratitude for small details. Another example is when the tormented family travels to Eugene’s funeral and Frank’s little brother comments on a situation on the street with words: “The horse did his doodoo on the street and there was smell, and Mam and Dad had to smile.” (*Angela’s Ashes*, 89)

Even though McCourt’s memoir works with a serious and sorrowful topic the author finds his way to build his writing on a humorous tone. Whether he writes about the hard time the family had living in America, his father’s alcoholic issues or the deaths of his own siblings McCourt finds humour in the most pathetic situations and thus keeps his senses instead of going mad.

4.8 Foreshadowing and the Title

Besides Comic relief Frank McCourt uses other literary devices; such as contrast, irony or foreshadowing.

Foreshadowing is according to *Encyclopaedia Britannica* “the organization and presentation of events and scenes in a work of fiction or drama so that the reader or observer is prepared to some degree for what occurs later in the work.” Even though *Angela’s Ashes* is often categorized as an autobiography there are passages in the memoir where foreshadowing can be clearly found.

The clearest moment is when Angela’s little baby girl Margaret falls ill and after a short time dies. Her body is brought into a hospital and Angela never sees it again. Margaret’s birth, as well as her death, plays a big change in the life of the whole family. Her death thus launches a string of events. Father goes back to drinking; mother lies in bed not being able to take care of their children. McCourt’s family is then forced to leave the United States to live back in Ireland from where the parents ran away. From this moment on, the family’s situation gets only worse. Little Margaret’s death delineates a whole chain of catastrophe that is to come.

Giving the memoir the title *Angela’s Ashes* was an interesting choice. The opinions on the interpretations in most cases correspond to one another. Hubbard suggests that the memoir was titled *Angela’s Ashes* “in part because his mother, Angela, often stared gloomily into the family’s cold grate.” (Hubbard in Levy) The title stands for the sadness Angela feels when she absent-mindedly stares into a burnt out fire place. It symbolizes the poverty the family suffers and is doomed to live in. The ashes are ‘attributed’ to Angela who is at home taking care of children waiting in vain for her husband to come home and bring money to buy food and coal to light a fire in the grate. Her husband though comes only in the morning, drunk and penniless. Therefore the grate stays full of ashes with no fire.

Hubbard also comments the character of Frank’s mother, Angela: “[T]he heartbroken mother becomes the symbol, almost a logo, of her own indomitable individuality” (Hubbard in Levy). Angela is portrayed as a defeated woman. Instead of actively seeking escape from the family’s miserable situation she accepts the dreadful living conditions and passively stares and waits for her husband. Her behaviour shows the first signs of loosing mental health. In situations such as these people take the

pressure differently. Angela's neighbour turns completely insane so she has to be taken to an asylum. She is so frightened that her family will starve one day that she cannot be stopped from baking. Her neighbour deals with her depression differently than Angela. She is excessively active whereas Angela appears to be indifferent to her problems. Angela calms her nerves with tobacco and tortures herself with long looks into the empty fire place. Her spirit is broken. One of the signs of her apathy is for instance the fact that she gave up on trying to save money and buys cigarettes with the last money she has. She deliberately hurts herself with smoking cigarettes and at the same time enjoys the brief fugacious moments of smoking tobacco as if they were the last moments of a 'miserable' happiness. In these moments readers understand that Angela stopped believing in the future.

Catholic insight magazine analyzes the title more deeply by saying that the memoir "bears a funeral title that announces the anguish of the author, reflecting his perception of his ethnic and religious background as far more burden than a glory." (*Catholic Insight*, 1998) The reaction on McCourt's depiction of Ireland was not always accepted well by the Irish, especially because Frank portrays his childhood as though his religious upbringing was obstructing his later growth. In the last chapter of his memoir he emphasizes how he realized the burden he had to carry being brought up in the Catholic Ireland. In some interviews McCourt jokingly explains the origin of the title by saying that the title was switched with the name of his second memoir 'Tis which is following Frank's life right after he arrived to America and also deals with Frank's mother arrival to the States, their relationship and her death. 'Tis are also the last words of his first memoir as a reaction to a question referring to America: "Isn't this a great country altogether?" (*Angela's Ashes*, 426) Never being able to learn whether Frank McCourt was joking about a title switch, the truth is that the titles are mutually convertible. *Angela's Ashes* may refer to Angela's defeated staring into an empty fire place just as well as the title could refer to the ashes of Angela's cremation as the only physical belongings left to Frank after her death.

5. Migration in Angela's Ashes

5.1 *Conception of two worlds*

Angela's Ashes is a memoir about a child's view of the world, a young boy's dreams and achievements, about family, its unity and falling apart. It is also a narrative about migration, travelling into an unknown country, coping with problems of immigrants and coming back home to people and memories left behind. McCourt's story of immigration is furthermore interesting because of the uniqueness of the family's travels. There is not only one but two or even three acts of migration; those being first Frank's parents' arrival in the States, then the family's unfortunate departure from America when small Frank was four years of age and lastly Frank's dream-come-true arrival back to America.

During each individual travel, each member of the McCourt family, like all immigrants, encounters the feeling of being in a position of a foreigner in a different country. Each of the McCourt's comes into contact with discrimination and poverty, possibly caused by racism and different stages of assimilation. There are examples to be found in the memoir of various co-existing ethnicities, cultural continuity and keeping or leaving behind Irish or American identity.

Frank's intriguing story is set in two vastly different countries: The United States of America and the Republic of Ireland. Both the cultures and the states of the two countries are indirectly put into contrast in order for the reader to see the abyss between them. Eric P. Levy mentions this approach in his work. He defines the two surroundings from Frank's point of view and explains the inevitability of his immigration:

Angela's Ashes pits two cultural attitudes against each other. One concerns a conviction of doom, and derives from colonialism, poverty, insularity, and the Roman Catholic Church. The other concerns a culture of the modern, of the way out, whereby Limerick is imbued with the idea and fact of passage. In this reading, Frank's emigration is 'culturally coded', and his escape is ironically assisted by values in the very culture which confines him. (Levy)

Levy describes the two very different mentalities depicted in McCourt's memoir. Ireland's cultural attitude is according to him predestined to deterioration. Their way of living is determined to some sort of decay. He assumes that nothing prosperous can be

produced in such surroundings. Ireland as a post-colonial country is doomed to a failure, poverty and traditionalism. Isolated Ireland is entirely dependent on itself. It is hardly ever influenced by other cultures. Development or any sort of changes is very slow. The United States, on the other hand, are described by Levy as a salvation. The question is, whether the Irish people care for a way out. They are indeed, isolated. However, the Irish are not interested in a foreign intrusion into the country's matters.

McCourt's memoir depicts the perception of both worlds, The Republic of Ireland and The United States of America. The contrasting impression of the two countries is clear. Ireland is depicted as a dilapidated country whereas America is presented as an escape.

Not only Frank's family but McCourt's neighbours in Ireland, Frank's fellow-students or Angela's friends share the same problems to obtain food, clothes or furniture. Mental health is another feature by which Frank McCourt adumbrates the unsure cultural future of Ireland. Angela's unstableness of psychical well-being is only worsened shortly after their arrival to her hometown where the reader finds women in similar positions and even in far worse mental state.

Besides poverty and poor state of mind, Levy writes about the narrow-mindedness of the local Irish people. Limerick people are not pictured as sensitive and comprehensive in McCourt's novel. It may be given by their strictly religious upbringing, small size of the town or general inaccessibility of information. On all accounts it is mainly the Puritanism that Frank despises about the Limerick people the most and this hatred, in consequence, motivates him to leave the country altogether.

Leaving for the United States is depicted in Frank's memoir as a rescue plan. Angela is sent to America by her mother who calls Angela "pure useless". She sends her daughter there assuming Angela may have more chance to succeed as she says: "There's room for all sorts of uselessness." (*Angela's Ashes*, 15). Angela's mother is a Limerick woman, highly religious and with values far different from the American style of living. She does not think of America well, however she is a rational woman and decides to send her daughter to the States because she expects her to lead a better life there. Another way of depicting America as a liberation is Frank's later immigration. Frank, contrary to Angela's mother, had the chance to experience living there and based on his experience he decides to live in America. He dreams about coming to the States

from the time the family had to leave. Even though he spent most of his childhood in Ireland he feels the sense of belonging in America.

When Frank was born America had already endured the great flood of immigrants from all corners of the world. It was the 1930s and America was becoming the famous Melting Pot. Frank McCourt describes his arrival in New York in Jones' interview: "Immigrating to New York was like discovering oxygen." (Jones, 2) The variety of nations living in one neighbourhood is documented also in his memoir as Foster notices in his essay: "There are kind Italian shopkeepers. There are wonderful Jewish neighbours. Father is a sentimental Northern Irish republican who sings rebel ballads, and Mother is the regulation-issue Irish mammy." (Foster, 2) Frank obviously enjoys the presence of various nationalities living in one neighbourhood and does not alter his attitude towards individual people based on their country of origin.

Little Frank has a great affection towards his outlandish neighbours. "I always felt more at home in New York. I never fitted in with the Irish" admits Frank in his interview with Barry Didcock. (Didcock) His liking towards his ethnic neighbours grew especially when they showed their kindness in times of need. Mrs. Lebowitz, their Jewish neighbour, helps Angela when her baby girl dies. Italian shopkeepers offer food to the boys even though the family has unpaid bills, and Minnie from next door cooks for the family when Malachy is drinking their money away. This kindness shown by strangers points to the togetherness of immigrants. They share their burdens and they are willing to help each other when it is necessary. The immigrants act on their moral principals, perhaps for the reason that they are able to put themselves into other immigrants' shoes and they can imagine the severity of a situation.

On the other hand, when a neighbour or an acquaintance went through a rough time in Ireland, people started talking about them. They spread rumours, arouse feeling of fear of them and started avoiding them. Angela's unstable financial situation forces grandmother to rent a room to a Protestant tenant. Her first reaction to discover the renter's religion is "What would people say?" She and people in Limerick are first of all scared of public humiliation because they know how little it takes for someone to be excluded from a society.

Americans on the contrary are a nation of forgiveness. It is in their nature to forgive and help when a person is unfortunate. Frank recognizes this enormous

difference of being each for themselves and of being a part of a large community and chooses the latter.

5.2 A Picture of America

The opinions on America, in the novel, vary according to the speaker. Different people have different views according to their own experience, their beliefs, their origin and the way they were brought up. The Irish school master is not fond of the country and calls Frank's motherland "the sinful shores of Amerikay" (*Angela's Ashes*, 134), others see the country from more positive angles. Grandma calls it "the Free State" and Angela thinks of America as a hope of life in a "warm place with lavatory down the hall" that she misses so much when the family lives back in Ireland (*Angela's Ashes*, 121). The truth is that none of the speakers are wrong. The distinction between the two countries is vigorous; therefore the persuasions are contradictory and strong.

The schoolmaster considers America to be immoral. Ireland in 1930s was a very religious country. To be a proper Catholic, to take a First Communion, to go to church and to Confession was very important to the people. For that reason the schoolmaster sees America as a country of ill-mannered people as their customs were different.

His position at school was connected to religious ceremonies and he was encouraging his students to lead their lives in accordance with the commandments. George B. Tindall and Davis E. Shi are of the opinion that many people outside of the States had the same view as the schoolmaster: "It is generally assumed, that "The Roaring Twenties" was a period of prosperity, frivolity, optimism and free love life. That was only true for some Americans, whereas for the others it was a period of hopelessness and doubts." (Tindall, Shi, 523) However, the schoolmaster is not familiar with this fact. He only sees Americans as frivolous sinners who do not follow religious ceremonies which play such a big role in his culture. The schoolmaster takes the culture and traditions of Ireland as a norm and assumes that other countries should accept it as their standard too.

The most shocking cultural difference the boys experience is a religious one. The brothers, Frank and Malachy, find themselves in highly embarrassing situations shortly after their arrival to Ireland. They are considered ignorant by the Irish people for not recognizing religious attributes or sacred dignitaries as for instance when they toil

from Dublin to Limerick and on their way the family meets a priest:

Dad said, Good morning, Father.
Father? I said. Dad, is that your father?
Mam said, Don't ask him any questions.
Dad said, No, no this is a priest. Malachy said, What's a —?
But Mam put her hand over his mouth. (*Angela's Ashes*, 45)

The boys were brought up differently in America. They were not thought to recognize sacred symbols, recite long prayers and go to Confession. It is not their fault that they do not recognize a clergyman when they meet one on the street. Nevertheless they are blamed for their lack of knowledge by the Irish who then judge America by strict measures of their own.

Frank's grandma is a person with very great demands. She is as critical with herself as she is with everybody else. Yet, unlike Frank's schoolmaster, she sees America in a positive view. Grandma calls America a free state because of the opportunities the country has to offer. *Encyclopedia Britannica* offers a brief description of America in 1930s, a time where the memoir is set into:

Although 1930s was dark time for the economy Great Depression was the longest and most severe economic depression ever experienced by the Western world. It began in the U.S. soon after the New York Stock Market Crash of 1929 and lasted until about 1939. The stock values had dropped to about 20% of their previous value and 25,000 banks had failed. (*Britannica*, 'Great Depression')

The Great Depression originated in America but spread worldwide (see Appendix 6). Despite the bad economic situation, immense problems with job seeking and poor living standards, the situation was still better than the situation in Ireland. Malachy, the father, is reminded of that fact when he and the whole family arrived in Ireland and spend the night at their father's family house:

It's quiet at the table till Dad says, Things are terrible in America. Grandma says, Och, aye. I read it in the paper. But they say Mr. Roosevelt is a good man and if you stayed you might have work by now. Dad shakes his head and Grandma says, I don't know what you're going to do, Malachy. Things are worse here than they are in America. No work here and, God knows, we don't have room in this house for six more people. (*Angela's Ashes*, 47)

The behaviour of Malachy's family members is obvious, each is for themselves. Both of Malachy's parents refuse to deal with their son's situation and they show their attitude

towards his troublesome situation by a long silence.

As in *Angela's Ashes* appear both male and female characters, the memoir allows to put into contrast the role of women presented by the author. Tindal and Shi talk in their work about women's movement, their renewal of a voting right campaign and general political involvement the same as breaking the sexual taboo (Tindal, Shi, 530). Ireland and its strict Catholic codex was on the other end of an imaginary scale. Frank McCourt recalls his disenchantment right after his arrival back to America: "I had no idea about relationships with women. I had no idea about women at all. The Catholic Ireland I grew up in did not prepare us for relationships with women – it crippled us," he said." (Young)

McCourt portrays different types of female character in *Angela's Ashes*. Their traits differ a lot according to their age and origin. The author has the possibility of comparing natures independently of their nationalities. Females who spent their whole life in Limerick share distinct qualities. Among these characters belong for instance Grandma, Aunt Aggie and Nora, a close neighbour who helped Angela when the family just moved to Limerick. These women, growing up in a small town, not having seen life, traditions and different cultures elsewhere, seem to grow bitter or pessimistic. Nora recognizes her lack of conversancy of the world and envies Angela her travels:

You're lucky, missus, that you saw a bit of the world. Oh God, I'd give anything to see New York, people dancing up and down Broadway without a care. No, I had to go and fall for a boozier with the charm, Peter Molloy, a champion pint drinker that had me up the pole and up the aisle when I was barely seventeen. I was ignorant, missus. We grew up ignorant in Limerick, so we did, knowing feck all about anything and signs on, we're mothers before we're women. And there's nothing here but rain and oul' biddies saying the rosary. (*Angela's Ashes*, 70)

The women in Limerick grow bitter and critical as they age. Hardened by life, the jolliness of youth evaporates and all they are left with are regrets, worries and a burden of responsibility with a view of an unsure future. On the other hand girls and young women presented in the memoir are the opposite. They are alive, thirsty for adventure and they are aware of their sexuality as if they knew their youth is fleeting and they wanted to enjoy their bloom while they can. Seventeen year old Theresa takes the initiative to seduce the then telegram delivering Frank, Angela is in her young years known as a queen of dancing balls and her friend Nora falls in love head over heels with

a charming Limerick man. It is only in the older age women start feeling resentful and morose.

5.3 A Picture of Ireland

In the 19th century, an increasing number of Protestant Irish turned to England as a protection against the Catholic inhabitants. To the Catholics, however, most Irish Protestants were a reminder that England, a foreign country, was still as powerful in Ireland as it had been in 1690. Dolan describes the intense relationship between the two groups of different religious belief and the first steps to freedom of the Irish Catholics. The struggle for Irish freedom from English rule became a struggle between Catholic and Protestant. The first great victory for Irish freedom was when Catholics were allowed to become MPs in 1829. In fact in Ireland this decision was accompanied by a repression of civil and political liberties. Even so, the fact that a Catholic could enter Parliament increased Irish national feeling. (Dolan, 30-35)

However, while this feeling was growing, Ireland suffered a terrible disaster. In the three years from 1845 – 1847 the potato crop, the main source of food for the poor, failed. During those three years 1.5 million people, approximately twenty percent of the country's population, died of starvation. Paradoxically at the time there was enough wheat being produced in Ireland to feed the population. However, the wheat was being grown by Protestant landowners for export to England. The government in power in London, through either incredible ignorance or a blatant indifference to the situation, failed to address the problem. (Dolan, 67-71)

The following great wave of Irish immigrants deprived Ireland of even more inhabitants, but the Irish people had little choice but to leave. McDowall describes the situation in Ireland:

Meanwhile Irish people were undergoing the process of assimilation, Charles Parnell, a Protestant Irish MP, demanded fuller rights for the Irish people, in particular the right to self-government. When most Irish were able to vote for the first time in 1885, eighty-six members of Parnell's Irish party were elected to Parliament. Most Liberals supported Parnell, but the Tories did not and Ireland did not gain the right to self-government, or "home rule", until thirty years later. But then Britain's war with Germany delayed it taking place, and by the time the war ended Irish nationalists had decided they could only win their freedom by fighting for it. (McDowall, 150)

By the time McCourt's family arrives to Ireland, northern and southern parts of the country are already considered to be two different countries, with enormous hatred for each other. "The country is drowning in depression. The unemployment grew from thirteen to twenty eight percent. The side effect of a huge unemployment was renewal religious attacks." (Moody, 245)

In the memoir Ireland is displayed in many ways. McCourt introduces Ireland to the reader in a contrast of beauty and worrying problems:

Limerick has a seemingly contradictory combination of verdant natural beauty, and miserable poverty, and ill health. The twins get excited by the park full of flowers, and McCourt notes the "grass so green it dazzled you." (Pg. 56) Yet, the boys who carry the McCourts' trunk have "snotty noses" and shaved heads to keep the lice away; they also wear no shoes. Grandma mentions the problem of consumption almost as soon as the McCourt family arrives. (Prestwick, T-8)

Life itself in Ireland is depicted as very gloomy. Foster uses a few, but harsh, words to describe Frank's Limerick: "dirt, defecation, shared privies in the back lane and the indignity of emptying chamber pots." (Foster, 2) McCarthy agrees and adds: "Due to malnutrition and squalid living conditions, with open sewage running just outside the family's door, the twins die in quick succession." (McCarthy, 107)

The climate and poor standard of living together form the almost unbearable living conditions. Neighbours in a lane share the same lavatories on the street and catch an infection. The weather, constant rain and humidity, causes spreading of illnesses. The unstable economic situation does not allow Limerick people to buy necessary medicine. However, besides these aspects there is one more that worsens the situation for the McCourt's. It is the people representing institutions that harden the lives of the family members. Establishments such as school, the Church or the charitable St. Vincent de Paul Society act towards people with low social status with cruelty. People turn to charitable societies only in the worst times when they cannot ask for help anywhere else. They turn to charities in hope when they are in need as the last option. Being harshly refused by such an institution is disheartening and it discourages people from facing their problems.

Didcock identifies the cruel behaviour of religious representatives and explains how Frank describes Ireland in his memoir: "He portrayed Limerick as a place where the weather was wicked, the nuns were worse and the living conditions went some way

beyond Dickensian.” He follows with a notion that it was not just climate factors that hardened the family’s life but also the behaviour of certain authorities: “The way McCourt tells it, his family was dealt only with cruelty and reproach by institutions like the supposedly charitable St. Vincent de Paul Society.” (Didcock)

McCourt created an unflattering picture of Limerick which due to the quickly growing popularity of the memoir became known around the world. It comes as no surprise that the response of some readers of the memoir coming from Ireland was negative towards the author, questioning his objectivity and the trustworthiness of his description. So did for instance a bar owner in Limerick, Dave Crowe saying: “It is so upsetting the way he desecrated his mother and his home town. He hated absolutely everything and the book is just so negative. I know he has put Limerick on the map and everything but all he’s done is knock Limerick.” (O’Hanlon)

A person living in Ireland has a different experience than Frank. Crowe’s impression of contemporary town and people differs from the author’s. He accuses Frank of bringing a notable amount of subjectivity in the memoir. Frank expresses his feelings about the country with which Dave Crowe cannot identify with.

The nature, weather, illnesses and Church are not the only aspects the author comments on. Frank McCourt also depicts the mentality of Irish people. Owing to the fact that the experience is written in child’s point of view narrative, the description of people’s behaviour is caught and delivered raw and honest just as the child sees it. Frank for instance explains how people behave to each other in the lanes of Limerick.

People in families in the lanes of Limerick have their ways of not talking to each other. But everyone talks to Uncle Pa Keating because he was gassed in the war and married Aunt Aggie and if they didn’t talk to him he wouldn’t give a fiddler’s fart anyway and that’s why the men in South’s pub call him a gas man. (*Angela’s Ashes*, 146)

Irish people are known for their gift of rhetoric, their need to tell stories. It is highly peculiar that people of Limerick refuse to talk to one another. Unfortunately in tough times of economic depression everybody has problems of their own. Sharing problems of others is overwhelming. People decide not to interfere in a neighbour’s problems. It is an easier way of overcoming obstacles life has prepared for them.

Shaun O’Connell discusses in his essay the need for survival. He describes the Irish mentality very harshly. He calls his theory a *hard truth which should be excused*:

“Their cultural limitations-clannishness, blind faith in their religious and political leaders, defensiveness and aggressiveness-should be understood, if not forgiven, as means of adaptation and survival.” (O’Connell, 251)

Religion is by all means mentioned in *Angela’s Ashes* many times. In fact, religion is one of the major themes of the memoir and often functions as an action trigger. Malachy McCourt is pushed into a marriage because of religion; he is not socially accepted because of his assumed religious belief. The readers learn about Frank’s Communion and Confessions. His whole life, Frank is haunted by guilt that Church brought upon him.

Although little Frank is a good Catholic the memoir leaves an anti-clerical impression. Susan Tetlow Harrington describes the role of the Church in her essay and blames Malachy’s fleeing on Ireland’s orthodox religion:

The Church subjugated the Irish at that time by prohibiting the spread of information about birth control and implies that part of the reason that Malachy McCourt abandons his family is that his worn-out wife refuses to sleep with him any more. (Harrington, 60)

The Church of Ireland in the first half the twentieth century was thus directly interfering with people’s lives. The religious institution kept the Irish in the dark by forbidding the spreading of information about birth control and so prevented the country from development. The Church thus deliberately causes reactionism and stands in the way of independent decision making of local people. The Church did not help people to decide but dictated the rules behind people’s backs.

However, keeping information away from the people was not the only wrongdoing of the Church. The institution proved to be bias when the authorities refused to accept Frank as an alter boy for his ragged look. The editors of magazine *Catholic Insight* point out how degraded Frank must have felt:

Malachy McCourt, who had been an alter boy in his day, displays a rare diligence by drilling his son in the language and gestures required to serve Mass. When the father leads his son, thus prepared, to the parish church for inclusion among the alter boys, the sacristan in charge of the servers curtly dismisses them. The McCourt’s attempt “to go unto the alter of God” does not “give joy to his youth.” It only results in another humiliation. (*Catholic Insight*, 1998)

Over the years Frank’s opinion of the Church has changed. He went from very little knowledge of religion in America, through an extreme Catholic upbringing,

and finally on to a personal revenge and eventual rejection of Church's ideas. Frank's feelings towards the Church slowly turn into antagonism. His hatred reaches its peak toward the end of the memoir when he transforms his feelings into action. When Mrs. Finuncane dies he steals money from her. Prestwick realizes this change in Frank's behaviour and describes the situation in his essay: "Mrs. Finuncane saved money to have Masses said for her soul after her death. Since the money is going to the Church, Frank does not feel guilty for taking it. He figures the Church owes him after slamming doors in his face." (Prestwick, T-42)

The very end of McCourt's memoir offers Frank's final rejection of the Catholic Church. In the last chapter, Frank finally arrives to America and to his dream. He finds himself in the company of a young American, sexually-liberated, woman called Frieda. Frank though surprised by her straight-forwardness succumbs to her flirtation and lets her seduce him. After their sexual intercourse he realizes his rejection of the Church's ideas about sex on which he grew up. Not only that Frank does not follow the rules of the Church but he could not care less now. He feels liberated from a great burden he had to carry his childhood. He is finally free from the guilt religion imposed on him.

Prestwick sees the episode symbolically:

When the pries knocks on the bedroom door, Frank ignores him. While with Frieda, Frank thinks, "...do you see what's happening to me at long last I don't give a fiddler's fart if the Pope himself knocked on this door and the College of Cardinals gathered gawking at the windows." (Pg. 361) (Prestwick, T-46)

The Church does not serve to people as a consolation. Instead of being helpful and sympathetic the dignitaries disdain people of a low social status. People representing the Church had a patronizingly superior attitude towards the poor people of Limerick. They refuse to recognize equality. They ask for humbleness but act in a pretentious way. The priests make differences between people according to their wealth. They look differently at the rich than at the poor. Frank is surfeited with this kind of hypocrisy and unfairness. Only as a young adult he is able to see through it clearly and makes his own image of the Church.

Peter Quinn writes about Frank's feelings toward the Church in his essay "Frank's Map" he wrote after McCourt's death:

Frank loathed the institutional church that he grew up in/under during

ultra-Catholic era of postcolonial Ireland. Living in squalor and poverty, he experienced first-hand the scorn and condescension of the pillars of the Irish-Catholic establishment: Church, State, and the Respectable Classes. With the publication of *Angela's Ashes*, Frank demolished the old taboo. He hung out the dirty linen for the whole world to see. For this, he was accused by some of wild exaggerations and outright lies. Now he has been given official confirmation in the horror stories chronicled by the Irish government's Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse. The commission itself, I believe was in part a consequence of Frank's revolutionary act of truth-telling. (Quinn, 2)

Frank McCourt himself has, in the end, made peace with the belief that influenced his life so much. Eventually he himself is able to find strength in this great phenomenon, not only drawbacks: "I don't believe in it," he says in an interview in Didcock's essay. "I'm fascinated by faith, it's a great comfort when you find it but it leads you to suicide bombing. The one thing the Catholic Church did give me was a sense of mystery." (Didcock)

In conclusion, Ireland is depicted in the memoir from many views. There are its beauties and problems, people living in lanes, their cruelty and kindness, their traditions, beliefs, dreams and manners. McCourt describes the enduring struggle between Catholicism and Protestantism, the English and the Irish. Frank noted the world surrounding him how he experienced it and perceived it.

5.4 Conflicts between Nations

There is a repetitive collision of mentalities of different nations to be found in Frank's memoir. Migration of Frank's family into two different countries provides the reader with an insight into two distinct identities and people's attitude towards foreigners. The feelings towards different nations are influential. The strongest tension is to be found among the Irish towards the English and the Northern Irish, or among the Irish and the Americans.

The relationship between two nations is very complex and cannot be generalized to only one feeling. Their feelings towards one another result from common history, different national religions and personal experience. Frank faces from a very small age different attitudes, and he is often left confused by the inexplicable behaviour of the adults surrounding him.

England and Ireland have a rich intermutual history and as a result of their former events the Irish hold a grudge towards the English. Shaun O'Connell suggests their relationship even strongly influences the Irish identity: "Identity in Ireland has long been defined by relations to England: Ulster Protestants insisted upon their Britishness while Irish Catholics, North and South, affirmed their Irishness." (O'Connell, 252) It is remarkable to build a nation's identity based on how the country distinguishes itself from another country.

The Irish hatred towards the English pervades *Angela's Ashes* from the beginning to the end. When McCourt opens his memoir with an introductory description of his harsh Catholic Childhood, he does not forget to mention that the English did not help to make his school years any easier:

[T]he poverty; the shiftless loquacious alcoholic father; the pious defeated mother moaning by the fire; pompous priests; bullying schoolmaster; the English and the terrible things they did to us for eight hundred long years." (*Angela's Ashes*, 1)

Although Frank did not live through the potato crop failure and he never met an Englishman in person as a child, he is brought up to be antagonistic towards the English. Frank, though, is a strong-minded character who from an early age is able to think for himself. The attitude of his character in the memoir is surprisingly neutral. For that reason an attentive reader after reading the whole memoir can sense a hint of sarcasm in Frank's introductory sentence (see *Angela's Ashes*, 1, above). He ridicules the nature of Irish behaviour towards the English. Frank says by his statement that the Irish were in a very unlucky situation but if there was a chance to blame the English for it, they would. That is why he also uses general "we, or in this case, "us", as in "the terrible things they did to us." He adopts the role of the speaker for the nation expressing the feeling of his fellow Irish citizens.

Regardless of the problem the Irish would always look to blame the English:

It is said there were no fleas in ancient Ireland, that they were brought in by the English to drive us out of our wits entirely, an' I wouldn't put it past the English. An' isn't it a very curious thing that St. Patrick drove the snakes out of Ireland an' the English brought in the fleas? (*Angela's Ashes*, 60)

Frank experiences the same attitude towards the English at school from one of his teachers, Mr. Quigley when he explains the reason why the students have to know

their prayers in Irish, he says with rage: “Irish is fine for patriots, English for traitors and informers.” referring to people who betrayed the patriots and deserted to the enemy. (*Angela’s Ashes*, 130) Mr. Quigley compares the English language to treason and thus this is how he sees the English. He draws a general conclusion that all English are enemies and refuses to forget the common history and forgive the Irish soldiers who during the war deserted the Irish army for the English one.

Judgments of the teachers at school differ though and so Mr. O’Halloran, Frank’s sixth grade teacher presents the class his view. He is the first teacher teaching history not only from the Irish point of view. Mr. O’Halloran has a high social status therefore nobody contradicts him. Besides, he is a natural authority for his students so they listen attentively to Mr. O’Halloran’s lectures. He has a healthy influence on his students because he gives them both sides of stories so that the students can shape their own opinions.

Helena Schneider comments on Mr. O’Halloran’s contribution on forming the Frank’s complex perspective: “It is a revelation when he says that during the battles between the Irish and the English there was cruelty on *both* sides, that the Irish were nor worse nor better than the English.” (Schneider, 17) Through Mr. O’Halloran’s lectures students learn equality and diversity.

Another not entirely spiteful message about her feeling towards the English sends Nora, Angela’s friend, who regularly finds herself in an asylum for mentally ill people. She complains to Angela about her alcoholic husband who drives her mad and opens her heart about her dream of leaving Ireland because she believes that anywhere else she would be better off than in Ireland: “I’d give my teeth to get out, go to America or even England itself. The champion pint drinker is always on the dole and sometimes he even drinks that and drives me so demented I wind up in the lunatic asylum.” (*Angela’s Ashes*, 70) Nora thinks practically. Because of the unstable income of her alcoholic husband, the family finds itself always on the edge of starving. She knows her family would be better off in nearby England. She thinks of England as a safe place. She would prefer America but when it comes to a social safety of the family she does not differentiate countries based on stereotypes.

A similarly hostile relationship is kept between the Irish and Northern Irish people. The tension is caused again by historically-religious reasons. Examples of

unfriendly behaviour can be found throughout the whole memoir. The population of Limerick, including Angela's family, has prejudices towards Malachy McCourt, coming from the north of The Republic of Ireland. Prestwick clarifies the mental attitude of Irish people: "By the time of the Great Depression, the southern portion of Ireland had become the Catholic Irish Free State, but the Protestant British ruled the northern part. Political and religious tensions affect the cousins' treatment of Malachy." (Prestwick, T-2) The residents of The Republic of Ireland feel comfortable being isolated from other nations. They act in a hostile manner towards newcomers, even though some of them are related. The local Irish people built a natural indifference towards the problems of immigrants. They judge automatically other cultures and fear the unfamiliarity.

The origin of Malachy influences even the behaviour of Grandma towards her only grandsons. She finds her way to blame the smallest trouble on Frank's father's ancestry. As for instance, when Frank is preparing himself for the First Communion and his Grandmother helps him to get dressed:

Come here till I comb your hair, said Grandma. Look at that mop, it won't lie down. You didn't get that hair from my side of the family. That's that North of Ireland hair you got from your father. That's the kind of hair you see on Presbyterians. If your mother had married a proper decent Limerickman you wouldn't have this standing up, North of Ireland, Presbyterian hair.

She spat twice on my head. (*Angela's Ashes*, 142)

Although Frank's father is Catholic, Grandmother implies that anybody coming from the North must be Presbyterian. As an affirmation of her hate she spits in her grandson's hair, not once, but twice. Grandma hints in her speech that the Northern Irish are not proper men. She, as many other people from Limerick, has developed an idea that only people from Limerick possess the best character traits and visual aspects. Negative qualities she assigns to other nation's origin. Grandma's opinions on Malachy affect her relationship with her grandsons and also her already fragile relationship with Angela. Her marriage to a Northern Irish man serves grandma as a confirmation of Angela's uselessness for which grandma sent her abroad. Grandma does not put any hopes in Angela and thinks of her as of a burden. Bringing a non-Limerick man to a family gives grandma a perfect excuse to give out to her slightly more.

Malachy therefore has hard time to get a steady job. Even though he dresses decently and asks for jobs, his job requests are declined immediately, the reason being,

for most parts, his instantly recognized northern accent. As a result, Angela can hardly feed their children from Malachy's 'dole money'. However when Angela asks Malachy why does he not try to talk like a Limerickman, he replies with pride greater than his troubles that "he will never sink that low and the greatest sorrow of his life is that his sons are now afflicted with Limerick accent." (*Angela's Ashes*, 102) The people of Limerick are unfair to Malachy. They would not hire a respectable man suitable for a certain kind of a job based on his origin. However the same grudge Limerick people hold against Malachy, he holds against the local people. Moreover, Malachy is the person in need, therefore if for nothing else, than for the sake of his family, he could try to overcome his stereotypes. However his pride is bigger than his sorrows, Malachy rather starves to death than forgets his hatred.

The last relations well depicted in the memoir are the feelings of the Irish towards the Americans. Ireland and America have not experienced any significant conflict in history that would severely influence their relationship at that time. Their attitudes towards one another are based mainly on their culture and mentality. Eric P. Levy identifies one big difference between the upbringing in the States and Ireland. America's education is based on individuality whereas Ireland pays attention to discipline and repression of standing out:

The community in which Frank grows up encourages and, indeed demands retention and repression on many levels. As a result, the very notion of individuality is problematized, since the content of individuality – the feelings and thoughts which make it unique and distinct – must be covered up: 'I have to keep it inside...' (p. 181) The worst consequence of such repression is not concealment from others, but inability to know oneself. (Levy)

When Frank is growing up he is not given space to *just* be himself. He is always told by all kinds of authorities how he is supposed to behave, what is appropriate to say, what and when he is to do. As a small boy he does not take into account what he himself would like to do. But as he matures he experiences a personal dilemma. He feels the pressure of the society which tells him to do what is appropriate but as he starts thinking for himself it becomes hard for him to stand back, not defending what he believes in.

Two examples concerning Frank's sojourns in the hospital will illustrate his dilemma. The first concerns his compassion for a fellow patient: "You can't show you understand what the nurse said about Patricia Madigan, that she's going to die, and you

can't show you want to cry over this girl who taught you a lovely poem which the nun says is bad." (*Angela's Ashes*, 198). The second concerns his sadness on learning of the departure of Seamus, the kindly cleaning man: "I want to cry but you can't cry in the eye ward with the brown stuff in your eyes and nurses saying, What's this what's this be man..." (*Angela's Ashes*, 230).

In both cases the society wants Frank to be *a man*. The nurses and the nuns do not want Frank to show emotions. They want Frank's feeling to be restrained. Showing empathy is generally considered weak and immature behaviour. Frank, in his teenage years, is supposed to act as an adult as soon as possible.

Another difference arising on pages of *Angela's Ashes* is the structure of society. In Ireland in the 1930s the convenient class system, although not official, survived as an illustrative case and serves Frank's attempt to become an alter boy and following rejection for not sufficiently position in the society. Whereas on the other hand, in the United States, there is democracy and American dream, where anybody, starting from nowhere, being nobody, can reach for the stars and achieve success, regardless of a social status. Mr. O'Halloran, Frank's history teacher is aware of this contrast:

Mr. O'Halloran says the Irish have kept a class system forced upon them by the English, and his system wastes the talent of bright lower-class children. The schoolmaster admonishes his students to go to America.
(Prestwick, T-34)

"Mr. O'Halloran tells the class it's a disgrace that the boys like McCourt, Clarke, Kennedy, have to hew wood and draw water. You must get out of this country, boys. Go to America, McCourt. Do you hear me? I do, sir." (*Angela's Ashes*, 338) Mr. O'Halloran is frank with his students. He talks about the unfairness of the established Irish system of classes. Mr. O'Halloran introduces his thought as an obvious problem. He realizes the gravity of the issue however instead of taking action in changing the class division in Ireland he appeals on Frank to immigrate to America. The class system, predetermination by birth and possession of money, judging people according to their wealth is a profoundly long-established system that is hard to break.

As a result of the teacher's urge, the insuperable difference between the Irish and American mentalities and the fact that Frank never really integrated in the small Irish town community, he manages to save enough money to immigrate to America.

5.5 Process of Immigration

The immigration of the McCourt family offers an observation of the individual aspects of the complex process of immigration. Both Frank's parents, Frank and his little brother Malachy undergo the process of immigration, live through the tough situations and endure the unusual situations that they would have not experienced having stayed in one country their whole life.

McCourt's memoir depicts Angela and Malachy in a position of Irish immigrants in America and Frank's and his brother Malachy's post of American immigrants in Ireland. *Angela's Ashes* shows American and Irish prejudices and stereotypes towards the new coming immigrants, the inevitably experienced poverty and different stages of assimilation. McCourt then points out the existence of various ethnicities and cultural identities. The memoir also focuses on the act of coming home and the difficult process of restoring old relations.

Brian O'Callaghan describes the life of American immigrants during the first half of the 20th century:

For most immigrants this new life in America was a hard one. They were outsiders in a strange land. Often they could not even speak its language. Only the hardest and lowest paid jobs were open to them. They had to work for long hours in dangerous conditions. (O'Callaghan, 78)

Angela's family did not speak a different language as for example her Jewish neighbour Mrs. Lebowitz, but their accents gave them away and evoked in people different kinds of stereotypes associated with the Irish and, as stated above, it certainly hardened Malachy's problems to find a steady job.

On the other hand, being in the position of an immigrant in America meant being integrated in a large group of expatriates who share the same problems and emotions. When Angela miscarried her baby girl and needed help, her ethnical friends and neighbours were there for her. They took care of sick Angela, fed her children and showed the boys how to change diapers of their little brothers.

The position of boys in Ireland was much different. In America immigrants from all over the world were flooding in, so that in 1920s Congress had to pass laws to limit all kinds of immigration. However in Ireland there were not many immigrants seeking a success. Two American boys then were in a small Limerick town easily spotted and looked at with different kinds of reactions: humiliation, scorn or sheer amazement.

Right after the family's arrival to Limerick, the McCourt's become the centre of attention. The interference of two different cultures creates humorous situations. Two little boys, porters at the train station, overhear Frank's and Malachy's accent and cannot help their astonishment. At the same time Frank and Malachy cannot help but gaze amazedly back because they have never heard the porters' accent before. "The boy said to the other boy, God they're Americans. They put the trunk down and stared at us and we stared back at them till Grandma said, Are ye goin' to stand here all day lookin' at flowers an' gawkin' at each other?" (*Angela's Ashes*, 56)

This kind of salience and feeling of unfitting will accompany the family throughout the whole memoir. People's behaviour towards them will differ from person to person but usually causes in people strong reaction. Their *exotic* origin rarely leaves people neutral and scarcely people react with a positive response.

Notorious prejudices and stereotypes complicate immigrants' every-day lives. People automatically assign various qualities to foreign people and thus behave towards them in a certain manner without letting people prove their assumption right or wrong. Eric P. Levy discusses in his work principles of Irish mentality, claiming that the most important are a fear of disgrace and desire for esteem. He then continues explaining the Irish urge to keep believing in prejudices:

The most obvious agent of disgrace is prejudice, which censures any behaviour or groups deemed unacceptable or incorrigible: 'If anyone in your family was the least way friendly to the English in the last eight hundred years it will be brought up and thrown in your face and you might as well move to Dublin where no one cares' (p. 133). (Levy, 182)

Eric P. Levy implies the grudge of Limerick people towards the English. It is clearly said that the situation is less grave in Dublin, where the relations between the two nations were not taken as intensely. Dublin is a city. The population is bigger hence the people are more anonymous. They care less about neighbours and their matters. Also, Dubliners come originally from various places, the city is more cosmopolitan and less xenophobic. The stereotypes and prejudices people used to believe in lose their significance.

The most unyielding example of Irish hatred towards Protestants is pronounced once again by Grandmother. She, Angela and their friend Bridey talk about a baptism of Angela's newborn baby:

Grandma is there to help and she says, That's right, no hope in heaven for the infant that's not baptized.

Bridey says it would be a hard God that would do the likes of that.

He has to be hard, says Grandma, other wise you'd have all kinds of babies clamorin' to get into heaven, Protestants an' everything, an' why should they get in after what they did to us for eight hundred years?

The babies didn't do it, says Bridey, They're too small.

They would if they got the chance, says Grandma. They're trained for it.

(Angela's Ashes, 182)

Grandma's obstinate animus against the Protestants goes beyond rational thinking. She accuses Protestant infants of tormenting the Irish Catholics even though it makes no sense.

McCarthy summarizes the prejudices of Limerick people that are kept towards the family members because of their origin. They look down on Frank and Malachy because of the Limerick people's assumptions about America. Their father is generally not accepted because of the mutual history full of conflicts between the North and the South of Ireland:

The kids are considered dirty Yanks by the natives, and not only is Dad shunned by Angela's relatives because he's a Protestant, but he's all but disqualified for work the moment he opens his mouth and reveals his northern accent. (McCarthy, 107)

The hateful feelings towards different nationalities grow to immense degrees and lead to disgraceful behaviour towards the immigrants. Frank and his younger brother Malachy are not only looked down on for their origin but also they are being ridiculed by the school authorities. Mr. Benson is a teacher at Leamy's National School. His attitude is extraordinary. His animosity for America clashes with his attachment to the boys. When he tells them off for misbehaving he intentionally emphasizes their American origin and connects it to their troubles:

You're a bad Yank. Say after me, I'm a bad boy.

I'm a bad boy.

Now say I'm a bad Yank.

I'm a bad Yank.

Malachy says. He's not a bad boy. It's that big boy.

Is that what true, Heffernan?

I was only jokin', sir.

No more joking, Heffernan. It's not their fault that they're Yanks. *(Angela's Ashes, 84)*

The whole incident resulted from one of Frank's class-mate's stereotypical assumption of Americans presented in cinematography. Brian O'Callaghan describes the greatness of American movies since 1920's and its expansion to the whole world: "In the 1920s American movies filled the cinema screens of the world. Most were made in Hollywood, a suburb of the city of Los Angeles in California." (O'Callaghan, 94) It is understandable that people outside of America easily made stereotypical assumptions about Americans based on films they saw in cinemas. The Hollywood movie makers were not introducing American culture to the rest of the world. They were trying to make money by showing people only the types of genres they knew people would like:

Hollywood movies were made by large companies called studios. The men who ran these studios were businessmen and their main aim was to make as much money as possible. They soon found that one way to do this was to standardize their films. When audiences had shown that they liked a certain kind of film, the studios made many more of exactly the same kind. (O'Callaghan, 94)

Producing such films is not creating art, but manufacturing goods in large measure. Hollywood films do not document reality. They follow the demand of the mainstream. Such a film shows only a few types of standardized characters. Therefore it was easy for the people of Limerick to make a distorted picture of American people and their culture. The fight between Frank and his classmate Heffernan starts over questions about the boys' place of birth. When Heffernan learns they come from America, his misinterpreted image of America influenced by the films in Lyric cinema comes to light: "Are ye Yanks or what? And when we tell them we came from America they want to know, 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." (*Angela's Ashes*, 83)

Frank's reaction is hesitant. He does not understand Limerick's people's simplifications and standardizations. His tentative attitude results in a fight. Malachy has no problem with answering ludicrous questions and finds a way to get along with his peers. While Malachy finds amusement in communicating with ill-educated people Frank is bothered by such questions and feels the need to correct people. Frank has problems to overcome people's ignorance. His will to leave Ireland for America is bigger than Malachy's.

Hollywood films were shot to earn money. Another sure way for a studio to

make money was to turn its actors into film stars. Film stars were actors who were so popular that people went in crowds to see any film they appeared in. A famous film star could make any movie a certain success. So the studios went to great lengths to make their actors into great celebrities. Irish people, associating the boys' American accent with movies, the only form of American culture they knew, were immediately linking the little boys to American film stars: "The men say, Jasus, will ye listen to them. They sound like bloody fillum stars. Did yez fall outa the sky or what?" (*Angela's Ashes*, 52) It is only logical that Irish people connected Frank and Malachy with film stars. Ireland was not a touristic attraction; people there were rather isolated and did not have a direct experience with Americans. The Irish were familiar with American accent but only from television or cinema. Therefore their images of American people come from a portrayal released by the media.

The hostility impacts on Angela as well. Although being born and raised in Limerick, has a local accent and is a proper Catholic, people find a reason to be bitter towards her. Prestwick detects indignation of Limerick people towards Angela as well: "Mam encounters resentment when she applies for charity because she has an American coat and children with American accents. Thinking life is surely better in America, the Irish resent her." (Prestwick, T-8) Frank explains in his memoir how other poor women standing in a queue to beg for second-hand clothes or furniture felt seeing Angela among them:

They say, Lord above, would you listen to the little Yankees, and they wonder why Mam in her American coat would be looking for charity since there's hardly enough for the poor people of Limerick without Yanks coming over and taking the bread out of their mouths. (*Angela's Ashes*, 63)

Irish people do not believe Angela that she is destitute. They envy her that she had a chance to make a better life in America and consider her opportunities unfair to others. They think that because the family is not utterly of Irish origin they should not be able to beg in an Irish Catholic Church charitable society.

The father, Malachy McCourt, finds himself in similarly jaundiced situations. Angela's family does not approve of him, he cannot find a decent job and anything that Malachy fails to do is ascribed to his northern origin. Harrington says: "Although he is Catholic, he is from the North. Potential employers take note of his unfamiliar accent,

‘sallow skin, and odd manner’. To them he has the ‘look of the Presbyterian’.”(Pg. 294)
(Harrington, 58)

In spite of experiencing various difficulties because of people’s prejudices the McCourt family has prejudices towards other people too. Being harshly judged by their surroundings does not stop them from denouncing other people because of their looks or origin. Susan Tetlow Harrington recounts Angela’s behaviour towards her relative: “Just as her relatives will not talk to Angela’s husband because he is from the North, so members of her group including Angela herself, also refuse to talk to Angela’s sister-in-law because she has the look of a Spaniard.” (Harrington, 59) All these acts of hypocrisy start confusing Frank. He considers the behaviour of adults as absurd and promises himself not to comport this way when he grows up:

Grandma won’t talk to Mam anymore because of what I did with God in her backyard. Mam doesn’t talk to her sister, Aunt Aggie, or her brother Uncle Tom. Dad doesn’t talk to anyone in Mam’s family and they don’t talk to him because he’s from the North and he has the odd manner. No one talks to Uncle Tom’s wife, Jane, because she’s from Galway and she has the look of a Spaniard. Everyone talks to Mam’s brother Uncle Pat, because he was dropped on his head, he’s simple, and he sells newspapers. Everyone calls him The Abbot or Ab Sheehan and no one knows why. Everyone talks to Uncle Pa Keating because he was gassed in the war and married Aunt Aggie and if they didn’t talk to him he wouldn’t give a fiddler’s fart anyway and that’s why the men in South’s pub call him a gas man. That’s the way I’d like to be in the world, a gas man, not giving a fiddler’s fart. (*Angela’s Ashes*, 146)

Frank is tired of living according to somebody else’s rules. He wants to talk to people of his own choice. He does not care about other people’s opinions. He was brought up in America, in a liberal way, where none of these social behaviour rules applied. Comparing now the Irish and American behaviour to one another, Frank concludes that the Irish does not agree with him

Angela’s behaviour to her sister-in-law, who lives in Galway, is startling. She, above all people, should know how difficult it is for a misfitting person to live in a small Irish town. Although Angela lived for a part of her life in a metropolitan city abroad in prejudice-free America she behaves towards her brother’s Spanish looking wife in the same way as her narrow-minded relatives to her husband. She was born in Limerick and still cares about her relatives’ reaction and neighbours’ opinions. Frank on the other hand, born in New York, wants to live in a place where nobody cares about

what other people say or do.

Owing to the process of assimilation, immigrants over the world are confused with their identity. Especially if their change of residence happened in an early age, when they were only absorbing the culture of their origin, learning about a new one is complicating the conception of themselves in their new environment.

The subject of Irish-American identity has been a hot issue since the large wave of immigration of 1840s and 1850s. The issue became a topic for fiction and non-fiction. The issue of Irish-American identity concerns a lot of people of more than one generation and even more people who have not experienced migration themselves but have been influenced indirectly, i.e. they have Irish origin. The Irish Americans are consistent with passing on their identity at least in a way that the next generation is aware and proud of their origin. They identify themselves with their inherited status. O'Connell describes the question of identity issues:

The identity issue has been addressed, reformulated, debated and revised in the United States in the last half century, a period when cultural definition for Irish-Americans grew less determined by family, community, religion and politics. Historians, journalists and politicians have re-examined this issue; even more persuasively, creative writers have eloquently recounted and reimagined Irish-American experience. More than a century and a half after the Famine of 1845-49 sent so many thousands of Irish into exile, the vision of a lost homeland and a sense of Irishness persists in the minds of the descendants of these displaced Irish. (O'Connell, 252)

Fintan O'Toole agrees with O'Connell's report and adds: "[T]he Irish immigrants who left for America along with their descendants, have long faced issues of identity and modernity." (O'Toole, 2000)

O'Toole's statement should not be a surprising fact, as Irish and American cultures differ so vastly. It is difficult indeed for a newcomer to continue living an accustomed traditional life and to absorb a new culture at the same time when the two cultures contradict one another on many levels.

The editors of a journal *Catholic Insight* examine in an article on Angela's Ashes the situation of Irish immigrants and their confusion on the spiritual level. From their point of view Irish-Americans through time tend to lose the contact with their Catholicism:

Irish Catholic assimilation in the United States has lately shown a

lessening of Christian commitment within the American project, and a loosened grip upon the transcendent character of all human striving. It is a decline into spiritual confusion. (*Catholic Insight*)

Loosing touch with the Catholic religion is well documented in *Angela's Ashes*. When Angela lives in New York she does not teach her children to say prayers and go to church. Perhaps because nobody else of her friends and acquaintances has a habit of doing it and she does not want to stand out. Or perhaps she simply does not agree with the Church's ideas. For whichever way she decided not to introduce Catholic religion to her children her behaviour does not show signs of confusion. Not to introduce religion to her sons is her solid decision she makes it because unlike in Ireland she has a choice.

Frank himself shows signs of changing his view on religion right after his arrival to America. Almost immediately after his arrival to the America of his dreams, he has sexual intercourse with an American woman he recently met. This episode is almost symbolic as he rejects the Church's rules and believes. His rejection is hard proven when he ignores a priest knocking on his bedroom door. His behaviour is finally in accordance with his dream not to care about what other people think, just as his uncle Pa Keating.

6. Conclusion

Human migration is a great phenomenon in the nations' history. It is a consequence of various significant events of the past however it is also an occurrence creating its own outcome. Immigration influences the world both geographically and culturally. Newcomers undergo the complex process of assimilation as well as they bring their own culture to their new country. The collision of the two identities is then inevitable and highly interesting.

The history has shown that newcomers are not always welcomed graciously in their new country. The adaptation is a long process, during which the immigrants are put into a position of a stranger to the local customs. Their religion, race, language or accent can evoke hostile feelings in people. People based on a single experience of behaviour create stereotypes and generalize them on the whole community. The immigrants are then easily excluded from society. People keep distance from them and

the immigrants are looked down on.

Angela's Ashes offers various cases of exclusion of immigrants from the society. Two different environments of assimilation, America and Ireland, show two different approaches of embracement of distinct cultures and invite for comparison the hospitalities of each country.

When Frank is born in 1930s in America, he finds himself in a multicultural country. People surrounding him come from various parts of world and he is presented to different cultures. He is brought up to have an open mind and to understand diversity. The more difficult it is for him when his family brings him to a small and strictly religious town in Ireland. His peers are highly judgemental and narrow-minded. Limerick people keep distance from the Irish-American family finding different reasons not to accept them as equals.

As a consequence of inhospitable surroundings immigrants struggle to find jobs and support their family, they live in poor conditions and thus find themselves in a Catch-22 situation, not being able to get rid of a label of an impoverished immigrant.

In spite of the family's origin and their differences from the Americans, Frank's father managed to find a job in America. If it was not for his drinking he would have been able to support his family. After all it was their own Irish fellow-citizens, their own blood who sent the family back home to poor Limerick, a town where intolerant Irish people would not hire Malachy McCourt when they learnt by his accent he was not local. Hence the McCourt family is forced to live on low unemployment benefits and beg for worn-out clothes and used furniture.

Further on the significance of carrying one's identity is discussed. The immigrants waver during their assimilation between resisting the process of normalizing and giving up to the adaptation to the new culture. The importance of carrying traditions and passing the identity to a following generation has also appeared in McCourt's memoir. Frank's father vividly narrates stories about Irish heroes and impresses the children with rich history of their ancestors, so that they would not forget where their forefathers came from.

Another issue that is connected to the life of immigrants is their return home. Immigrants are tempted to come back to their motherland. They do not forget where they come from and they would like their children to get to know their ancestry.

However there are obstacles, which should not be overlooked. Not always immigrants come home kindly welcomed. Similarly as McCourt shows in his memoir; neither Angela nor her husband, Malachy, are welcomed by even their family with open arms or kind words. They are simply calmly advised that they would have been better off in America.

Immigration in *Angela's Ashes* presented from many angles. The reader can see moving to another country from the eyes of people brought up in three different regions. At the same time there is a point of view from the eyes of curious and perceptive children as well as from the caring mother and proud father. And finally, the stories of immigration are narrated in two ways. Some are lit up with a handful of humour which makes the memoir easier to read and some on the contrary are left with all the grief, so that the reader feels the heaviness of problems the family had to deal with.

Angela's Ashes falls into the category of Irish-American literature. For one reason, the author indirectly describes his Irish-American identity in his memoir and for the second reason, *Angela's Ashes* carries enough of both Irish and American cultures. For the Irish part, Frank McCourt has a very special way with words. Not only he uses the dialect, jargon and he phonetically transmits the accent into his words so that the reader can almost hear the Irish lilt coming out of the memoir. He brilliantly brings the proverbial Irish storytelling gift into his narration so it penetrates the whole memoir.

The American share is more of a cultural value than linguistic and it is very unique. There has been a similar pattern among Irish-American literature. They all have in common a few aspects: depicting a difficult childhood and journey full of obstacles to make a good living. *Angela's Ashes* is exceptional in a way American cultural is being looked upon. The family in Frank's memoir do not travel to America but from America, an inverse direction of immigration. On that account the American identity and the Irish identity are being observed from a different point of view than commonly. The Americans do not create surroundings for newcomers yet their adjustment is studied by the local Irish people.

Resumé:

Lidská migrace utváří historii lidstva. Je to důsledek významných událostí v minulosti a zároveň jev silně ovlivňující budoucnost světové populace z hlediska zeměpisného i kulturního. Ať už donuceni žalostnými životními podmínkami, za prací, či se jedná o změnu životního stylu, čím dál více lidí cestuje do zahraničí budovat nový život. Nově příchozí přistěhovalci procházejí složitým procesem asimilace. Do nové země s sebou přinášejí svou identitu, stejně tak jako nová kultura formuje jejich hodnoty, normy a životní styl. Zkušenosti přistěhovalců jsou individuální díky rozdílnosti zemí, ze kterých pocházejí, rozmanitosti kultur a především díky rozdílné osobitosti každého jedince.

Tato práce pojednává o Irsko-Americké identitě. Autorka zkoumá její formaci teoreticky, studováním kultury států Irska a Spojených států amerických i prakticky, vyhledáváním konkrétních případů vyskytujících se v beletrii. Zvláštní pozornost práce klade na historii obou států z hlediska přistěhovalectví a na způsob, jakým je imigrantská zkušenost zobrazena v umělecké próze.

Za cíl si autorka diplomové práce určuje nalézt kořeny irské a americké identity a charakterizovat nejvýraznější prvky obou mentalit. Zvláštní péči dostávají témata o přístupech a chování příslušníků obou národů k ostatním státním příslušnostem, jejich otevřenost a snášenlivost vůči imigrantům či naopak jejich předpojatost a úzkoprsost.

Zvolenými přístupy jsou převážně studie vztahů mezi Irskou republikou a Spojenými státy americkými doplněná o zkoumání vztahů s dalšími státy jako například Velkou Británií a Severním Irskem. Autorka se následně pokouší nalézt příklady zkoumané teorii v beletrii, konkrétně v literárním díle Franka McCourta, *Andělin popel*.

Autor tohoto románu je sám irsko-amerického původu, vychován v malém irském městě a americkém velkoměstě. Jeho autobiografické dílo se odehrává na území obou dvou států a snoubí v sobě tak prvky dvou naprosto odlišných kultur. Román *Andělin popel* nabízí zákulisní pohled na dvě kontrastní mentality, jejichž následné porovnávání je nevyhnutelné.

Diplomová práce zohledňuje i možný subjektivní přístup autora, zabírá se jeho pohledem na skutečnost a zahrnuje tedy polemiku o McCortovu možném odklonu od reality a žánrovém zařazení díla. Zamýšlený závěr práce tvoří konečné souhrnné srovnání obou mentalit: irské a americké a jeho dokumentaci v samotném díle.

Náměty, kterými se zabývá první teoretická část úzce souvisí s problematikou identity a přistěhovalectví. Jednotlivé kapitoly teoretické části se dotýkají témat migrace, konkrétně osudů příslušníků irské diaspory v Americe, jejich osidlování, společenské pozice, diskriminace a rasismu. Poté následuje studie složitého procesu asimilace, otázky etnicity, zachovávání tradic a zvyklostí, věrnosti své národní identitě.

Druhá část práce aplikuje teoretické myšlenky na umělecké literární dílo. Názory na irskou a americkou identitu nacházejí své konkrétní případy v díle Franka McCourta, jeho vzpomínkách na dětství. Díky přechodnému pobytu hlavního hrdiny v obou dvou státech byl Frank McCourt vystaven chování jak jedné, tak i druhé národnosti. Důsledkem působení obou dvou kultur je proto jedna smíšená identita a tou je identita irsko-americká.

Historie nasvědčuje, že nově příchozí přistěhovalci nejsou vždy vítáni místní populací nejlépe. Adaptace je velice dlouhý a náročný proces, během něhož jsou imigranti postaveni do nesnadné pozice cizince, jemuž jsou tradice a zvyklosti původních obyvatel nevlastní. Jejich náboženství, rasa a jazyk či exotický přízvuk v lidech vyvolává nepřátelské pocity. Lidé si o přistěhovalcích vytvářejí zjednodušené, často negativní představy vycházející z jediné zkušenosti. Tyto představy pak zobecňují na celou komunitu. Obyvatelé určité oblasti si drží od imigrantů určitý odstup a ti jsou posléze z tohoto důvodu přirozeně vyloučeni ze společnosti.

Román *Andělin popel* nabízí různé příklady předpojatého chování vůči imigrantům. Dvě rozdílná prostředí pro asimilaci, Spojené státy americké a Irsko, vykazují odlišné přístupy přijetí jiné kultury a vyzývá tak ke srovnání pohostinnosti každé země.

Když se Frank narodil ve třicátých letech dvacátého století v Americe, byl obklopen multikulturním prostředím. Lidé, se kterými se denně stýkal, pocházeli z různých koutů světa, a tak byl Frank od malého věku vystaven rozmanitým kulturám. Je vychován být přístupný a otevřený k odlišným zvykům, tradicím a názorům. O to těžší je pro Franka, když je jeho rodina donucena přestěhovat se a žít v malém irském městě Limerick, odkud pochází Anděla, Frankova matka.

Limerick je velice nábožné město, ve kterém jsou Frankovi vrstevníci, ale i rodina vychování k předpojatosti a úzkoprsosti a jakýkoli náznak individuality je rázně potlačen. Takový přístup je Frankovi cizí. Obyvatelé Limericku neuznávají

McCourtovu rodinu přicházející z Ameriky jako sobě rovnou a drží si dostatečný odstup.

V důsledku nepřátelského přístupu k nově příchozím se přistěhovalci potýkají s problémy s nalezením práce a uživením rodiny. Žijí v nuzných životních podmínkách a nacházejí se v bezvýchodných situacích. Bez správných šatů a životosprávy se jim nenaskytne správného vzdělání a následně důstojné práce, která by jim zajistila potřebné peníze na obživu.

V románu *Andělin popel* má čtenář šanci porovnat situaci imigranta shánějícího práci jak ve Spojených státech amerických, tak v Irské republice. Navzdory irskému původu obou Frankových rodičů a kulturní odlišnosti od Američanů, se Frankově otci podaří ve Spojených státech nalézt práci. Kdyby nebylo jeho problémů s alkoholismem, byl by Malachy McCourt pravděpodobně schopný zabezpečit svou početnou rodinu.

Na druhé straně, nalézt práci ve své rodné zemi se mu nedaří. Přestože Malachy pravidelně vstává brzy ráno a obléká se do slušných šatů, v irském městě Limerick nemá úspěch. V nesnášenlivém a netolerantním maloměstě pro svůj cizinecký přízvuk Frankův otec není schopen nalézt zaměstnání.

Práce dál pojednává o důležitosti udržování národní identity. Imigranti kolísají během procesu asimilace mezi vzdorováním normalizaci a poddáváním se adaptaci nové kultuře. McCourtův memoár *Andělin popel* taktéž zmiňuje významnost udržování tradic a předávání národní identity další generaci. Frankův otec rád a často vypráví příběhy svých předků a opěvovaných irských hrdinů z dávných dob, aby jeho děti nezapomněly odkud pocházejí. Jejich matka Anděla zpívá dětem irské lidové písně, avšak ani jeden z rodičů neučí děti katolickému náboženství, které k Irské republice zvláště v tehdejší době neodmyslitelně patří. Proto jsou Frank i jeho bratr rozpačití, když mají čelit jako nově příchozí imigranti v Irsku národním tradicím. V hlavním městě Dublinu poznají sochu národního hrdiny Cuchulaina, ale když potkají tvář v tvář kněze, neví, kdo to je, a jak se k němu chovat.

Další problematika, která se týká života imigrantů je téma návratu domů. Přistěhovalci jsou často v pokušení vrátit se do své rodné země. Nezapomínají odkud přišli a chtěli by, aby i jejich potomci poznali svůj původ. Nicméně s podnikáním cesty domů jsou spojeny potíže. Ne vždy jsou imigranti vracející se domů přivítání přívětivě. Podobně jako ve Frankově memoáru, ani Anděla ani její manžel Malachy neobdrží při

svém návratu vřelé přivítání. Jsou jednoduše pokárání a informování, že by jim bylo lépe tam, odkud přišli. Na druhé straně svůj návrat do rodné Ameriky Frank vykresluje jako šťastný konec. Frank je vysvobozen ze spárů svazujícího náboženství a mentality ubíjející jeho smysl pro individualitu a svobodomyšlnost.

Na emigraci je v memoáru *Andělin popel* nahlíženo z mnoha úhlů. Čtenář vidí život přistěhovalce očima lidí vycovaných ve třech rozdílných prostředích. Frank je narozen v Americkém velkoměstě, jeho matka Anděla v malém katolickém městečku v Irské republice a Frankův otec pochází z protestantského severu Irska. Stejně tak je možno porovnat migraci z úhlu pohledu člověka v různém věku. Sám autor se v průběhu memoáru mění. Na pozici vypravěče se vystřídají postavy v různém věku. Frankův příběh čtenáři uslyší z pohledu malého dítěte, dospívajícího mladíka a jeho dospělých rodičů. Nakonec se čtenář může dívat na události se vši vážností, smutkem a lítostí, či s určitou dávkou komičnosti, kterou román oplývá, díky Frankově smyslu pro humor.

Román *Andělin popel* je klasifikována jako irsko-americká literatura. Jedním z důvodů je již zmíněný autorův původ. Tím druhým je duální kultura, kterou v sobě autobiografický román nese. Irská identita se v knize projevuje Frankovou jazykovou dovedností. Nejen že McCourt obohacuje jazyk irským dialektem, žargonem a foneticky do knihy vnáší irský akcent tak, že čtenář téměř slyší charakteristický irský rytmus vycházející z řeči postav. Frank McCourt vnáší do knihy pověstné irské vyprávění příběhů, popěvky a básně, které prostupují celou knihou.

Americký podíl identity v McCourtově memoáru je více kulturní než jazykovědný. Irsko-americká literatura sdílí určité společné prvky, které se často opakují: líčení nesnadného dětství a cestu plnou strastí za lepším životem. Memoár *Andělin popel* je unikátní ve svém podání americké kultury. Místo toho, aby čtenář vypožoroval typické rysy americké identity v domácím prostředí, je jejich mentalita sledována v prostředí cizím. Americký imigrant je umístěn do kontrastního irského prostředí, kde tak nejvíce vyniknou odlišné charakterní stránky.

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Appendix:



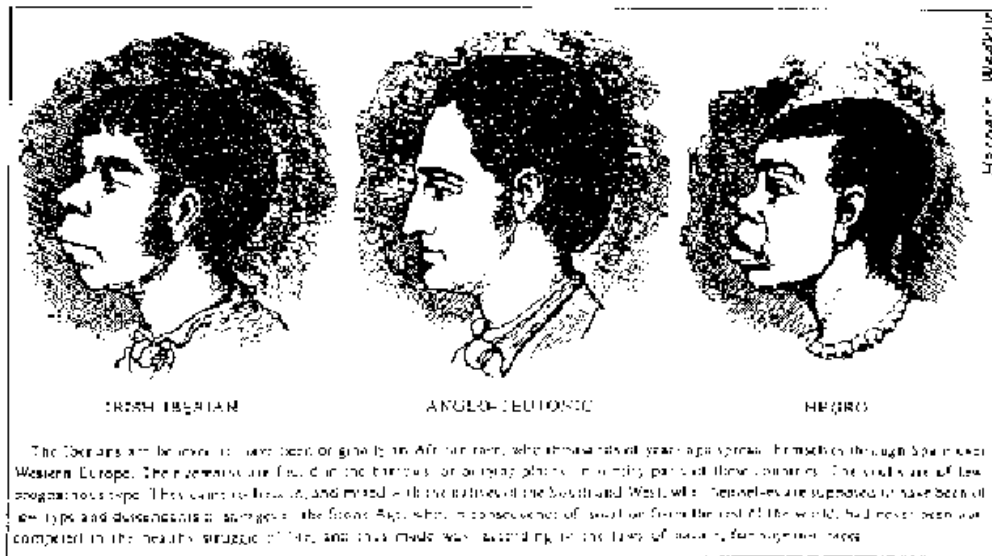
Appendix 1 - Irish immigrants flowing to America through the years.



Appendix 2 - Population of Ireland through the years.



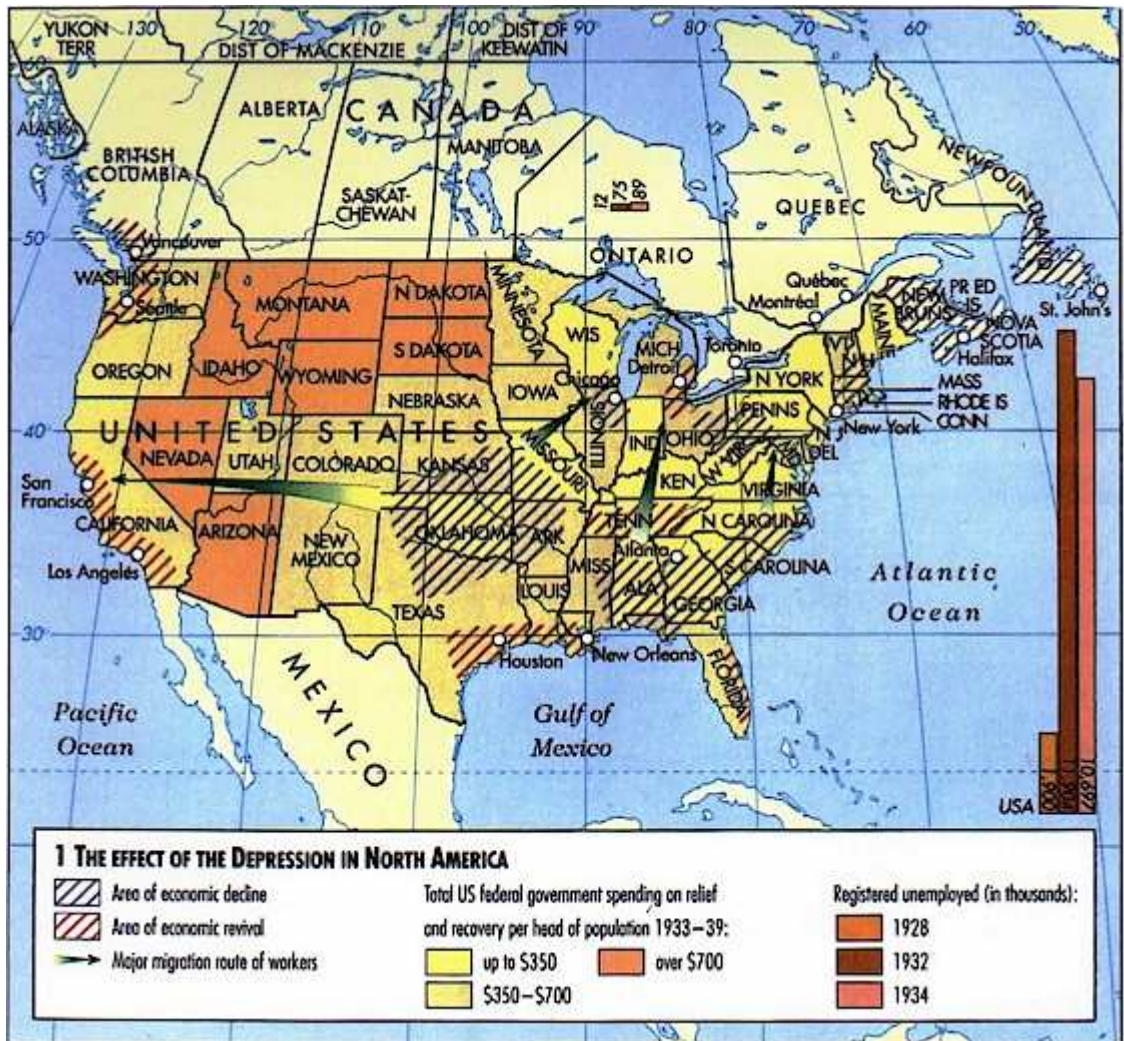
Appendix 3 – Job discrimination of Irish people in America.



Appendix 4 – Exaggerating of somatic differences. Irish people (on the left) portrayed with ape-like facial features.



Appendix 5 – Ridiculing people of Irish origin, depicting them as animals.



Appendix 6 -The effect of the Depression in North America.