Comedian Autobiographies
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An Examination of the Publishing Phenomenon

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Abstract

Simon Amstell, Kevin Bridges, Billy Connolly, Adam Hills, Michael McIntyre, and Sarah Millican are not only well-known stand-up comedians in the United Kingdom, but they have also all written autobiographies, with the majority becoming bestsellers. Comedian autobiographies are a contemporary publishing phenomenon that has become increasingly popular in the past 20 years, but they are without any academic study so far. This PhD thesis investigates comedian autobiographies and defines their unique characteristics. In approaching this under-researched topic this thesis draws on sources from a variety of academic fields, such as studies on genre, disability, and memory, and includes analyses of recorded stand-up performances by the comedians. It is argued that the key characteristics of a comedian's persona and comedic voice established in their stand-up and television work must be transferred into their autobiographies to maintain authenticity. The stand-up comedian brings humour into a text to match the voice of their public comedy persona, which creates its own distinctive and meta-autobiographical sub-genre. The thesis goes on to position this new, popular sub-genre alongside autobiographical writing and within creative non-fiction, if we understand autobiographical writing as "a historically situated practice of self-representation" (Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, 2001, p. 14), which is "inspired by a creative, and therefore fictional, impulse to select only those events and experiences in the writer's life that go to build up an integrated pattern" (Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 1957, p. 305). More recently, creative non-fiction has been defined more simply as "the practice of writing nonfiction in a dramatic and imaginative way" (Gutkind and Fletcher, *Keep It Real*, 2009, p. 13). The comedian autobiographies studied show, primarily through the use of humour, considerable heterogeneity and subversion of 'an integrated pattern'. These range from the visual aspects of the books to the self-reflexive content and structure. Thereby, some comedian autobiographies are interspersed with transcripts from the comedians' stand-up

comedy performances and others resemble self-help books discussing the benefits of humour as/ and therapy.

Key words: stand-up comedy, autobiography, creative non-fiction, persona, humour, voice

0. Autoethnographic Preface

In the summer of 2018, as soon as I had a basic idea of what my doctoral research project would be about, I started to look for primary materials – autobiographies written by British stand-up comedians. Now it could be said that I am a little old-fashioned, because instead of searching for them online, I went to my local bookshop to purchase the autobiographies. This would have several advantages in my opinion: I wanted physical copies of the books so I could write notes onto the pages and I wanted them immediately, without having to wait for them to be delivered. In physical copies the photo sections would also be displayed in a better quality than in digital versions (that is e-books) and, perhaps, I thought, seeing lots of autobiographies next to each other, would inspire me to pick up more than I had planned on buying, or purchasing an autobiography by a different stand-up comedian that I had not previously considered.

To my surprise, getting the books from a bookshop was much more of a challenge than I expected. Knowing that the books were autobiographies, I tried to find them in that section, however, such a section did not exist in the bookshop I went to. None of the books were under the category 'Humour' either; and I was very close to asking one of the staff members of the bookshop where I could find the works – after all, I was certain that they would have the autobiographies – when I tried one more category that I had spotted from the corner of my eye. And finally, there they were, placed in the shelves titled 'Biographies'.

At first, I was happy and relieved that I had finally found the books I was looking for, before confusion and annoyance became my primary emotion. On reflection, this disappointment may very well have come from the fact that I am a student of English Literature, an avid reader, and someone that likes to have things in an order (as in 'a place for everything and everything in its place'), so that simply my 'scholarly self' was initially annoyed. But still, who would sort books that were so clearly autobiographies, into the category called 'Biography' when there is a clear difference between them?

While I understand that many autobiographies of celebrities are probably ghost-written and could in theory therefore perhaps count as biographies, this was, to me, unlikely with the comedians' works, mainly because their authentic public persona would be difficult to be matched from an 'outsider'. Secondly, I believed that if the comedians are writing their own material for on-stage comedy performances, then surely, they are good writers and could write a book about their own memories just as well. Realising that my bookshop of choice and one of the biggest ones in the entire country did not even have a separate section for autobiographies was more disappointing to me than I would have thought. I expected at least a shelf titled 'life-writing' or the American (and broader term) 'creative non-fiction', which would contain autobiographies, biographies, and other works of creative non-fiction. Incidentally, I am not alone with this confusion. In *Boom!: Manufacturing Memoir for the popular Market* (2013), Julie Rak writes about different bookshops having different shelving systems, often depending on the local community or how the bookshop wants to market itself (see *Boom!* Chapter 2). I have since learned that in the United Kingdom, biography is usually understood to include autobiography, and that it appears to be the standard practice in the bookselling trade. Nonetheless, this experience opened my eyes to a bigger debate; it raised a question that I will try to answer extensively in this thesis: how does the humour used in comedian autobiographies skew literary genre?

The first autobiographies by stand-up comedians that I bought some time before I even knew I was going to write a PhD thesis about them later were *help* (2017) by Simon Amstell and *Best Foot Forward* (2018) by Adam Hills. After reading both books for pleasure, I realised that autobiographies by professional comedians and the characteristics of these works may be something I could study. I had noticed some parallels shared by Amstell's and Hills' publications and so I wrote a research proposal for this project. Once my place of study was confirmed, I started to purchase more autobiographies written by stand-up comedians.

For the purpose of this thesis, all the books that I deal with here were read with an intentionally academic and analytical mind-set rather than a subjective 'fan/ admirer' one. This means that I studied the texts rigorously, backing up my findings with theoretical perspectives and factual evidence. In other words, my intention was to perform a consistent, critical reading that put personal taste aside unless it added to the analysis (this procedure of autoethnography is made clearer in the "Approach to Research" Chapter 1.3). Generally speaking, autoethnography is an effective way of combining research with autobiographical experiences (see Sparkes 2018).

It should at this point be mentioned that I was in a unique position upon starting my PhD research. As a German native who was born and raised in Bavaria, in the South of Germany, I was analysing English-language comedy. It is usually said in the United Kingdom that Germans do not have a sense of humour and although I would like to say that this is false, perhaps me being a non-native speaker of English actually helped me. I looked at the texts in great detail to understand them completely and I could read the texts without being too distracted by laughing at the humorous elements featured in them. Occasionally I would have to look up words in a dictionary or read up on people or events that the comedians mentioned but which were so British or from a different decade that I had no chance of knowing what they were talking about. However, I have also spent enough time living and working in the United Kingdom and have a good international and common knowledge, for the language and cultural barrier to not be an impactful disadvantage. In fact, I would even say that working in my second language makes me more observant of the exact words that are being used in texts.

Moreover, I prefer English-language stand-up comedy to German-language stand-up comedy (although I like Bavarian music-cabaret even more). I wrote my Bachelor dissertation on 'The English Language in Bavarian Cabaret', in which I examined and questioned the use and linguistic specificities of Bavarian-English words as occurring in Bavarian music-cabaret by means of thorough analyses and interviews with a number of Bavarian music-cabaret

artists. In terms of my academic lineage that has led me to doing a PhD, more recently I did my Master of Arts degree in Writing, Editing, and Mediating at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, The Netherlands. My final dissertation for that degree was an analysis of William Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes*, a creative non-fiction tourist guide to the Lake District by the eco-conscious poet Wordsworth, first published in 1810. Thus, my academic past shows that I have some experience in analysing texts (whether they are humorous or not). As will become clear in this PhD thesis, humour is always present to some extent in the texts featured in my study and the comedy aspect is a significant element of my investigation. However, the main focus of my PhD topic lies in the literary aspects of the comedian autobiographies and the key characteristics of this publishing phenomenon.

Further regarding my motivation for choosing the topic of my PhD project that it is, it must be noted that the growing amount of autobiographies written by comedians, and the fascinating topic of life-writing and creative non-fiction in general, are just some of the reasons why I wanted to study the relationship between text and performance in autobiographical texts written by stand-up comedians. The topic of comedian autobiographies is notably under-researched, yet relevant and contemporary. Combining stand-up performances and writing, while maintaining an emphasis on the written autobiographies, was a logical step, especially because despite the differences between the two media (in delivery of content and more), there are, at the same time, many parallels between the two media. The works are furthermore connected by the common denominator of the stand-up comedian that performs and writes in a very specific comedy persona. The following introduction to the thesis explains my methodology and my contribution to knowledge in detail.

1. Investigating a Publishing Phenomenon

"Stand-up comedians have big followings for live tours, TV shows and DVDs. Now publishers hope fans will pursue them into bookstores." This statement is the standfirst of an article in the *Independent*, written by Kate Youde, and published on the 19th of June 2011. The article comments on the popularity of comedian autobiographies, stating that "industry experts say 2011 is notable for the sheer number of books and the 'high profile' names writing them" (Youde). Seven years later, in 2018, when I started to work on my PhD project, this strand of publishing had not diminished, in fact, by then comedian autobiographies had become an emerging genre of contemporary literature and autobiographical writing in English.

Having said this, comedian autobiographies are not purely a modern phenomenon. Comedian autobiographies do not come from nowhere; there is a history or rather a tradition for comedian autobiographies to be written by stand-up comedians both in the United Kingdom and the United States. Some of the earlier comedian autobiographies are *Groucho and Me* by Groucho Marx (1959), Charlie Chaplin's *My Autobiography* (1964), and Lenny Bruce's *How to talk dirty and influence people* (1965). Initially, such publications were rare – for United Kingdom-based comedians – the exception being Spike Milligan's 'War Memoirs', a series of seven volumes, which were published between 1971 and 1991 ("War Memoirs Series"). Peter Kay's memoir *The Sound of Laughter* (2006) changed that significantly, leading to Kay writing another memoir titled *Saturday Night Peter* (first published in 2009) as well as writing the fictional pseudo-autobiography *The book that's more than just a book* (2011). By 2011, Kay's *The Sound of Laughter* had sold more than 850,000 copies and was "the biggest-selling hardback autobiography since Nielsen BookScan started collecting data in 2001. Its success tempted others to follow suit: whereas no comedians made up the top 10 biographies and autobiographies in 2005, they have featured prominently [in recent] years" (Youde). Of the comedian autobiographies analysed in this

study, the majority have appeared on bestseller lists and generated huge revenues (see Chapter 6.2 on the topic of "Commercialisation").

In November 2020, I analysed the list of books on the website of Waterstones – one of Britain's biggest book retailers – that were categorised under 'Entertainment – Theatre Dance and Other Performing Arts – Other Performing Arts – Comedy'. The list included 1065 items on 45 pages. I categorised each item as follows: whether it was a book or Audio CD, whether it was by a stand-up comedian based in the United Kingdom or from elsewhere, whether it actually was written by a stand-up comedian, whether the book was an autobiography/ memoir or apparently of a different genre, whether the book was a paperback or hardcover version, and what year the version was first published. Sorted by publication date (old to new), I was able to create the following overview of autobiographies published by comedians from the United Kingdom:

Book Title	Comedian	Hardcover year of publication	Paperback year of publication
What Would Beyonce Do?!	Louisa Omielan		1998
The Sound of Laughter	Peter Kay	2006	2007
Dear Fatty	Dawn French		2008
Look Who It Is!	Alan Carr		2009
Saturday Night Peter	Peter Kay		2010
Mack the Life	Lee Mack	2012	2013
Him & Me	Jack and Michael Whitehall	2013	2014
I Laughed, I Cried	Viv Groskop		2014
How did this all happen?	John Bishop		2014
*What the **** is normal?!*	Francesca Martinez		2014
So, anyway…	John Cleese	2014	2014

Book Title	Comedian	Hardcover year of publication	Paperback year of publication
Becoming Johnny Vegas	Johnny Vegas		2014
No Further Action	Jim Davidson	2014	2015
We need to talk about… Kevin Bridges	Kevin Bridges	2014	2015
Tell us one we know	Roy Chubby Brown		2015
Hopeful	Omid Djalili	2014	2015
Spectacles	Sue Perkins	2015	2016
Thatcher Stole My Trousers	Alexei Sayle	2016	2016
A book for her	Bridget Christie		2016
Alanatomy	Alan Carr	2016	2017
Full Circle	Angie Le Mar		2017
Believe Me	Eddie Izzard	2017	2018
How to be Champion	Sarah Millican	2017	2018
It's not me it's them	Joel Dommett	2018	2018
Help	Simon Amstell	2017	2019
I'm a joke and so are you	Robin Ince	2018	2019
Straight Outta Crawley	Romesh Ranganathan	2018	2019
Born Lippy	Jo Brand	2018	2019
Perfect Sound Whatever	James Acaster	2019	2020
Who am I, again?	Lenny Henry	2019	2021

Table 1: An Overview of recent Publications of Comedian Autobiographies via Waterstones (https://www.waterstones.com/category/entertainment/theatre-dance-and-other-performing-arts/other-performing-arts/comedy)

From this table it becomes apparent that in the United Kingdom, Peter Kay started the trend of writing autobiographies as a comedian – a trend which fully picked up in the 2010s with

six paperback publications released in 2014 alone. It can also be seen that such publications are still popular, with many books likely scheduled for publication in 2021. The table also shows that generally, paperbacks are published approximately one year after the hardcover version is released, which is standard practice in the bookselling industry. A more interesting result is that Waterstones calls this list ‘Comedy Books’, but includes audio CDs, joke books, books about Oscar Wilde and by YouTube celebrities. Furthermore, this list from Waterstones is not conclusive – despite listing 1065 items in the ‘Comedy Books’ category, the autobiographies by, for example, Billy Connolly, Michael McIntyre, Alan Davies, and Jason Manford do not appear on the Waterstones website under this category, even though I purchased physical copies of those books from a Waterstones shop where they were shelved right next to comedian autobiographies that do appear in the list. Instead, Connolly’s autobiography and other comedians’ books can be found under the category of ‘Arts & Entertainment Autobiographies’ on the Waterstones website. Furthermore, Louisa Omielan’s book is dated as having been released in 1998, when actually it was released in 2016 (Omielan) – here Waterstones is listing incorrect information. The reason for this non-uniform ordering and generally confusing list on the website is unknown but it is reminiscent of my struggle to find comedian autobiographies in the shop too (as noted in the “Autoethnographic Preface”). It can be speculated that there are individuals categorising items for sale in the shops but a different team of people coding and tagging items for the website, which results in the seemingly random splitting of similar texts across different categories. A further indication for this assumption is that the website frequently lists paperback versions only, but not the original hardcover versions of the books, which are available in the bookshop. Either way, the non-uniform categorisation is a real-life indicator that trying to categorise comedian autobiographies is confusing. My PhD project defines comedian autobiographies and produces a clearer image of what comedian autobiographies are.

At this point, I would like to explain why I selected which autobiographies for analysis. Simon Amstell's *help* was the first autobiography I bought, some time before even thinking about doing a PhD. After also reading Adam Hills' autobiography *Best Foot Forward*, I noticed some parallels and common features in the texts that were unlike anything I had ever read before, particularly relating to the use of humour in texts and the prominent influence of a stand-up comedy persona in writing. As I realised that this offered material for analysis, I started to collect and read more autobiographies by stand-up comedians. The next autobiographies that I purchased were those by Kevin Bridges, Michael McIntyre, and Sarah Millican. I also read the autobiographies by Lenny Bruce, Billy Connolly, Steve Coogan (and the ones written as his persona Alan Partridge), Alan Davies, Ellen DeGeneres, Peter Kay, Jason Manford, Sue Perkins, Romesh Ranganathan, Jon Richardson, and many more. Those comedian autobiographies are engaged as reference works and for supporting background material, to strengthen the claims and observations I am making.

The previous table gave an overview of some available comedian autobiographies by British comedians. It soon became clear that I would need some parameters to limit the number of autobiographies to analyse in order to produce a work that would be concise but valuable within the scope of the overall project. I ruled out all comedians from the United States and focused on comedians primarily working in the United Kingdom, because the available quantity of suitable autobiographies by comedians would have been too large otherwise. Although some comedians from the past century have released autobiographies, the majority have been published in recent years, so currency became another criterion. While the works by Bridges, Connolly, Hills, and McIntyre are quite classically structured autobiographies[1], a bigger variety was added through the works of Amstell, whose text consists primarily of transcripts, and Millican who created something similar to a self-help

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[1] In terms of narrative structure and time covered, for example – think of a non-humorous autobiography, like Christopher Eccleston's *I love the Bones of you* – but these comedians' works contain elements of humour.

book. Further autobiographical works by other comedians may be referred to whenever they add something to my study. Although a variety of writing styles and comedians is of some importance, the selected comedians were also chosen because they appear to reflect the demographic in the stand-up comedy industry of the United Kingdom, where BAME or female comedians who have published autobiographical works are rare.

In addition to the "Focus Comedians" (1.2) that I have chosen for close analysis and which I will introduce in Chapter 1.2, I refer to other autobiographies written by stand-up comedians, too, to support my arguments or present further examples and show how other comedian autobiographies help establish the sub-genre or contrast my primary material. Most often, I refer to the works of Sue Perkins and Jason Manford, although those were just two of many comedian autobiographies that I analysed to the same extent as the "Focus Comedians". Since this is however, one PhD project, and more importantly since my thesis is laying groundwork for this emerging literary sub-genre, it also must be understood that although I did close readings and analyses of the works mentioned, this thesis is an introduction and overview to the genre. Ultimately, my work is designed to open a discussion for the future and present ideas for further research.

Hereby, an important note: throughout this thesis I will sometimes call comedian autobiographies their own 'sub-genre' and other times a 'genre'. I thereby mean that comedian autobiographies are, as I am arguing, a sub-genre of creative non-fiction and a genre alongside autobiographical writing. This is similar to autobiographical writing being a genre but simultaneously also a sub-genre to creative non-fiction.

Following "The Research Questions" (Chapter 1.1) and the short biographies of the "Focus Comedians" (Chapter 1.2), the "Approach to Research" chapter (Chapter 1.3) is an introduction to the history and challenge of genre classifications, as well as the popularity and cultural impact of comedian autobiographies. There are no existing academic publications available that deal with my specific topic, so I have had to extract critical tools from diverse

sources, with some stemming from works on humour theories, others dealing with disability studies, creative non-fiction, or studies on memory. It is for this reason also, that in place of a stand-alone literature review, relevant academic publications will be referred to in the specific chapters the literature relates to, to provide background information and ground definitions for concepts like ‘narrative structure’ or ‘personas’. Common assumptions about autobiographical writing and creative non-fiction are presented in Chapter 2. All in all, this thesis investigates the relationship between text and performance in autobiographical texts written by stand-up comedians and examines the emerging sub-genre of comedian autobiographies in the main body, defining this extraordinary sub-genre in the process.

1.1 The Research Questions

This PhD thesis examines the publishing phenomenon of comedian autobiographies. The research questions that I seek to address are:

1. What defines the genre of comedian autobiographies?
2. What is the relationship between the on-stage performances and autobiographical writing of stand-up comedians?

While these questions are clear and straightforward, responses are not to be found in any critical literature that pre-exists this work. The main part of the thesis will use the critical consensus on the behaviours and features of autobiographies as a benchmark against which to delineate the distinctive characteristics of comedian autobiographies. The approach to this investigation includes a close reading of the texts and analysis of the performances by the selected stand-up comedians and studying the material in terms of concepts like humour, voice, authenticity, narrative structure, and visual aspects.

The structure of the thesis is as follows: First, the “Focus Comedians” are introduced and portrayed briefly, followed by an explanation of the approach to research and framework for this study. The main part then begins with an analysis of the narrative and literary qualities

of the selected comedian autobiographies. Common experiences in the comedy industry are identified and compared in this first chapter of the main part. Furthermore the chapter examines the relationship between the content of the comedians' autobiographical writing and their on-stage performance recorded on their DVD productions. The following chapter deals with voice, including the comedians' use of literary devices and humour in their autobiographies. Literary narrative is then investigated in consideration of authenticity to persona, including the relationship with gender, disability, and dialect, and in combination with the proposal that comedian autobiographies feature a self-help element that has the potential to benefit comedians. Subsequently, the distinctive sub-genre of comedian autobiographies in literature written in English is defined. This section also discusses the commercialisation of the written works and intended readership of comedian autobiographies. Lastly, the conclusion presents ideas for further research and answers the question of what implications can be drawn from this PhD project.

1.2 "Focus Comedians"

The following is a brief overview of the stand-up comedians whose works this thesis will examine in detail. They are the "Focus Comedians" of my investigation into the publishing phenomenon and sub-genre of comedian autobiographies and have been selected from a range of comedians that have written an autobiography, as the previous introductory sections explained. The short biographies and additional information about the comedians, their performances, and books give a first indication of the works and personas concerned. For those not entirely familiar with the "Focus Comedians" and their works, I quote from the books directly wherever appropriate and provide background information. As a reminder, the six "Focus Comedians" are: Simon Amstell, Kevin Bridges, Billy Connolly, Adam Hills, Michael McIntyre, and Sarah Millican.

However, before I can give an overview of each comedian, one thing must be made clear. Although basic pieces of information such as date of birth are undisputable, there are, ultimately two entities sharing one name – the person, and the comedian persona. These two entities cannot always be clearly separated and for the majority of the time, they are intertwined and any attributes that are given to describe them, could be for either. This thesis argues that it is primarily the comedy persona, which is described, and who writes, although there is a blending of the two again with the autobiographical material. Being aware of this blending is important for the understanding of the arguments I will be making; a discussion of the comedians' personas can be found in Chapter 5.

Simon Amstell

Simon Amstell was born on 29 November 1979, in London, where he still lives today. He "started performing on the comedy circuit when he was just 13 [years old] and later caught the eye of television executives by becoming the youngest finalist of the BBC New Comedy Awards in 1998" ("Simon Amstell Biography"). Being a former host of the (music) quiz shows *Popworld* and *Never Mind the Buzzcocks* helped him rise to fame – many people will know Amstell for offending a celebrity guest to the point of them walking out and away from the panel show that he hosted. Aside from his stand-up performances, the comedian also had his own television sitcom called *Grandma's House*; and although it is supposed to be fictional, it is somewhat autobiographical too. Frequently Amstell repeats autobiographical material that creates humour in *Grandma's House*, his stand-up comedy performances, and his autobiography. On top of that, he has made a mockumentary titled *Carnage* (2017) and recently released the semi-autobiographical film *Benjamin* (2018). The comedian is Jewish, gay, vegan, and currently does not drink alcohol, but he takes drugs occasionally (see Amstell, *help* 10, 65, 156). Amstell's comedy style is described as "quirky dark wit, which may sometimes be controversial" ("Simon Amstell Biography") and the comedian "wrings

belly laughs from the most harrowing of anecdotes about sexuality, loneliness, relationships, family, frailty and personal discovery" (Toberman). Amstell often describes himself as shy, awkward, funny, and lonely, which clearly comes through in his stand-up comedy performances, his autobiography, and especially also in interviews, although it is, of course, difficult to confirm that these attributes are actually Amstell and not just his public comedy persona.

The usefulness of analysing Amstell's work in detail lies in the following: *help* was first published in 2017 in what could be called the outbreak of comedian autobiography publications. Knowing just how greatly Amstell's book differs from those authored by other comedians suggests that Amstell's work is possibly a trailblazer in the further evolution of contemporary comedian autobiographies or could alternatively be seen as an indication of the somewhat persistent uncertainty of what a comedian autobiography is and how this sub-genre is still finding itself. This matter of genre is discussed in Chapter 6.

As I will demonstrate in Chapter 3.4, the most significant aspect of Amstell's autobiographical work is the percentage of original text and re-printed stand-up excerpts in *help*, but also the combination of therapy and comedy. Thereby, Amstell is not the only comedian that connects therapy and comedy, and he is not the only one that includes many performance excerpts. Nonetheless, his book is much more of a hybrid text than other examples – it is a text with a high percentage of (autobiographical) performance material and a lesser addition of literary autobiography, which will become a key point of analysis and discussion.

Kevin Bridges

Kevin Bridges was born on 13 November 1986 in Glasgow and is the youngest of the "Focus Comedians" in this study. He was inspired to try stand-up comedy after having read the autobiography of the English comedian Frank Skinner and having enjoyed making others

laugh in the past, especially in school. Bridges had his first shows aged 17 at the Stand Comedy Club in Glasgow and has since regularly sold out the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre (SECC) in Glasgow for days on end, breaking box office records ("Kevin Bridges"). The contents of his jokes range from humorous incidents he witnessed or was involved in, Scotland-related jokes, or other observations and commentary on more global, political, or social events with a funny twist (see The Newsroom) that frequently make Bridges laugh on stage too – all told in the comedian's characteristic Scottish voice.

Bridges' autobiography *We need to talk about… Kevin Bridges* was first published by Michael Joseph in 2014. Penguin's paperback version from 2015 is 480 pages long (making it the longest autobiography analysed here), including five photograph sections, and it tells the story of Bridges' life from childhood to his first SECC stand-up comedy performance in Glasgow in 2010. The most significant elements from his book are the use of Scottish words, the length of his book with a large focus on his early life, as well as the non-humorous approach that Bridges uses to write his autobiography. Furthermore, Bridges' autobiography reads itself like a Bildungsroman[2], telling the story of a young Glaswegian man from a working-class family discovering his passion for comedy and then making his dream of becoming a celebrated stand-up comedian come true.

Billy Connolly

Sir William "Billy" Connolly was born in Glasgow on the 24th of November 1942. He left school to become a welder in the shipyards. After first having started out as a folk singer, he had been performing as a stand-up comedian since the early 1970s. The jokes he told between songs eventually took over his act and he became a full-time comedian. Already a big star in Scotland, he became a household name in the UK after appearing on *Parkinson* in 1971 ("Billy Connolly Biography"). He is well known for doing observational comedy, the use of

[2] Sometimes also called a 'coming of age' novel.

his Scottish dialect in his works, and his extravagant hair and clothes. In terms of comedy style, Connolly always stays true to who he is, and created a unique comedy style, even if at the very heart it "is all about observing people leading their day-to-day lives and finding what is funny in them and about them" (*Made in Scotland* 173), more so than about his own life.

In 2018, Connolly released his autobiography *Made in Scotland*. A second work, namely a publication of a selection of transcripts of his stand-up comedy performances was released in 2019 under the title *Tall Tales and Wee Stories*. Connolly is valuable for my study, because he is such an inspiring comedy legend for many comedians and he uses a lot of Scottish words in his autobiography. Many of the other "Focus Comedians" have interacted with him in a number of ways and mention him in their autobiographies. At the same time, both of Connolly's books, but especially *Made in Scotland*, feature characteristics that are common for comedian autobiographies as well as additional material that sets his work apart from other autobiographies written by stand-up comedians.

Adam Hills

Adam Hills was born in Sydney, Australia, on 10 July 1970 and currently works in Australia and the United Kingdom, which justifies him being included in this study. While he is famous in Australia particularly for hosting the music quiz show *Spicks and Specks* from 2005-2011, in the United Kingdom he is now perhaps best-known for presenting Channel 4's talk show *The Last Leg*. When he is not working on TV shows, Hills can be found touring the stages of the world as a successful stand-up comedian (see adamhills.com.au/bio/; Hills, *Best Foot Forward*; token.com.au/artist/adam-hills/).

Hills' *Best Foot Forward* was published in July 2018 by Hodder & Stoughton and is Hills' first book. It is a 368-page long autobiography in which Hills "tells the story of a life spent in comedy. From the early days of the Sydney Stand-Up scene, to hosting his own radio show in Adelaide, to touring the world and eventually landing on British TV"

(adamhills.com.au/best-foot-forward/). Although Hills already started to think about writing an autobiography in 2003 (see Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 179), in the acknowledgments he thanks his publishers for asking him to now actually write the book, and for "bearing with [him] while [he] did, saying nice things about it and moulding it into shape" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 335).

It is useful to study Hills' book, as it is full of advice that he received when starting out as a comedian, but which he now offers to new comedians/ the reader, meaning that *Best Foot Forward* is not only a book to be enjoyed by the casual reader, but it is also a work for future stand-up comedians to learn from. In addition to insights into the world of comedy, Hills gives insights into his experiences as a radio show host and television presenter (see Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 99, 229). Aside from his career, Hills writes about his family and his life with a prosthetic foot, yet all in all, "[i]n many ways, this book is merely a collection of … [comedy gig] stories. Every comedian has them, I was just sober enough to remember them, and nerdy enough to write them all down" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 32).

Michael McIntyre

Born on 21 February 1976, the London comedian Michael McIntyre was reported to be the highest grossing comedian in the world in 2012 (Sullivan). Among other achievements, he has won a BAFTA award with *Michael McIntyre's Big Show* and sold out London's O2 Arena for 28 shows in a row. McIntyre is known for having a loud and 'camp' voice, making jokes based on observations, and his great use of physicality on stage. In 2011, Penguin Books published Michael McIntyre's autobiography *Life & Laughing* (subtitle: "My Story"). The book has since become a Number One Bestseller and is also available as an enhanced e-book. The work is 367 pages long and tells McIntyre's life story from his birth to the Royal Variety Performance that helped establish him as "Britain's biggest comedy star" (McIntyre back cover). The book thereby focusses on his relationships with his family – the search for

his wife and how he tried to win her heart, his grandmother that wanted to prevent this relationship, and his parents, who divorced and then were in relationships with other people. As much as McIntyre's book is about his own life, it is, at times, also a biography of his father Ray Cameron, who was a comedian himself but died very early, which is one of the reasons why the book is interesting to analyse. Other reasons for an analysis of his work include McIntyre's novelistic approach to writing, which is similar to Bridges', as well as McIntyre's extensive use of intermediality.

Sarah Millican

Sarah Millican was born in South Shields in North East England on 29 May 1975. Aside from her stand-up tours, she has created a television show, a podcast, and a women's magazine. Most of the comedian's material for her performances and her autobiography comes from her relationships with her ex-husband and current husband. When she was 29 years old, she divorced but has remarried since. She delivers her stand-up in a very high-pitched voice with a Geordie accent, which is spoken in the Tyneside and Newcastle area of North East England, and often creates comedy based on sharing very intimate/ 'too much' information or commenting on her own body figure/ shape. In this enquiry, Millican's voice, her individual way of writing an autobiography in the form of a self-help book, her way of creating humour and female gender in comedy will be examined.

Millican's No. 1 *Sunday Times* Bestseller *How to be Champion* was published by Trapeze in 2017. Although the subtitle of the book is "My Autobiography", *How to be Champion* is actually more of a self-help book based on autobiographical experiences, which is exactly what it was intended to be by the author (Millican, *How to be Champion* 1). In a review of the book, Steve Bennett puts it aptly: "[Millican's] personal chatty approach means the book sometimes feels a bit like a blog in hardback, partly memoir, part life tips gleaned from her experience – and even occasionally a scrapbook of things" (Bennett, "How to be

Champion"). Thereby, the book appears to be deliberately crafted in this manner, possibly exploiting scraps that did not quite make it into a stand-up comedy performance, and/ or trying to use the popular 'self-help book genre' for commercial gain. It is for this reason in particular, that Millican's work is analysed here, as her autobiographical self-help book serves as a 'limit text' to identify a definition of the sub-genre of comedian autobiographies.

1.3 Approach to Research

In this chapter, I will set out the framework for this investigation and begin to define genre as it is deployed in this work. I will then explain how I analysed the selected comedian autobiographies. The understanding of genre is referred to throughout all chapters and is the focus of Chapter 6 when I address the research question of what defines the sub-genre of comedian autobiographies.

First of all, genre is a complex concept: John Frow calls it a "set of conventional and highly organised constraints on the production and interpretation of meaning. . . . [which] is why genre matters: it is central to human meaning-making" (10) and which would explain my reaction to being unable to locate my texts in Waterstones (see "Autoethnographic Preface"). Others see "genre classifications [as] a matter of defining the possible *uses* that texts may have" (Frow 26, emphasis original) or think that "a text would not *belong* to any genre. Every text *participates* in one or several genres" (Derrida 230, emphasis original). Since the texts of the comedian autobiographies combine autobiographical writing and humour, there is already a blending of genres occurring (see Chapter 6). However, as I am arguing for a sub-genre of comedian autobiographies under the genre of creative non-fiction and related to autobiographical writing, it is necessary to have some definition of genre, rather than working under the concept of there being no genre at all.

Gale MacLachlan and Ian Reid argue that "genre, in a broad or narrow sense, is an effect of framing'" (91), which means that readers are influenced by a number of factors and

will generate expectations and interpretations accordingly. Such influential factors can include the genre under which the text is advertised, a book cover, the authenticity and authority or believability of the writer, or even reviews and opinions of others. All these factors and the way they appear in comedian autobiographies will be studied closely. In *Autobiography*, Linda Anderson defines genre as

> a specific type of artistic or cultural composition, identified by codes which the audience recognize. Examples of typical genre categories are science fiction, detective fiction, the musical, the western, soap operas and so on. There are also broader categories such as romance, pastoral, film noir, comedy and so on, and even broader: the novel, poetry, drama, film and so on. It is now increasingly common for texts to blur genre divisions. (142)

Such codes may be elements of a text that have specific characteristics for that particular genre and in this thesis I will identify the most notable common characteristics featured in comedian autobiographies, which shape this specific sub-genre.

Another way of analysing texts is Frow's method of breaking up texts into "the *semiotic medium* in which a text is inscribed and presented", "the *'radical of presentation'* through which the text is presented to its receiver (first- or third-person narration, dramatic narration, non-narrative address, song, and so on)", and "*mode* in the adjectival sense as a thematic and tonal qualification or 'colouring' of genre" (all Frow 73, emphasis original) Additionally Frow sees "*genre* or kind, [as] a more specific organisation of texts with thematic, rhetorical and formal dimensions", and "*sub-genre*, [as] the further specification of genre by a particular thematic content" (Frow 73, emphasis original). However, I will not use Frow's concepts of analysing texts directly by the names he gave them, because I have different goals for my study than Frow and to accommodate that, I will look at these concepts and the characteristics of comedian autobiographies by using terms like voice, narrative or visual aspects and commercialisation, for example. Generally,

> [g]enres emerge and survive because they meet a demand, because they can be materially supported, because there are readers and appropriate conditions of reading (literacy, affordable texts), writers or producers with the means to generate those texts, and institutions to circulate and channel them. (Frow 137)

This fits with the popularity of comedians and their publications which generate huge revenues, as well as the popularity of creative non-fiction works, such as biographies and autobiographies in general. In summary, according to the aforementioned theorists (Frow, MacLachlan and Reid, Derrida, Anderson), genres are fluid, create meaning and cultural impact, and genres are defined by framing, codes and literary devices. Genres are also a figure of reading or a literary attitude and genres are performative. Genres and sub-genres are important because knowing which genre a text belongs to can help the author to write for a certain genre and market it accordingly, whereas the reader can adjust their expectations and understanding of a work depending on the (sub-) genre; after all, "[g]enre … defines a set of expectations which guide our engagement with texts" (Frow 104).

A question that arises when thinking about genre and more specifically the emerging sub-genre of comedian autobiographies is the question of why we need this new sub-genre which is already so popular. As I have mentioned earlier, comedian autobiographies have been published for a while now but the numbers of such publications and revenues or best seller list places are increasing in the 21st century. Of the six comedian autobiographies that I am analysing in detail, four have been on the *Sunday Times* best seller list, for example (see Chapter 6.2 "Commercialisation" for data on book sales/ best seller numbers and more evidence of the success/ popularity of comedian autobiographies). This increase in such publications indicates an emerging literature that is gaining popularity and has turned into a publishing phenomenon: "Publishers have caught on to the fact that, over the past five years or so, memoirs by comics have sold incredibly well indeed" (Masters). As I will go on to show, there are many common and specific attributes among comedian autobiographies that warrant the declaration of their own sub-genre.

Overall, this PhD project takes a literary-critical approach to primary materials (stand-up performances and autobiographical texts). I selected autobiographical texts written by stand-up comedians and compared them with recordings of on-stage performances by the

same comedians, where they occasionally tell the same jokes as can be found in the texts, before interpreting the results. This methodology, the close reading of texts, which is explained further in this sub-chapter, enables my original contribution to knowledge. A substantial amount of material was collected and critically analysed, with the focus being on texts and performances and additional theoretical concepts that productively illuminate the relationship between the two different media.

My approach to research and philosophical stance can be summarised in the following way: I am collecting and analysing data in the form of comedian autobiographies. I am thereby performing a cross-sectional analysis among several contemporary comedian autobiographies. Mixed methods were used; for example, I looked at stand-up performances and written texts, analysing them from a literary and linguistic perspective and using both pre-existing theories as ground work as well as new deductions that I made from the case studies.

One of the biggest challenges I encountered while working on this thesis is the lack of academic publications related to my project. Of course, a PhD project is required to be original and filling a gap in knowledge, however, I struggled to find any relatable pre-existing discussion of the topic. Countless hours of research and numerous consultations with research librarians, as well as academics working in the fields of comedy, performance, or autobiographical literature have often proven to be unhelpful and unsuccessful in finding sources. For this reason, some of the supporting literature may appear to be tangentially linked, but my analyses demonstrate its relevance.

Further challenging but significant topics that are being looked at in this project are, understanding the presentation of self in performance and performance of the self on the page, discovering the thin line between a comedy persona and the ‘real’ person in the two different media, identifying the comedians’ unique ‘voices’, and trying to uncover the strategies for the use of humour in the selected autobiographies. Additionally, the concepts of authenticity, truth, and memory cannot be linked without thorough discussion. I will comment on these

matters in Chapter 4.3, some premises have to be understood beforehand: it is not the purpose of this study to show clearly how trustworthy comedians are in their autobiographies and other outputs, such as interviews, stand-up performances, and panel shows, and it can be assumed that a lot of what a comedian says and writes will be authentic to their stand-up persona but not necessarily to the 'truth'. In this thesis, the comedian autobiographies are analysed as creative texts and for their congruence with the author's on-stage persona, without speculating on their verisimilitude.

At the same time, exactly these challenges make this doctoral project valuable and relevant. Some scholars have written about individual concepts, like humour or creative non-fiction, but I am combining the two in order to create a better understanding of both comedians and autobiographical literature. The individual steps that I undertook to analyse the autobiographies were as follows:

Step 1: first read-through of the autobiographies at average reading pace to get a general understanding of the content and first impression of the text.

Step 2: second read-through and analysis of the autobiographies in terms of writing techniques, humour, and content – this was done very carefully and slowly, so that nothing would be missed; notes were taken in the margin of the books and collected in digital word documents.

Step 3: watch all stand-up performances that can be found of the comedians analysed and take notes on the voice used, stage presence, and content.

Step 4: compare the results of the book analyses with the on-stage performances, meaning that I noted whenever a comedian would talk about the same anecdotes/ share the same jokes in both media and looked at how closely they overlap (for example establishing whether they are

word for word equivalents or just similar in the general content; is the version in one medium revealing more than in the other medium etc.)[3].

Step 5: analyse and interpret all results of the individual comedians and provide additional background information on the comedian, their career, and their publications.

Step 6: comparison of all autobiographies/ comedians – synthesis and discussion of insights.

Aside from that, and throughout all the years of my PhD studies, I continued to read more comedian autobiographies, both extant, and ones that were released within the past three years. Through that, I had a substantial amount of supporting information that would shape the study as it is now, even if this thesis shows only a fraction of the work that I have done, the material that I have gone through and read, but it is also only a fraction of the further possibilities this examination of comedian autobiographies (and further yet autobiographical studies) has. Nonetheless, my work is beginning to fill a gap in knowledge regarding these matters.

To summarise more precisely, this thesis explores narrative elements including temporality and the relation between the autobiographies and the performances. Voice and personas are essential to the understanding of comedian autobiographies too, and are thereby examined in detail. The discussions are illustrated by direct, analysed examples from the primary texts and occasionally additional examples from other comedian autobiographies.

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[3] To compare the comedian autobiographies and the comedian's stand-up performances, I first read through the books, taking notes of the page numbers on prominent themes. I then watched every stand-up comedy performance of the comedian, once again taking notes on the exact minutes on the main themes. After comparing the notes, I knew if the content was similar or not. If it was similar, I would reread those sections and re-watch the stand-up performances, pausing the videos precisely, to identify, just how similar the overlaps are. This result would then end up in a separate document for each comedian, before a selection of those would end up in this examination.

It is not the intention of this investigation to offer descriptive accounts of the contents of the texts, nor to provide a complete autobiographical account of each comedian. Concerning the comparisons of the books versus the stand-up performances, a variety of sources of the stand-up recordings was used, as indicated within the specific analyses. These sources include audio files from Spotify, videos on YouTube of performances, and the official DVDs. In addition to that I watched interviews and read newspaper articles, show and book reviews, as well as posts on social media made by the comedians and their fans. All of these sources provided the advantage of understanding the comedians' lives, personalities, and ways of creating humour, while simultaneously gaining the ability to notice consistent features of the works, rather than quirks from an individual performance/ source that might not be replicated elsewhere. A complete list of all sources I examined can be found in the works cited list at the end of the thesis.

Further regarding the scope and limits of this study, I do not directly analyse any of the jokes that are included in the source texts. So instead of identifying punch lines, for example, I only identify the category of humour used (for example saying whether a joke is dark humour or self-deprecating). Whether something is humorous or not, often depends on individual taste and opinion, but a joke or humorous section in a text can be recognised whether the joke actually evokes laughter in an individual or not, and these are the sections that are referred to most frequently. Only if I believe that it adds to the analysis I will comment in an autoethnographical manner on the (humoristic) elements of the works and state how I felt about the element subjectively as a reader or listener. I am furthermore using book reviews, primarily by Steve Bennett from the *Chortle Comedy* website, a stand-up comedy industry insider and critic, to gain an additional expert opinion on the comedian autobiographies that I am analysing. Lastly, I deliberately chose to not interview any of the comedians that I am analysing, for these reasons: Firstly, since my analyses and study are literature/ text based, I did not anticipate that I would gain anything more by interviewing

comedians than what I can already get from the texts. It then would have also been a question of who I would be interviewing – a comedian's goal seems to be to live as their persona, at least whenever they are in public surroundings. And am I then interviewing the comedy persona, or the author, or the 'true self' of the person? Can I believe anything the authors/ comedians are saying or would they reply to my questions in a way that casts a very positive light on the comedians and their works? All of these questions were too much of a critical variable that may have influenced my analyses negatively, but by deliberately choosing to not interview the comedians, I was able to analyse their work free of the creators' opinion. This question of personas and truth will be discussed further in Chapter 4.3 and Chapter 5.

The theoretical approaches made in the following are generally applicable to more than one of the comedians' works featured in this examination. Because many comedians use, for example, the same literary techniques; these features can therefore be better discussed collectively, especially also because to present them in individual analyses could risk repetition.

Headings and subheadings allow a better thematic overview within the following chapters – here they are narrative, voice, personas, and genre. As a final introductory note, in the main body, the overall purpose of exploring the relationship (or differences and similarities) between written texts and performances written by stand-up comedians will be addressed and it is also explained how humour works in the texts and what role humour plays in the autobiographies, which means that the research questions will be addressed. As a reminder, the exact phrasing of the research questions is: 'What is the relationship between on-stage performances and autobiographical writing of stand-up comedians?' and 'What defines the genre of comedian autobiographies?'. To signpost what is to come in the thesis, here is an overview of differences and similarities between

the analysed comedians, a combination of facts and my impressions of their works, before the common assumptions about autobiographical writing and creative non-fiction are looked at[4]:

Comedian	Amstell	Bridges	Connolly	Hills	McIntyre	Millican
Photo section	no	44 photos	53 photos, plus more in text	36 photos	42 photos	41 photos
Funny photo captions	none	some	some	not really	some	some
Embodiment or "illness" humour	depression, skinny body shape, homosexuality	Scottishness	Scottishness, Parkinson's disease	artificial foot	'pseudo campness'	big body shape, bullying
Self-advertising/ referencing	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Stand-up excerpts or references to performances	more excerpts than new writing	very few	very few	a few	very few	almost none
Ending at (present) time of writing	yes	no, ends with his first SECC performance in 2010	yes	yes	yes, but his recent years/ successes are only mentioned briefly	yes, but followed by a recipe for a cake and an afterword
Growth/ transformation noticeable	positive personal (mental health) development	primarily childhood to adult growth, but also comedic growth	primarily childhood to adulthood, as well as accepting his Parkinson's disease	primarily comedic growth	childhood to adult growth, as well as comedic growth	personal and comedic growth, but her growth appears to be small because of the non-linear narrative
Structure to the work	chronological	chronological	chronological with interview sections	chronological	chronological	non-chronological
Stand out graphic/ textual feature	interesting layout of texts and stand-up excerpts	Scots words	Scots words, curse words	rich imagery	foreign accents, excessive film references	lists
Stand out type of humour	self-deprecating	observational, (Scottish) working class	observational, Scottish	easy going, personal	observational	dark humour/ self-deprecating
Was shy as a child	yes	yes	not mentioned	not mentioned	no	yes
Thinks comedy is therapeutic according to the book	yes	yes, but mentions it only very briefly	no comment from him about this	somewhat	no comment from him about this	she is a proponent for counselling and had counselling sessions because of her comedy career
Author intrusion used	little	a lot in the beginning	yes	some	frequently	frequently
Mentions Billy Connolly	no	yes	-	yes	yes	no
Has performed at the	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes

[4] The appendix shows a similar table for some additional comedian autobiographies that I analysed, including John Cleese, Stewart Lee, Alan Davies, Jason Manford, Romesh Ranganathan, and Sue Perkins.

Comedian	Amstell	Bridges	Connolly	Hills	McIntyre	Millican
Edinburgh Festival Fringe and mentions it in the book						
Appeared on *Who Do You Think You Are?* and wrote about it	no	no, but would have liked to	no, but would have liked to	yes	no	yes
Had their own TV show	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Went on a book tour to promote their autobiography	no	yes, 22 dates	no	yes, 8 dates	no	no
Their book appeared on a bestseller list	no	*Sunday Times* Bestseller list	no	*Sunday Times* Bestseller list	*Sunday Times* Bestseller list	*Sunday Times* Bestseller list

Table 2: An Overview of the “Focus Comedians” and their Autobiographies

2. An Introduction to Creative Non-fiction and Autobiographical Writing

This chapter serves as an introduction to creative non-fiction and autobiographical writing, two concepts that need to be understood in order to be able to define comedian autobiographies, which – as I am arguing– are a popular sub-genre of creative non-fiction, rooted in autobiographical writing. Chapter 2.1 considers creative non-fiction, setting out assumptions about creative non-fiction and explaining its relevancy to the comedian autobiographies. The chapter also looks at the history of creative non-fiction and reviews available literature about it. Chapter 2.2 deals with autobiographical writing, the emphasis being less on the history of the genre and more on commonly accepted understandings of autobiographical writing by means of a literature review. Ultimately, this entire chapter illustrates contemporary assumptions about autobiographical writing and creative non-fiction and the comedian autobiographies' relation to both. The rest of thesis then analyses comedian autobiographies and reveals how comedian autobiographies connect and differ from autobiographical writing but still fit within creative non-fiction, resulting in the argument that comedian autobiographies are their own sub-genre of creative non-fiction alongside of and rooted in autobiographical writing.

2.1 Creative Non-fiction

In comparison to autobiographical writing, 'creative non-fiction' is a relatively new term in literature and describes a developing genre. Although there are texts throughout history that could be described as creative non-fiction, this specific term had just not been available. The term was first used by Lee Gutkind (the pioneer of creative non-fiction) in the 1970s (Gutkind and Fletcher 10) before the term spread and raised awareness to the genre. Creative non-fiction has since become a very popular genre. Essentially, and as a brief explanation, creative non-fiction is "the practice of writing nonfiction in a dramatic and imaginative way" (Gutkind and Fletcher 13).

> It is focused on story, meaning it has a narrative plot with an inciting moment, rising action, climax and denoument [sic], just like fiction. However, nonfiction only works if the story is based in truth, an accurate retelling of the author's life experiences. The pieces can vary greatly in length, just as fiction can; anything from a book-length autobiography to a 500-word food blog post can fall within the genre. ("Creative Nonfiction: An Overview")

The controversy related to this genre questions the amount of 'truth' in the works and asks how much can be embellished and changed but still qualify texts as works of creative non-fiction instead of fiction. To understand, "[t]he genre of creative nonfiction (also known as literary nonfiction) is broad enough to include travel writing, nature writing, science writing, sports writing, biography, autobiography, memoir" (Nordquist). This study argues that another popular sub-genre within creative non-fiction is comedian autobiographies.

When writing autobiographically, at first, a basis of non-fiction is established. Often then and especially so with comedians that write their autobiographies, the non-fiction text becomes creative through a variety of creative features ranging from structure, to visual aspects, to humorous voice. At the same time, autobiographical writing itself is part of the overarching genre of life-writing. The term creative non-fiction comes from American scholarship and life-writing is used more frequently in the United Kingdom. In this thesis the American term creative non-fiction is used primarily, because the very words 'creative non-fiction' describe the genre rather fittingly by representing the fundamental tensions between truth-telling and story-writing. And, through this understanding, the term creative non-fiction hints at what most comedian autobiographies present, namely, life stories based on true events but edited with a creative liberty for comedic effect. The content of the comedian autobiographies is thereby clearly about the comedians' lives, or at least that is what they make the reader believe it to be, even if ultimately a comedian autobiography might rather be seen as an autobiography of a comedic persona. In contrast, the widely-accepted definition of life-writing has a slightly different connotation to me, in that it sounds like a commitment to narrating one's life as faithfully as possible, but as will be discussed, the words 'truth', 'autobiography' and 'stand-up comedian' cannot be combined carelessly. The humour that

comedians bring into their texts due to the nature of their job as well as the influence and focus of humour in their lives, adds to the creative writing aspect, as will be explored in detail in this examination. As my thesis will also show, the humour aspect is not the only characteristic of comedian autobiographies that stands out to argue for its own sub-genre of creative non-fiction.

Before going into more detail about creative non-fiction, it has to be noted that there is considerable critical literature on genre, though none identifying the genre of comedian autobiographies that I want to propose and define in this thesis. A number of works from academics have been from quoted already, among them John Frow's *Genre*, which explores a variety of topics related to genre, including its form and dimensions, history, and interpretations, and is a useful reference work. A much earlier exploration of genre was made by literary critic and theorist Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, first published in 1957, which serves as an interesting introduction to, and as background information on literary criticism and genre studies. Theories of hybrid forms of genres are getting closer to what comedian autobiographies are, especially those of Lee Gutkind, who is often called the godfather of creative non-fiction, as his works explain the creative non-fiction genre, its potentials, its complexity, and its limits. It is a common assumption and general impression or understanding that autobiographical texts (including autobiographies or memoirs) are usually based on facts and still considered works of creative non-fiction (unless they are encyclopaedia entries), yet the autobiographical works by the stand-up comedians are particularly inventive and creative due to their need for/ (extensive) use of humour in their texts. Margot Singer and Nicole Walker further collected experimental creative non-fiction essays about creative non-fiction and its limits and potentials in *Bending Genre*. Generally knowing how creative non-fiction functions as a genre allows me to discover similarities and differences between the comedians' autobiographical works in terms of structure, content, and writing style, but humour in creative non-fiction is seldom analysed in academic

publications. Brenda Miller and Suzanne Paola somewhat colloquially give suggestions on how to write a work of creative non-fiction in their publication *Tell It slant*, whereas Peter Heehs (*Writing the Self* 2013) depicts the history of the self in writing and (psychological/ social and literary) theories. Again, despite their generally interesting titles and topics discussed, these works mentioned, with the exception of Frow's and Gutkind's, are not too helpful for my project, as I am not writing anything autobiographical myself. Nonetheless, it is valuable to explore the genre of autobiographies and creative non-fiction to understand what the genre of comedian autobiographies can look like and what it is.

To start with the basics, the following quote by Lee Gutkind explains what creative non-fiction sets out to do: "in creative nonfiction, the writer is encouraged to capture the drama and force of real life, in the most literary way possible. The creative nonfiction writer is encouraged to utilize all the literary techniques available to the fiction writer in order to render his or her true story as dramatic, appealing, and compelling as possible" (Gutkind *The Art of Creative Nonfiction* 32). Especially stand-up comedians can use a variety of literary techniques in their autobiographies and certainly emphasise the 'drama' of their lives.

Furthermore, on the online website of the magazine *Creative Nonfiction*, founded and edited by Gutkind, the following information can be found:

> The word "creative" has been criticized in this context because some people have maintained that being creative means that you pretend or exaggerate or make up facts and embellish details. This is completely incorrect. It is possible to be honest and straightforward and brilliant and creative at the same time. "Creative" doesn't mean inventing what didn't happen, reporting and describing what wasn't there. It doesn't mean that the writer has a license to lie. The cardinal rule is clear—and cannot be violated. (Gutkind, "What Is Creative Nonfiction?")

This quote stands somewhat in contrast with comedian autobiographies. Although it could be argued that comedian autobiographies are humorous works of non-fiction, as this thesis shows, the truth in such books seems distorted. Therefore, when looking at Gutkind's definition, comedian autobiographies may not belong to the creative non-fiction genre. And yet, comedian autobiographies seem to fit perfectly into the genre, combining creative

(humoristic) elements with autobiographical fact. But since the autobiographical fact can be debated too, perhaps for these reasons then it is necessary to create a separate genre for comedian autobiographies specifically, considering the peculiarity and popularity of those publications.

Another work that I looked at in preparation for this PhD project was Michael Pickett's "An Analysis of Narrative and Voice in Creative Nonfiction" which looks at the narratological relationships between fiction and creative non-fiction and tests Manfred Jahn's narratological framework usually used for fiction on the creative non-fiction genre. Although by doing so, Pickett makes some interesting discoveries for his study, in the end, Jahn's framework is not the most useful theory for my work as it would add an unnecessary layer of complication: even Pickett comes to the conclusion that it would be problematic to create "a nonfiction framework due to the inherent notion of nonfiction being the 'representation of fact'" (13). Jahn's framework[5] was meant to be used for fictional texts rather than comedian autobiographies which are works of creative non-fiction or rather a combination of different genre elements/ its very own sub-genre.

Those who are familiar with creative non-fiction, may have come to an opinion a while ago, possibly believing that what I am searching for to describe the works written by the stand-up comedians I am analysing, is the term 'humour memoir'. And although this term does indeed sound promising, it must undergo a detailed examination before it can be applied to the autobiographies written by stand-up comedians. Cardell and Kuttainen's article brings David Sedaris' autobiography and the term humour memoir together. Their points are valid, and yet their use of the term does not quite transfer to the autobiographies written by the stand-up comedians in this study. Cardell and Kuttainen explain that

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[5] The framework essentially comes down "to the question 'Who narrates what how?'" (Jahn 17) as well as the extended questions of "TO WHOM?", "WHY?", "TO WHAT EFFECT?" and "IN WHICH SITUATION?" (all quotes from Jahn 18, emphasis original). These questions can be helpful when interpreting fictional texts, but the focus of this study is more on what constitutes comedian autobiographies.

> Sedaris is not only writing autobiography, he is also writing humour. The stories he tells about his family not only reveal the important figures in Sedaris's life and his identity in relation to them, but are in themselves amusing and highly stylized comic vignettes. . . [thereby moving] between fact and fiction. (Cardell and Kuttainen 101)

There is a difference between writers (like Sedaris) using humour and humourists/ comedians writing – it is a matter of a humorous life narrator versus a (life-) writing comedian. Yes, Sedaris is often described as a humourist these days, but he started out as a radio presenter and then a writer first. He is not, however, a stand-up comedian as opposed to the autobiographers analysed here. So although the term 'humour memoir' (which, as far as my research has shown, is not used by academics but sometimes indirectly/ non-explicitly by blogs/ online articles to categorise autobiographies written by stand-up comedians) could in theory perhaps be used to describe the autobiographies written by the stand-up comedians, a better term would have to be created since the way Cardell and Kuttainen use the term is not 100% applicable for the other autobiographies. What can be taken away from Cardell and Kuttainen – or rather from Sedaris – is that Sedaris states that "[t]he events described in [his] stories are realish" (Cardell and Kuttainen 99) and 'realish' is possibly a good term to also describe how stand-up comedians depict their life-events. As somewhat of a side-note and excursion here, I was also examining if the comedian autobiographies could be categorised as being 'autofiction', as the events described are often based on real experiences but fictionalised. The challenge with autofiction is that there seems to be no clear definition of this literary term, with one common assumption being that in autofiction, the author and the protagonist just happen to share the same name but are not directly the same person.

Originally, the term autofiction was coined by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977 to describe his book *Fils*, which he did not want to call autobiography because that term is "reserved for the important people of this world." Instead, he calls it "Fiction, of events and facts strictly real" – or autofiction (Doubrovsky qtd. in Pitcher McDonough 7). Autofiction is a distinctive approach to truth telling, it is an attitude of writing/ reading that allows room for

nuance/ reflexivity in the relationship between the writing self and how they represent their lived experience. This reflexive element of autofiction bears a similarity to comedian autobiographies. Furthermore, autofiction allows the explicit understanding that autobiographical texts will be fictionalised and is reminiscent of the following discovery I made while reading comedian autobiographies: The front matter of *Saturday Night Peter* (2010), officially sold as a memoir/ autobiography of/ by British stand-up comedian Peter Kay, states that the "book is a work of non-fiction based on the life, experiences and recollections of the author. In some cases names of people, places, dates, sequences or the detail of events have been changed to protect the privacy of others. The author has stated to the publishers that the contents of this book are true" (Kay). A deviation in the formulation of this information occurs in *The book* (2011): "A large majority of this book is a work of non-fiction based on the author's own experiences and recollections. However certain scenarios have been invented and heightened for comic effect. Any similarity these passages bear to actual individuals or situations is completely unintentional and coincidental" (Kay, *The book*).

Remarks like these may therefore indicate an autofictional nature of stand-up comedians' autobiographies and definitely refer back to the earlier point that comedian autobiographies are edited and constructed. Once again, academics acknowledge a fluidity in the autobiographical genre (see also the following sub-chapter). As the comedians move between writing and performing, between telling the truth and making things up for comedic effect, between being serious and humorous, and playing with the literary format, they simultaneously play with genre. A regular reader/ fan may not question any of this, but instead take the book as it is advertised – a comedian's autobiography/ memoir, which, as my analyses show, can describe (humorous) texts using a variety of other literary and visual features.

2.2 Autobiographical Writing

The concept of autobiographical writing is important for this study, because the comedian autobiographies that I am investigating are, first and foremost autobiographies. Not only are they marketed and sold as autobiographies, the content and structure of the works also fits with common assumptions about autobiographies – with some variations as the main body of the thesis will show. But firstly, what are autobiographies and what academic works deal with autobiographical writing?

An examination of available literature on autobiographical writing shows that there are works that give a historical overview of the development of autobiographies (among them Maria Di Battista and John Sturrock). Sturrock, for example, gives an overview of the history of autobiographies and how they are written from Augustine's *Confessiones* to works by Rousseau, Goethe, Darwin, and Sartre. More recent publications from the field of autobiographical writing present ideas on how to write an autobiography in general, how to structure them, research information, or how to read them (Nicholas Corder, Brian Osborne, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson). Corder's work, for example, is a writing guide on how to write an autobiography. Particularly interesting are Chapters 2 and 5, on how to remember what happened, and on how to edit the entire autobiography. Thereby, Chapter 5 encourages authors to edit out what interrupts the reading flow or just does not feel right, which is significant for comedian autobiographies. Osborne's *Writing Biography and Autobiography* (2004), is a writing handbook providing guidelines and ideas on how to write (auto-) biographies, with the majority of the work addressing authors about writing biographies. Nonetheless, some of the information found in the book can be useful for writing autobiographies too. Especially Chapters 5, 8, 9, are helpful as they deal with structure, writing up the work and legal issues to keep in mind, respectively. In Chapter 5, for example, the writer of an autobiography is advised to find a strong opening, encouraged to get creative with the sequence of events, and find a suitable and intriguing title. Chapter 8 focuses on the

importance of the intended audience/ readership of the autobiography, while Chapter 9 emphasises that any legal issues have to be sorted before publication, although it can be assumed, that in the case of the autobiographies that I am analysing, the latter was done by the publishers and not by the stand-up comedian directly. And continuing, Smith and Watson's publication *Reading Autobiography* (2001) offers an informative introduction to the subject of autobiographies. It explains in-depth but also with brevity and simple words, what life writing is, what history it has, what criticism autobiography writing has faced and gives a tool kit with questions to ask when reading autobiographies. These questions include, among others, taking a closer look at the voice, the audience, the coherence, and narrative plotting (see Smith and Watson 165ff.). Appendix A to the book explains fifty-two genres of life narrative, from apology to witnessing, giving detailed definitions of the terms (see Smith and Watson 183ff.). *Autobiography* by Linda Anderson is a fundamental guide to the genre and explains and summarises historic autobiographies, theoretical approaches to autobiographical writing, as well as women's writings. None of the books considers the specific sub-genre of comedian autobiographies. The closest to the topic are Smith and Watson's and Anderson's books which are drawn from substantially in this examination. It is unclear whether the comedians that wrote autobiographies actually read such guide books or whether the comedians simply started writing, basing their techniques on other autobiographies that they were perhaps familiar with.

To better understand autobiographical writing, it is important to know that autobiographies employ a number of common writing techniques; "[b]oth the life narrative and the novel share features we ascribe to fictional writing: plot, dialogue, setting, characterization, and so on" (Smith and Watson 7). The fact that autobiographies share features with other genres, makes autobiographies a fluid genre with fuzzy boundaries, moving into other genres.

For Anderson, 'Auto/ biography' is a

> recently coined term [that] has been used to denote the way autobiographical and biographical narratives are related and to suggest how the boundary between them is fluid. This can be manifested in the way autobiographies may contain biographical information about the lives of others, or be read for the biographical information they contain about the subject. Biographies also may include personal revelations about their authors or a personal narrative of their own quest for information or their relation to the biographical subject. (40)

Texts can feature elements from different genres, which will then influence the readers' perception of the book, while allowing the author to be creative. This mixing of genres and the fluidity of it leads "Paul de Man [to argue] that autobiography is 'not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading' [and] Georges May argues that 'autobiography is neither a genre, nor a form, nor a style, nor even a language. . . [but] a literary attitude'" (Abbott 598f.). These are very interesting ways of looking at autobiographies as they move towards a genre classification guided by impressions and feelings. Porter Abbott sees

> [t]he difference, then, between an autobiography and a novel … not in the factuality of the one and fictiveness of the other but in the different orientations toward the text that they elicit in the reader. Correlatively, when an autobiography is read as factual (as a biography of the author) with the reader displacing or making transparent the act of writing, it is read in some respects much like conventional fiction. (Abbott 603)

Again the fluidity of the genre and the influence on the reader stands out. Abbott also makes clear that a text might change depending on which lens it is viewed through. As my analyses will explain, with comedian autobiographies the reader can never be quite sure they get what they may expect (that is a humorous book) with a comedian autobiography.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson then describe genre as the following:

> Our working definition of autobiographical or life narrative, rather than specifying its rules as a genre or form, understands it as a historically situated practice of self-representation. In such texts, narrators selectively engage their lived experience through personal storytelling. Located in specific times and places, they are at the same time in dialogue with the personal processes and archives of memory. (14)

And furthermore, "[w]e are always fragmented in time, taking a particular or provisional perspective on the moving target of our pasts, addressing multiple and disparate audiences. Perhaps, then, it is more helpful to approach autobiographical telling as a performative act" (Smith and Watson 47). Once again, the preference seems to lie in moving away from

defining the genre strictly, but rather seeing it as a type of carefully created or edited performance with porous boundaries. This autobiographical performativity is mentioned by many theorists (see Smith and Watson 143f.) and suggests a construct of autobiographical texts that may not be entirely factual. On the other hand, "[a]ccording to [autobiography professor Philippe] Lejeune, the author of an autobiography implicitly declares that he is the person he says he is and that the author and the protagonist are the same"[6] (Anderson 3), meaning that the author can be trusted and does not intentionally perform a narrative persona. However, especially since I am studying autobiographies written by stand-up comedians, who are performers first and writers second, the notion of autobiographical writing being a performance is significant for my project and will be the background/ lens through which I will analyse my primary materials. After all, "[a]ny utterance in an autobiographical text, even if inaccurate or distorted, characterizes its writer" (Smith and Watson 12) and

> [m]ost autobiographies are inspired by a creative, and therefore fictional, impulse to select only those events and experiences in the writer's life that go to build up an integrated pattern. This pattern may be something larger than himself with which he has come to identify himself, or simply the coherence of his character and attitudes. (Northrop Frye 307)

This understanding of autobiographical writing corresponds with the understanding that comedians work consciously with personas and edit their texts carefully. The main body of the thesis will reveal how clear the editing of the autobiographical texts is and will show the selected comedians' thoughts on their writing process.

Moreover, I will argue that comedians inhabit different selves while writing their texts, but the preliminary result here is that the humour used in the comedian autobiographies, as well as their playing with the generic codes and signature characteristics of the text (for example having it look like a self-help book) skew the classic understanding of autobiography as a literary genre. Generally, however, the theoretical view of autobiographies is problematic, as there are no clear research results presenting a universal autobiography

[6] Although declaration is again a performative act.

theory, but as my study will show, there are certain characteristics of autobiographical writing that apply to comedian autobiographies whereas other characteristics of comedian autobiographies differ from the generally accepted understanding of autobiographies. Uncovering these characteristics of the special sub-genre of comedian autobiographies is where my work is original and creates and interprets new knowledge in particular. The popularity of comedian autobiographies is another reason why my work is relevant and useful, as has also already been explained in the introduction.

Nicola King assumes that the popularity of the life-writing genre (to which autobiographical writing belongs), "may be partly based on [the] constant, often unconscious activity" in which "we are all engaged in the process of narrating our lives on a daily, informal basis" (King 339). Rocio Davis writes that the genre of "[m]emoir seduces us because we want to believe that that story is true—the truth element, the weight of truth, might be what ultimately compels us to consume life writing, which hinges on the contingencies of experience, rather than on a well-made plot, and thus lures those of us who recognize that lives cannot be structured or mapped out" (89). Here, Davis argues that people read autobiographies because they want to experience true and real life in a book, rather than a fictional one that is carefully planned, thereby belonging to a genre of non-fiction.

Aside from the aforementioned *Reading Autobiography: a Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* by Smith and Watson, the works by Frow and Gutkind, as well as Anderson's *Autobiography*, there is one more publication that has become relevant and useful for this study: Estelle C. Jelinek published the remarkable book *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography* in 2003, whose introduction "Autobiographical Criticism: An Overview" makes some points that are particularly relevant to this exploration of the autobiographical genre. Firstly, Jelinek summarises that "In *Figures of Autobiography*, [(1980)] Avrom Fleishman argues that autobiography may not be a genre at all – as did Paul de Man several years earlier – because it takes so many different forms" (25). This theory is interesting and

perhaps helpful to some researchers. However, as I am arguing for a genre of comedian autobiographies, it is necessary to settle on a working definition of autobiography. Nonetheless, I appreciate the existing belief of there perhaps being no need for such a genre (distinction). At the very least, a common understanding and acceptance can be found in the statement of autobiographical works coming in 'many different forms'.

In fact, some scholars, in particular "[a]ntihistoricists, such as … deconstructionists, and poststructuralists, believe that no literary history can be written about autobiography because its characteristics have not been defined. However, most critics today tend to accept autobiography as a content, not a strictly defined form, and get on with the interpretive function of literary criticism" (Jelinek 25). This notion is significant, as calling autobiography a content rather than a defined genre, would work for comedian autobiographies too. The material that the comedians share in their works is usually based on autobiographical experiences, but may only be an appearance rather than actual truth. Instead, as "Paul John Eaking [writes] in *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention* (1985), … autobiographical truth is not a fixed but an evolving constant in a process of self-creation" (Jelinek 25) and self-creation is definitely a fitting description of what stand-up comedians do.

Jelinek also says that "[t]here is less concern now with prescriptive definitions of a 'true' or 'good' autobiography, less interest, by and large, in the philosophical abstract, more with the concrete and the personal" (25). I also wish to avoid subjectively presenting one comedian autobiography as better than another; instead I have focussed extensively on what the comedians reveal in interviews, and what their autobiographical texts provide as information. My 'judgement' was then formed on the basis of these revelations. Rather than identifying if an element featured in a comedian autobiography, such as the specific use of voice, or humour, is good or bad, my aim was to demonstrate the element, show that it is there and can be found in a comedian autobiography as possibly a defining characteristic. Furthermore, my aim was to determine whether or not the specific element gives any insights

into the success of a comedian autobiography (which is mostly dependant on the authenticity to persona), as well as add to the general understandings of (comedian) autobiographies.

Jelinek continues:

> Despite this egalitarianism, critics by and large still have certain expectations of a “good” autobiography. It must center exclusively or mostly on their authors, not on others…It should be representative of its times, a mirror of the predominant zeitgeist. The autobiographer should be self-aware, a seeker after self-knowledge. He must aim to explore, not to exhort. His autobiography should be an effort to give meaning to some personal mythos. (Jelinek 25)

All comedian autobiographies analysed here, certainly fulfil the requirements proposed by Jelinek. The comedian autobiographies are, first and foremost about the stand-up comedian, they are contemporary, and even share insights into the current world/ industry of stand-up comedy. Very often the comedians are self-aware within their writings, especially in the forms of author intrusions and when considering that the comedian autobiographies will have been written and edited to present the comedian in a certain light. Although Amstell does this mainly through the use of excerpts from his stand-up comedy performances, each of the comedians featured in this study, also reveal something new about themselves. Jelinek’s last expectation also rings true: the comedians certainly explain themselves and give insights into their personal background as well as their creation process of comedy, thus adding revelations about their ‘personal mythos’ of how they became successful stand-up comedians and give an impression of who the person behind the on-stage persona is (at least as far as a reader is willing to believe the comedians’ words as facts/ true indications).

The genre of autobiography is, in summary, multi-faceted. It is both studied and yet appears under-researched. There are some definitions and yet those definitions often seem vague. On the most basic level there appears to be an understanding that a work of autobiography is written about the author’s own life as a first person narrator, ideally in a chronological order and perhaps even self-reflecting. Meanwhile, the form of an autobiography can be varied, ranging from diaries to full books, or even graphic novels. On the other hand, scholars like Lejeune, Smith, and Watson, and others attempt a more

theoretical approach to the genre of autobiographical writing (as shown earlier). The genre seems to be ever-evolving, with arguably no limits aside from a required truth content, so not to re-create an '*A Million Little Pieces* situation' in which author James Frey published a memoir, a large amount of which was made up which caused an outrage as it deceived readers worldwide (Barton). Frey's text had "no generic label … (the covers simply bore the author's name and the title), the intimate, confessional tone and the authentic quality of the experiences described led critics, reviewers and the reading public to identify the work as a memoir" (Hurley 2), but investigations into the accuracy of Frey's experiences revealed that a lot of it was fictional. Had the book been marketed as an autobiographically informed novel, there would not have been any problems. This example shows how readers' assumptions can misalign with a text. Similarly, comedian autobiographies may be expected to be highly entertaining or behave according to assumptions of the presumed norm of an autobiography, but, as this thesis shows, this is not always the case. Comedian autobiographies appear like autobiographies and follow most of the classic 'guidelines' (chronological order, talking about themselves in a self-reflective manner), but very often the stand-up comedians play with these characteristics by, for example, not using a chronological order. The biggest influence on the genre is the use and effect of humour in the works. Autobiographies that are not written by stand-up comedians are rarely humorous to the same extent as comedian autobiographies, particularly due to the nature of their profession, possible readership expectations as well as requests from the comedians' publishers or managers. This humour then has the possibility to change trustworthiness and verisimilitude of the work in order to keep up the authenticity to their publicly known on-stage comedy persona, which often draws heavily on their personal experiences. In addition to that, comedian autobiographies also come in many different forms. As the exemplary works analysed show, this can be a collection of stand-up excerpts interspersed with additional autobiographical stories or a classically structured autobiographical work combined with direct diary entries. For now,

there is no previously existing definition of comedian autobiographies, but I aim to reach one in this thesis. Just like it is challenging to define autobiography, there are a number of factors that play into the definition of comedian autobiographies, which will be studied further in this chapter.

Looking beyond the basic theoretical understandings of autobiographies, the keywords autobiographies, memoirs, and diaries are also of importance when dealing with comedian autobiographies. I used the words autobiography and memoir interchangeably since they are closely linked (see Julie Rak, "Are Memoirs Autobiography?") and even the comedians and bookselling industry often do not differentiate between the two. McIntyre, as a comedian, for example writes that his book is "an autobiography, although [he prefers] the word 'memoirs'. . . . [which] sounds a lot sexier than 'autobiography'" because it is French (*Life & Laughing* 4), but he does not comment on further differences between the two. Diaries can also function as a literary genre that is (auto-)biographical (see Bruce Merry). Hills' autobiography includes several pages of excerpts from his diary, as do the autobiographies of some other comedians, but none of the comedians in this study has published an entire book purely in diary form. In addition, diaries are often used in therapy, to keep track of one's thoughts and progress and (reflective) writing itself can be therapeutic, which is something the comedians mention occasionally (for example Amstell and Millican).

Regarding publications related to comedy, there are none that mention comedian autobiographies. It is then perhaps more of value to look into publications related to the history of stand-up comedy and comedians, for which the following works are worth mentioning. The key insights from these publications follow, beginning with Franklin Ajaye's *Comic Insights*. In the first part, this book provides tips for people who would like to be stand-up comedians, the third part comprises interviews with comedy club owners and agents, but part two is the most interesting for my purposes. This biggest section of the book contains interviews with well-known stand-up comedians in which

they talk about their experiences as stand-up comedians. Among the interviewees are Louie Anderson, Ellen DeGeneres, Bill Maher and Chris Rock. The interviewees share valuable insights into their comedy writing processes, how they remember their routines, how they deal with hecklers and what they think about being a stand-up comedian in general. Overall, each comedian has a different approach to stand-up comedy; some write out their shows word for word, others don't write them out at all. The comedians considered usually do not go into much detail about their processes, but whenever they do, it becomes noticeable and of interest, especially for readers that would like to pursue a career in comedy themselves. In *Stand Up!*, Oliver Double analyses the foundations of stand-up comedy, while also writing about his own experiences as a stand-up comedian and examining the works of other comedians. In Chapter 3, Double briefly mentions some existing humour theories (aggression, incongruity, release), but comes to the conclusion that for him "the secret formula for all jokes is … *Joke = Incongruity + Faith*)" (Double, *Stand up!* 91), with the difficulty being in "putting … incongruities across in a way which makes the audience believe that they're actually funny, making them have faith that you really are a comedian and that it's OK to laugh" (Double, *Stand up!* 91). Another example of an academic publication related to stand-up, is *Truth in Comedy* by Charna Halpern et al. and although the title sounds very promising in relation to what my PhD project deals with, the book actually focusses on 'Improv-Comedy' and gives ideas for how to do improvisational comedy through games. As I do not deal with improvisational comedy here at all, this book is not of much use for my project, but a good introduction to the matter for anyone that is interested. Similarly, Deborah Frances-White who authored *Off the Mic*, shares (auto-) biographical experiences in the comedy business from which new comedians can learn. It is part memoir, part advice book for wannabe stand-up comedians, including professional's opinions from comedians like Robin Ince, Phill Jupitus, and Sara Pascoe. Also drawing on interviews and examples of performances is *Why stand-up matters* (2015) by Sophie Quirk which discusses how

manipulation is used in stand-up comedy, through for example the use of a persona or manipulating/ controlling the audience to react in a certain way for comedic purpose.

The history of stand-up comedy (in America) is presented in, for example, the work by Richard Zoglin: *Comedy at the edge* is a personal commentary on the development and history of stand-up comedy in the America of the 1970s. It is written like a combination of a novel, a well-researched essay, and a memoir, and thus comes somewhat close to the autobiographies that I am analysing. However, it does focus on a larger group of comedians and does feel more informative on a wider scale, looking at the development of comedy. Tony Allen's *Attitude* is an introduction to being a stand-up comedian and also gives an overview over the history of stand-up comedy, and its alternative forms. The advantage of Allen's book is that Allen is a stand-up comedian himself and is therefore very knowledgeable in the field.

All of these texts dealing with stand-up comedy do offer valuable insights into the comedy industry, but do not examine the phenomenon of comedian autobiographies. Thus, comedian autobiographies, like the ones studied here, now make additional revelations about the developing history of stand-up comedy, its industry, and writing, from the very personal and exclusive view of stand-up comedians themselves. To be more precise, my thesis looks directly at the phenomenon of comedian autobiographies, going beyond the basic content of the works, and having analysed a variety of characteristic features, such as the writing styles and even visual aspects of the books. One element that features quite heavily in the comedian autobiographies but has rarely been acknowledged so far, is the mentioning of therapy or writing as being therapeutic within the comedian autobiographies. This combination of therapy, stand-up comedy, and writing will be discussed in Chapter 5.6. Humour is one element that shows up frequently in comedian autobiographies in a variety of different forms. It is also what shapes and differentiates this specific sub-genre of English literature from other genres.

How do comedian autobiographies compare to other/ ‘normal’ autobiographies and other autobiographical works of creative non-fiction? Taking the actor Christopher Eccleston’s *I love the Bones of you* as an example the following insights are revealed: Eccleston shares lots of stories about his childhood and later life, including industry insights and personal photos. At the same time, similar to Michael McIntyre’s book, Eccleston also offers a biography of his own father. The actor additionally reveals his struggles with depression and talks about seeking therapy – again something that many comedians mention. These are just two examples of similarities between comedian autobiographies and autobiographies; others include the preference of chronological structure.

As a second example of a different autobiographical work, Matt Haig’s *Reasons to stay alive* can be considered. Haig also writes about his experiences with depression and anxiety, but, in his autobiography his memories are interspersed with actual statistics and facts about mental health issues and Haig gives pieces of advice to the readers who may be in a similar position. One of many interesting features about *Reasons to stay alive* is that Haig created a conversation between his past and future self for a different perspective on his thoughts. The book is, in summary, similar to Sarah Millican’s *How to be Champion* as well as Simon Amstell’s *help*.

While the next chapters examine the comedian autobiographies in detail and address this question as well as a definition of comedian autobiographies in Chapter 6 – here is a first indication of the similarities between comedian autobiographies and autobiographies: The visual aspects and commercialisation appear to be very similar, as does the use of intermediality, the temporality in the works, the therapeutic element, literary devices and qualities. Yet what comedians add, unlike most other autobiographers, is the humour, the authenticity to their publicly known comedic persona, and the excerpts from stand-up comedy performances. These characteristics are a common feature of comedian autobiographies (but not usually of other autobiographies) and move these specific autobiographies towards the

creative side of autobiographical writing and clearly show that they are works of creative non-fiction. Together with the popularity and large number of such publications of comedian autobiographies, the humour-related peculiarity provides arguments for the creation of its own literary sub-genre. However, what happens when this argument is continued? If comedians get their own sub-genre, why not also group together all autobiographies written by actors or musicians? Certainly, such autobiographies by people from other professions are just as frequent and popular, and there will likely be common denominators amongst, for example, all musicians' autobiographies, but, as I am explaining and showing in this thesis, it is the humour aspect which does not usually exist in the autobiographies of anyone other than stand-up comedians, which differentiates comedian autobiographies from all the others. That is not meaning that other autobiographies cannot be very funny, (see for example Bill Bryson's *Life and Times of the Thunderbolt Kid*), it is more about the sustained attention and the expectation to be funny due to their known comedic persona.

The comedians make it look very simple and fun to write an autobiographical text, giving the impression that all you need to do is write down amusing anecdotes in a roughly chronological narrative, but as is known, "[creative non-fiction's] power is not its simplicity, but its ability to *disguise* its own incredible complexity" (Mays 320, emphasis original). And although it is a great achievement to have written a book (Hills, for example even went on a book tour to celebrate and promote his autobiography), there is a common belief that the studied comedians agree on: nothing beats performing live comedy. Millican for example, describes the adrenaline she gets from being a stand-up comedian (see Millican, *How to be Champion* 118: "The adrenaline I get at a gig when someone announces 'Sarah Millican!' is huge"). While reading Hills' book, some of his stories sound very similar to the stories that Bridges wrote about in his autobiography *We need to talk about… Kevin Bridges*, especially the descriptions of what a good comedy club should be, showing that both comedians had somewhat similar experiences in the beginnings of their comedy careers (for

example Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 22). At the beginning of their careers, Bridges and Hills have both had unsuccessful performances on stage and both speak of their experiences relating to the phrase "to die on your arse" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 24). Like many of the other comedians, Millican was "a performer who as a kid was afraid to perform" (Millican, *How to be Champion* 4), but simultaneously "destined to tell jokes for a living" (Millican, *How to be Champion* 5). Yet no matter how much they may have also enjoyed the writing process, the comedians' autobiographies suggest that they are still stand-up comedians rather than writers. Bridges, for example does not "feel skilled enough as a writer" (*We need to talk about… Kevin Bridges* 478), which is also visible in his struggles to start writing his autobiography at the beginning of his written work or just by looking at how passionate all the comedians are about their profession – although Millican does also frequently mention how much she enjoys writing creatively. Having said this, this research and analysis of autobiographical texts and performances written by stand-up comedians has also shown that both their performances and their autobiographies are inextricably linked with each other. Rather than stand-alone literary works, the autobiographies are more like an extension of the comedians' stand-up performances into a different medium.

In *Unreliable Memoirs* (2015), Clive James writes in his preface that "Most first novels are disguised autobiographies. This autobiography is a disguised novel" (1). As this thesis will show, for comedians writing autobiographies, the latter sentence could be changed to 'This autobiography is a disguised stand-up comedy performance'; especially also because comedians often see life as material for their art and their comedy is frequently based on their life-stories and experiences. The sub-genre of comedian autobiographies is still establishing itself and is still expanding. Some of the "Focus Comedians" are more experimental with their works than others, as my thesis will show in the main body. While creative non-fiction can break boundaries of literary genre, comedian autobiographies are conforming again, as they are following certain key characteristics amongst themselves, even if they may experiment

with those characteristics. The rest of this study now looks at the comedian autobiographies directly, picking out a number of elements featured in those works and explaining how they confirm or differ from what is known about and expected from autobiographical writing and creative non-fiction.

3. Narrative

While the previous chapter has explained some assumptions about creative non-fiction and autobiographical writing, this chapter now focusses on the specific narrative strategies employed in the selected comedian autobiographies. The shared experiences between the comedian and the reader as well as between comedians are examined. The relationship between text and stand-up performances is also studied. Theoretical concepts are thereby combined with direct examples from comedian autobiographies to illuminate the distinctive qualities of comedian autobiographies. Findings reveal a common narrative structure in comedian autobiographies, common topics and experiences that are shared by comedians, as well as a visible transformation in their lives as soon as the authors get into comedy. In addition to that, comedian autobiographies stand in an interesting tension with the on-stage stand-up comedy performances in terms of wording and percentage of stand-up excerpts used in the texts, with the autobiographical nature of comedy performances also being emphasised. This chapter firstly illustrates the initial impressions of comedian autobiographies, beginning with an explanation of some key characteristics of comedian autobiographies, particularly relating to the content and structure of the books.

3.1 Initial Impressions of Comedian Autobiographies

An autobiography is generally supposed to lead “the reader on a journey, allowing her to discover parts of the world that she might not normally see” (Gutkind and Fletcher 70). In the specific case of comedian autobiographies, the aim of the narrative is to get to know the comedians and their life stories as new material in addition to what the comedians share and how they act on stage. By doing so, the reader can discover hitherto unknown aspects of the comedian as well as the stand-up comedy industry. Fans/ readers being able to learn something new about the comedian whose autobiography they purchased, is one of the reasons why comedian autobiographies are popular. This new knowledge about the

comedian's life is enabled by the use of structure and other literary qualities employed in a work.

In terms of narrative structure, often, an autobiographer begins by writing about their birth and childhood, up to the current state of adulthood at the point of writing. Thereby, autobiographies impose a structure on lived experience as

> [g]ood memoirs are a careful act of construction. We like to think that an interesting life will simply fall into place on the page. It won't…Memoir writers must manufacture a text, imposing narrative order on a jumble of half-remembered events. With that feat of manipulation they arrive at a truth that is theirs alone, not quite like that of anybody else who was present at the same events. (Zinsser 5-6)

However, a narrative structure does not have to "follow a rigid chronological sequence" (Osborne 50) and the autobiographer can decide what stages of life they want to include, as Zinsser explains. Comedian autobiographies use a variety of different structures to their books, with the majority following a chronological structure, from birth to the current point of writing before publication.

It can be questioned what to put into an autobiography and why any autobiographer writes about their childhood in the first place (see Gass). The term autobiography (as opposed to memoir) traditionally implies the entire life, or at least as much of it as has been lived and the childhood and upbringing shows the reader who the comedians are and where they come from. In the autobiographies, comedians build up their own character through the stories they share.. In terms of the stand-up comedians it is additionally interesting to look at the following quote by William Gass, who says: "Autobiography is a life writing its life. As if over? Or as it proceeds?". Or rather adapted for the stand-up comedians – when stand-up comedians write their autobiography, should they only write about their lives leading up to becoming a comedian or should they include their career development too? Although for a reader certainly both would be interesting, the decision ultimately lies with the comedian or their managers or publisher. As the examples in this sub-chapter show, there is no direct uniformity about the comedian autobiographies in terms of structure and some comedians

may talk a lot about their careers in comedy while others will hardly mention anything about their comedy career.

In terms of the structure and content, the stand-up comedian Sarah Millican for example, mentions nothing about her birth, a memory from school is the earliest memory in the book. *How to be Champion* also follows a non-linear narrative structure. Simon Amstell's text is similar in structure to Millican's and Michael McIntyre includes everything from birth until the moment of him apparently being asked to write an autobiography (although the sentence indicating this may be a joke, which makes a point on authenticity and humour in the texts that will be discussed in Chapter 4.3). Adam Hills, too, writes about being born and ends at the point of him writing the book many years later. Kevin Bridges ends his autobiography with the performance that established him among the most successful contemporary stand-up comedians in the United Kingdom, instead of continuing to write about his experiences in more recent years up until the year of his book being published. As can be seen from these insights, comedian autobiographies usually follow a chronological structure that encompasses everything from birth to at least the comedians' first big performance, thereby following the traditional norm in fiction as well as autobiographical writing.

Another signifying element of comedian autobiographies that is very visible and designed to attract attention, are the titles of the books, as well as chapter titles. Not only can these titles indicate what the content and structure is like, but they can also be used to create humour and therewith suit the comedy persona of the stand-up comedians. Hills instantly creates humour by titling the foreword "Best Foot Foreword" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* ix), which is a play on the title of his own book *Best Foot Forward*. Such creativity with chapter titles can be seen throughout Hills' book, for example "A Star is Norm" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 13) instead of 'A Star is Born', "Better Late'n'Live than Never" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 160), which is a combination of the saying 'better late than never' and a reference to

the famous Late'n'Live comedy show at the Edinburgh Fringe, or "Para-Dise" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 254) hinting at his experiences at the Paralympics which he writes about in that chapter. All of those chapter titles are puns to be read and show that Hills paid attention to every aspect of the text by thinking about the chapter titles when he could have just numbered them, for example, as an alternative. Then again, there seems to be no consistency among comedians regarding this feature of creating humorous chapter titles. Some comedians simply number their chapters (for example Lenny Bruce, Bridges, McIntyre), some give the chapters humorous titles (for example Hills, Millican), some give the chapters titles that are not particularly humorous (for example Manford or Amstell, whose 8 chapters appear more like bigger thematic sections), and others may not have chapters at all. Connolly's *Made in Scotland* (published in 2019) is clearly divided into thematic sections (for example "The Shipyards", or "Religion"). The title of Bridges' autobiography can be counted as a literary device, similar to Hills' title – Bridges' one is a play with/ reference to the title of Lionel Shriver's novel about toxic masculinity *We need to talk about Kevin*, first published in 2003. Shriver's book is about a dysfunctional teenager who kills many of the people around him – Bridges does not comment on the title of his autobiography in his work or how the comedian relates to Shriver's book other than by sharing the same name as one of the main protagonists. The title does, however, raise some questions as to what people presume about Bridges and the book upon spotting the title. The use of the title is a literary joke, and potentially hints at how Bridges views himself, although according to the stories he shares in his autobiography, there is no apparent connection to his fictional namesake in his presented behaviour.

Looking at the content, usually included in the comedian autobiographies are stories which the comedians do not normally share on stage, like very specific information about their birth or childhood. In more depth, here are the insights from the textual analyses in terms of narrative structure:

Amstell's autobiography *help* was published by Square Peg in 2017. The book is a hybrid text which combines excerpts from his stand-up shows, and new and personal information about Amstell's life. In fact, as one reviewer writes, "[h]is story is interwoven with extracts from his major shows, to the point where those as familiar with his live act as with his TV work ... might feel a tad short-changed. Or wonder if their £12.99 might have been better invested in a live DVD" (Toberman). This statement is a hint at two of the key elements of Amstell's publication that will be examined throughout this examination of comedian autobiographies: literary value and the percentage of stand-up excerpts used in the books.

The many stand-up excerpts included in *help* reveal a lot about Amstell's thoughts on comedy and his writing process. The comedian for example, "go[es] straight to my computer and start[s] typing up what's happened, so I can tell *you* about it! And I'm annoyed with my own fingers for typing – Why do we have to do this so soon? Because we're too talented!" (Amstell, *help* 144, emphasis original). Amstell additionally shares life lessons in his excerpts that may work even better in a written medium: "But then, I was in a spa hotel in Spain, because life lessons can come from anywhere – many will come tonight. You won't realise, you'll think you've seen a comedy show and then tomorrow you'll think, Perhaps I should leave my husband" (Amstell, *help* 145). Furthermore, the comedian presents 'wisdom quotes' that are presented more effectively in a written text than on stage and which he therefore does not include in his stand-up performances: Amstell wrote the wisdom quotes in his notebook while being cured of past trauma with the help of ayahuasca (a vision inducing drug) in Peru, but "didn't mention any of these things in my stand-up show. I thought they were holy sentences that shouldn't be mocked. Each sentence was written on its own page, in capital letters and circled" (Amstell, *help* 179f.). Amstell then writes the sentences down in capital letters in his book to emphasise them and give the sentences the presentation that is acceptable to him. Some readers may then find some of these 'holy' sentences amusing, which creates

something of a cynicism with his ‘holy’ sentences having the potential to be entertaining. Amstell pays attention to formatting here, by trying to imitate the layout of the sentences in his notebook in the autobiography, too, resulting in a visual mimesis. The effect of this visual mimesis is that it brings the reader closer to the original text or notes that Amstell had as if the reader was allowed to take a glimpse into the comedian’s personal diary; thus creating a close relationship between the comedian and the reader.

With those sentences, Amstell’s comedic voice also seems to veer between extreme (possible false/ created) modesty and a grandiose sense of the comedian’s importance. The layout of those pages additionally plays a role in terms of the visual aspects of the book – a topic discussed later and just as important and constructed as the content of the text. In terms of literary qualities and narrative structure, Amstell’s work delineates from other autobiographies in that Amstell does not reveal much about his early years of life. Furthermore, with the inclusion of so many stand-up excerpts, Amstell’s additional autobiographical text does not offer a lot of opportunity for the comedian to demonstrate specific literary qualities, such as using many literary devices or building excitement in his work. Amstell’s more experimental comedian autobiography varies from most other comedian autobiographies in a number of ways, such as narrative, layout, but in particular the extensive use of stand-up excerpts, which is further discussed especially in Chapter 3.4.

In terms of the content of Kevin Bridges’ autobiography *We need to talk about... Kevin Bridges*. Bridges reflects on past events and at times comments on them from a current perspective – a feature used frequently by the comedians in their autobiographies. An example for this is on page 425, when Bridges reflects on the importance of comedy competitions for new comedians, admitting that “they are … undoubtedly influential … and it definitely helps to move on a level. I didn’t see it like that at the time but, looking back, writing this ten years later, I know they definitely laid some foundations for my career” (*We need to talk about... Kevin Bridges*). Just like Bridges thinks that “comedy could be social

commentary as well, and I'd enjoy it when the audience would laugh and then applaud, recognizing there was more behind the joke" (Bridges, *We need to talk* 429), his autobiography shows that there is more to him as a person than how he appears on stage, by sharing many childhood memories in a reflective manner. Interestingly, the comedian thereby questions the reasoning for him writing an autobiography at the young age of twenty-seven, saying that "Being asked to write your life story induces quite a surreal feeling and one that taps into every insecurity in the human conscience. Who wants to read this? Who gives a fuck?" (Bridges, *We need to talk* 11). Unfortunately, Bridges himself does not answer these questions in his book. He is likely writing by request of his management or book publishers and someone (mainly fans of his, as will be discussed later) will certainly buy it. At the same time, Bridges wonders, if his thoughts and insecurities about writing about his own life would have been different if he were older, but then the comedian comes to the conclusion that he did also start to perform stand-up comedy at a very young age when he was seventeen and that he has always felt older than he looked (Bridges, *We need to talk* 12). The comedian finds justification in this realisation.

Judging by the length of Bridges' book, it may not be too surprising that "more than a third of this book passes with him still at primary school. Beyond mild flirtation with a gambling problem, petty criminality and disclosing that he was an introverted cry-baby for much of his pre-teens, there's no scandal in his memoir and little of note that isn't already in the public domain" (Jay Richardson). In fact, Bridges describes his "final meeting with … school" only on pages 255f. of *We need to talk about… Kevin Bridges*, with another big part of his childhood (and the content in the early chapters in the book) taking form in his descriptions of his love for Celtic Football Club. Other comedians do not usually write this extensively about their childhood in their autobiographies, yet, what Bridges does here is somewhat similar to what John Cleese does in his memoir *So, anyway…* from 2015: The co-founder of the Monty Python comedy troupe writes about his time at school and university (as

a student and teacher) for about 173 pages of his 424 page long book. However, Cleese started performing and writing comedy while he was at university, which somewhat justifies this focus on education.

Bridges' book, on the other hand, "is perhaps over-packed with youthful memories, not all of which are notable, but they gradually build up a picture of an awkward, shy outsider" (Bennett, "We Need To Talk About Kevin Bridges"). But then, later on in the book, "[a]s with the autobiography of his early inspiration, Frank Skinner, Bridges also delivers compelling insights into the comedian's mind-set and what's required to make it" (Jay Richardson), which is a valuable insight regarding the readership (see also Chapter 6.3) and allows Bridges to arrive at the current time of his career and ultimately at the point of him writing his autobiography.

When looking at the writing styles used in comedian autobiographies to express the content, it quickly becomes clear that Bridges is well read; Bridges mentions that he has read a number of autobiographies in his life and ends his book with a Mark Twain quote (Bridges, *We need to talk* 478). Bridges brings together humour and religion and addresses the combination of both in his written work because "it's in the autobiography-writing manual" (Bridges, *We need to talk* 129) – which also is a form of reflexivity which draws attention to his literary endeavour. Although that was a joke – an 'autobiography-writing manual' for comedians does not exist – Bridges seemed to have known exactly what a traditional autobiography can be like in general and he has read autobiographies for pleasure before, with comedian Frank Skinner's autobiography having influenced Bridges' life immensely. Thus, Bridges is knowingly playing his text off against traditional autobiographies; using genre codes to certain effects (mainly to create humour and to show novelistic qualities and knowledge). There are of course many tips and guidelines that can be found on how to write an autobiography as seen in Chapter 2 of this study and even if Bridges' book clearly features a lot of characteristics of a standard autobiography (for example, having a chronological

structure and being self-reflexive), he tried to generally avoid using too "many autobiographical clichés" (Bridges, *We need to talk* 277). This thought of Bridges creates complications from an analytic and theoretical point of view, because he has read a lot of autobiographies and wants to avoid clichés, but then this seemingly prevents him writing a humorous or well-balanced book (containing several hundred pages on his relatively normal childhood), which makes *We need to talk about... Kevin Bridges* appear long-winded at times. It is the insights into the comedy business that would too, be particularly interesting for readers and especially for people that may want to go into stand-up comedy themselves, but the later chapters that discuss this, feel somewhat rushed; and it is doubtful that Bridges' book will have a similar impact on aspiring comedians as Skinner's autobiography had on Bridges. As a way of summarising the book, "[f]or the most part, Bridges doesn't intend to be funny in the writing, but the book is a candid primer into what made him the man he is – a personality that has proved phenomenally popular with the comedy-going public" (Bennett, "We Need To Talk"), which indicates that, according to Bennett, it is rather Bridges' personality that attracts readers to his autobiography rather than plot or humour, which other comedians give more priority to.

In contrast, the Scottish comedian Billy Connolly who is also from Glasgow, and who was an important figure in the history of stand-up comedy until his retirement (see Busby) had a different approach to writing his autobiography. According to Connolly, the idea for this book came about when a journalist said he was "coming from nothing", to which he replied "I didnae come from nothing: I come from Scotland" (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 7). In his autobiography *Made in Scotland*, Connolly continues by saying "this book is about why I will always be happy and proud that I do [come from Scotland]" (7). *Made in Scotland* is therefore not only an autobiography of Connolly, but also a social study and commentary on Scottish people (for example 11, 32, 34f., 92), and an (historical) account of Scotland (for example 74, 238, 242). Different articles and interviews, differentiated from the regular text

through a change in font and content, include personal anecdotes by Connolly, but are also mostly non-humorous, generally addressing extended matters he could otherwise only briefly mention in the autobiography as such without turning the autobiography into a collection of interviews or an anthology of cultural material.

Furthermore, the reader will soon realise that chapter titles are always quotes from the chapters, they are also rather large, and the general font of the text is very clean, making it easy to read. Yet what is most significant with regards to his thoughts on writing an autobiography is his statement that "I've always hated misery memoirs and that shite 'woe-is-me' style of writing. I just don't see the use of it. I also loathe that thing of 'I'm from a working-class slum, didn't I do well?' That whole stance leaves me cold. . . . What do they want, a medal?" (Conolly, *Made in Scotland* 12). "Even so, there is no denying that my early years, whichever way you look at them, were pretty grim" (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 12), but it is what shaped him and he could use his experiences for his comedy routines.

Connolly also wrote *Made in Scotland* with ghost writer Ian Gittins ("Ghost Writer"), possibly due to the comedian's struggles with his Parkinson's disease, which will be looked into in Chapter 5.4. Further, Connolly also released a book called *Tall Tales and Wee Stories* in 2019, which is a collection of transcripts from Connolly's stand-up shows, but, unlike Amstell's work, these excerpts are published separately from the comedian's autobiography. Connolly's work contrasts with Bridges' autobiography in that Bridges focusses on himself only rather than also on a national Scottish level and that Bridges does not include references to stand-up performances. Additionally, and a very specific literary quality is the difference in terms of usage of Scots words, which will be further discussed under the chapter of "Personas" (Chapter 5).

While Bridges focusses on his own life and particularly his childhood extensively, in comparison, the structure in McIntyre's book resembles a romance plot, complete with obstacles to his union with his wife, as well as the complexities of his parents' relationships. It

is interesting to note that despite being a national comedy star, McIntyre does not write about his immense success in recent years, but as he explains, he tried to write about the successes but then deleted the section because it sounded "like a long-winded arrogant CV" (*Life & Laughing* 359).

Instead, the main focus of McIntyre's autobiography is on his teenage years and adulthood. This is understandable from the artist's perspective as a lot of people knew him following his first Royal Variety Performance, however, from a reader's perspective, it may have been valuable and entertaining to see how much more his life has changed and what other comedy insights he could give based on his more recent experiences before the publication of the book. In 2017, Channel 5 showed a documentary "looking at the career of Michael McIntyre" ("The Michael McIntyre Story"). This documentary is essentially his autobiography, slightly extended, in a television format, with fellow comedians and friends providing additional insights and commentary on McIntyre's life, hinting at intermediality and commercialisation, which is discussed in Chapter 6.2.

Millican, again has a very different approach to framing her autobiography to any of the comedians looked at so far, by turning it into a self-help book, using a non-linear narrative structure in her work, and being even more creative compared to McIntyre and the expected norm of autobiographical writing. As will be explored in a moment, the stand-out feature of Millican's comedy persona is her crudeness, which also appears in her book and is unlike any of the other comedians analysed in this thesis. Starting at the beginning, as can be seen from the table of contents in the work, the autobiography consists of 43 chapters, plus a foreword, an 'afterword', and acknowledgements. This number of chapters may sound like a lot, but the chapters are generally very short, ranging from one page only, to a maximum of 22 pages, and as Bennett says, "[m]any of the chapters are in easy-to-digest list formats" (Bennett, "How to be Champion").

In the paperback edition of *How to be Champion*, two pages of reviews are very prominent even before the actual book begins, with Millican's father saying the book is "[a]s good as a cuddle" (Millican). Among the other people endorsing her work (presumably to attract buyers with positive opinions about the book) are some of her colleagues, namely the comedians Michael McIntyre, Jason Manford, and Alan Carr. The book reviews that can be found online are generally also positive towards Millican, although one reviewer makes a valid point:

> Sarah has a unique brand of comedy. She refers to it herself plenty. She states that it's ok to not like her brand of comedy, but you can't say it's not funny because clearly she is a very successful comic. For example, I've always loved Sarah since I first came across her on Michael McIntyre's Comedy Roadshow but when I was reading this book at work, my colleague said 'I don't like her she's too crude.' And I said 'that's ok because I think she's hilarious and I love that's she [sic] crude, it's a huge part of what makes her funny, in fact, I wouldn't say she was crude it's more that she's honest.' ("How to Be Champion by Sarah Millican. Review")

This quote depicts the split opinions comedy fans often have about Millican, either liking her style of comedy or not liking it at all. As the quote indicates, Millican's use of crudity is divisive and acts as the key element of her comedy persona: Millican is aware of how her comedy persona acts and uses it as a form of advertisement – generating fans by her crudeness and haters alike. The translation of on-stage comedy personas within the comedian autobiographies and its effectiveness is discussed in Chapter 5.

Delving into the content, the foreword of *How to be Champion* explains the title of the book; additionally, it is set up like a dictionary entry and immediately communicates - an idea of how creative the autobiography is regarding style, content, and structure. Throughout the book, Millican tells many anecdotes from her life, but in her well-known style: she often shares stories including what some readers may see as too much information or very private information that should perhaps not be shared publicly, for example, when the comedian reveals that when she is on the toilet her body often gives off a "pebble-dashing that sounds like a poorly motorbike" (Millican, *How to be Champion* 31), or on page 145, when Millican shares how she apparently asked her father to explain anal sex to her. Sharing 'too much

information' is thereby likely a deliberate (literary) strategy and relates to the notion that comedian autobiographies and comedian personas undergo a careful editing and crafting process, which is an important key understanding of comedian autobiographies made clear in this thesis. This strategy works by using explicit language and revealing extremely personal information to the public, such as the previous quote from page 31 of *How to be Champion*. The effect of this is, as indicated by the previously mentioned review, that many people may turn away from Millican's comedy and her written text as it makes them uncomfortable. A comedian's unique voice and use of language is crucial for shaping a persona:

> Lenny Bruce, for example, was renowned for his originality, taboo busting and improvisation skills; Richard Pryor, for his unflinching honesty and clever use of language; Joan Rivers, for introducing brash female comedy at a time when women were hardly noticeable on the comedy scene; and Bill Hicks, for his anarchic comedy, which was underpinned by a strong sense of morality. What all these comedians have in common is that they speak (or spoke) in their own authentic language, with conviction and imagination, about the things that they know and understand best. (Ritchie 32)

As this crudeness of Millican, as well as her focus on (breaking) gender-related prejudices is a predominant feature of Millican's comedy persona, this topic will be studied in more detail in Chapter 5.1.

Millican uses many creative strategies in *How to be Champion*. The narrative structure, for example, is non-linear: the chapters generally seem to be in no particular order. Stand-up topics are mostly in the latter part of the autobiography but not always directly grouped together. The book is rather written in a stream of consciousness and there are not always links between the chapters. The effects of this non-linear structure are that it can be difficult and confusing to read, as the stories Millican tells seem to be pulled apart, with no continuous flow moving through the entire book. This difficulty and confusion relates to temporality and is further discussed in Chapter 3.2. None of the other comedians analysed here – not even Amstell's work – employs such a literary strategy.

A useful parallel to Millican's autobiography is Sue Perkins' book *Spectacles* (2016). Perkins is best known in recent years for appearing on *The Great British Bake-Off*, together

with her comedy partner Mel Giedroyc (the act is known as Mel & Sue). Perkins's memoir, *Spectacles*, was first published in October 2015. In October 2018, she released an autobiographical travel book called *East of Croydon: Blunderings Through India and South East Asia*, which was shortlisted in the 'Autobiography of the Year' category at the 2018 National Book Awards ("East of Croydon"). The latter text is not mentioned again, as it focusses on her travels made with a film crew in tow for a documentary about the Mekong River, and not on her entire life. With 441 pages, Sue Perkins' autobiography *Spectacles* is, however, one of the longer books mentioned in this study. The book is a *Sunday Times* Number One Bestseller. Perkins' autobiography covers everything from birth, kindergarten, school, her pets, her time at Cambridge University, meeting her comedy partner and friend Mel, her time in London, marriages, Cornwall, tumour, relationships, and more. In addition to that, Perkins also gives insights into *The Great British Bake Off* (365ff.) and answers frequently asked questions about the television show in an interview style format.

Structurally, Perkins' work consists of five parts (different places) plus a preface and epilogue, photos and scans of other documents are included, but within the narrative and instead of in separate 'photo sections', which is positive, because other comedians would often say 'oh stop reading, look at the photo' or write in the caption of the photo 'see page 235', which results in a disruption of the reading flow. However, there is only one childhood photo and a few scans included in Perkins' work, which is not much at all in comparison to what most comedians do. Ultimately, Perkins bridges the gap between a work like Millican's autobiography (as the two share some literary devices such as playing with the reader through intrusions) and an autobiography like Bridges (both are of a similar length, but Perkins talks about more life topics than Bridges).

Also interesting to consider briefly are the works by Steve Coogan and his persona Alan Partridge. Coogan wrote a 'regular' autobiography about parts of his life, but then also a pseudo-autobiography as his comedy persona Alan Partridge. In the acknowledgements to

Coogan's *easily distracted*, the comedian thanks "Amy Raphael for co-writing the book with me, for guiding me, helping organise my thoughts, making me sound more eloquent and tolerating my endlessly straying off the point with nothing more than a sigh" (Coogan, 2). Most significant of Coogan's book is the following statement from his introduction: "Most of my life has been spent wanting to be someone else. If I pretended to be other people, then I didn't have to be me" and that both books by Steve Coogan and Alan Partridge have an index, which is a clear indicator of non-fiction and used by a number of stand-up comedians in their books, such as those by Billy Connolly (*Made in Scotland*), John Cleese and Stewart Lee. And although the pseudo-autobiography by the persona Alan Partridge would be interesting to investigate in great detail, this would greatly extend the scope of this thesis.

As can be seen by these explorations, in terms of narrative structure, the following insights have become apparent: most comedians attempt to follow a traditional narrative structure for their autobiographies. Additionally, comedians can decide what and how much they share, with some texts being heavily edited and shaped to portray a certain image of the comedian in an attempt to create a valuable publication for the comedian and reader in terms of sales and entertainment respectively, which will be discussed throughout the thesis.

3.2 Temporality

Another narrative feature that is noticeable in comedian autobiographies, is that autobiographies exhibit a complex temporality. Temporality thereby means here that

> Narrative texts undertake a plethora of remarkably complex temporal operations linking 'story' and 'discourse'. Genette (1980) lists three main correlations between 'story' -time and 'narrative' -time, namely, order, duration and frequency. First, order: events occur in a putatively real chronological order, but are then recounted in a more or less different order. Well-known examples of these techniques are 'flashback' (analepsis), or 'foreshadowing' (prolepsis), or beginning *in media res*. Second, duration: the respective duration of 'story' -time and 'narrative' time may be correlated in many different ways. Bal (1997: 102) delineates five possible durational rhythms: ellipsis, summary, scene, slow-down and pause. . . The reason that narrative texts can undertake such complex operations with narrative temporality is that they are multilayered constructs which contain in themselves a number of different temporal

> strands. Bal (1997: 81 – 83) identifies at least four temporal linear strands: (1) that of the lines of print, which the reader will consume or construct in a temporal reading process; (2) that of the 'story' which is assumed to be mapped, with more or less acute degrees of 'anachrony', by (3) the linear sequence of the narrative 'discourse'; and (4) the temporality of reading, already referred to, in which the three previous temporalities are woven together as a putatively coherent whole. It is not difficult, however, to imagine clashes and incoherencies between these four linear strands. (West-Pavlov 91, emphasis original)

These temporal elements and form of 'sequencing' is particularly prominent and noticeable in Millican's book, as demonstrated in this chapter. In an autobiography firstly, a

> narrator, in the here and now, takes upon himself or herself the task of describing the progress of a protagonist in the there and then, one who happens to share his name. He must by convention bring that protagonist from the past into the present in such a way that the protagonist and the narrator eventually fuse and become one person with a shared consciousness. Now, in order to bring a protagonist from the there and then to the point where the original protagonist becomes the present narrator, one needs a theory of growth or at least of transformation. (Brockmeier et al. 27f.)

Or, as West-Pavlov puts it, in "the normal process of autobiographical writing, … the narrative of the life ('story') progressively gets closer to the real temporal moment in which the writing subject is speaking ('discourse')" (89). In a diagram, the previous quotes would look something like this in the comedians' context:

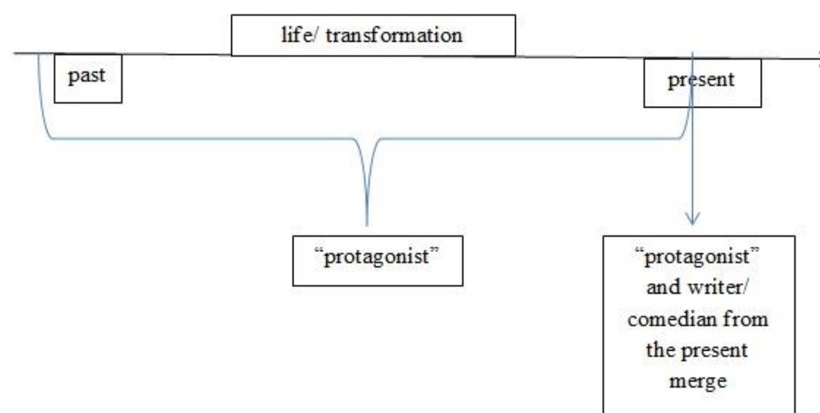

Diagram 1: Temporality

To explain, most easily the transformation or progress is told by following a chronological narrative, starting in the past and coming up to the present time where the 'protagonist' and

writer/ comedian become one, at which point the autobiographies by the comedians usually end with a story from their current present. Thereby, the ‘protagonist’/ writer/ narrator/ comedian, is retrospective and reflects on their past and present. But even if the narrative structure may be disrupted or apparently incoherent in some of the texts, (Millican especially frequently shares childhood memories followed by anecdotes from her present age at the time of writing, followed by childhood memories again), a transformation or growth is always noticeable in the autobiographies that are being dealt with in this investigation. Usually it is in the story of how the comedians became famous and successful, with some even having a ‘tragic backstory’ and being somewhat like a Bildungsroman (for example Millican or Bridges) and performing stand-up comedy being a turning point in their lives. This growth or transformation may be explored more or less extensively in the works, for example Hills (more) vs. Amstell (less). Thereby, essentially, “[t]he memoir’s prime stylistic distinction is a give-and-take between narration and analysis, one that directs the memoirist to both show and tell” (Larson 25) – meaning that the comedians give the reader information about their lives while simultaneously reflecting on their past. Readers then may be inspired by the comedians’ lives and their transformations and experiences. Thus, comedian autobiographies have the potential to influence society and for example, inspire a new generation of future comedians.

Further relating to the narrative, it is interesting at this point to investigate in more detail the temporality in comedian autobiographies: Aside from a non-linear narrative that sometimes occurs in the autobiographies (especially with Millican), the temporality in all of the analysed works, seems to create a special, dual-sided narrative tense at work here: In stand-up performances, a comment like ‘the other day I met someone’ which could introduce a humorous anecdote, is easily overlooked and does not matter as much, neither if it is the same ‘other day’ in the first show of a comedian’s tour nor on the last day of their tour. In books, where every single word is read carefully and subsequently has a meaning, such an indicator of time seems to have a bigger impact, especially, when there is a delay between

Millican writing and a reader reading the section.. McIntyre and Bridges, for example, both start their autobiographies by describing their 'writing action' to the reader. "I am writing this on my new 27-inch iMac" (McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 1), McIntyre writes, and Bridges gives the reader an update on his current word count of his autobiography before stating "[a]s I write this, I'm picturing you standing there, considering the purchase. A comedian's autobiography? . . . Hopefully now you'll take this over to the till and I can accompany you for the next wee while" (Bridges, *We need to talk* 7f.). These author intrusions address the reader directly and while they are part of the autobiography, they do not add to the general narrative of the comedians' lives. However, such commentary by the comedians once again shows their reflexive attention to the writing process. In terms of temporality, the reader of course knows that these sentences were written in the past, as they are already holding the published books in their hands. Millican, as another example, writes "I am, at times, a shoddy daughter, friend, person. Not wife, though. Always brilliant at that. Isn't that right, Gary? He's shouting 'What?' from the other room but I'm choosing to hear 'Yes'" (*How to be Champion* 2). This interaction with her husband, transcribed as if it was happening while Millican wrote the passage also feels like it is happening at the same time the reader is reading the passage, creating an interesting attention to time. On page 223 of *How to be Champion*, Millican mentions an event that was happening "[l]ast night", as well as that "[a]t the time of writing, I have photo shoots coming up for this book and the next tour". The comedian then gives the reader an update on the photo shoots on page 238. Millican is thereby essentially jumping from a story occurring in her past to mention something that is coming up in her future at the point of her writing at the present time (which is now also in the past as the book has been published), before continuing with a story set in her past and then commenting again in a past tense on the photo shoot that had been in the future for her but is now also in her past – all of which has happened already in the past from the reader's point of view at the (present) time of reading.

In stand-up, the

> comedian has an unwritten contract to address the here and now. If something unexpected happens during the show, whether it's a heckle, a dropped glass or the ringing of a mobile phone, the comic must react to it. . .The present tense is built into the language of stand-up. When comedians tell stories about past events, they're still related in the present. They say, 'I'm walking down the road …', not 'I *was* walking down the road …'. (Double, *Getting the Joke* 326)

For most of the time, the autobiographies are however, written in a past tense – with the occasional author intrusions in the present tense. A reader may decide here to ignore this focus on time and/ or employ the concept of willing suspension of disbelief. This term, used first by the Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1817, is an essential technique for story telling:

> The concept that to become emotionally involved in a narrative, audiences must react as if the characters are real and the events are happening now, even though they know it is 'only a story'. . . [Wilbur] Schramm argues that this is a general expectation for all entertainment (see also entertainment function): we are 'prepared to go along with a story or a spoof or a good joke, to identify and agonize with a character who never lived…to have a certain empathy with fictional characters, to go along with the conventions of films or broadcasts'. (Chandler and Munday)

In the autobiographies written by stand-up comedians, and also the comedians' performances, the above quote relates to their authenticity of both written and spoken works as well as their on-stage comedic character/ persona, which is a topic that is discussed throughout this work and in particular in Chapters 4.3 and 5. Generally, the readers/ viewers of comedian autobiographies or performances are expected to believe the comedian, subconsciously acknowledging that not everything the comedians say will be completely true but has been edited for comedic effect. By ignoring this, the reader/ viewer can enjoy the material independent of actual truth – as long as the material is authentic to the comedy persona. The believability of a (fictional) work then is often referred to as 'verisimilitude'. Readers will thereby accept a lot of what a comedian says or writes, as long as there is a congruity between what the comedians are saying and what the readers understand the comedian's persona to be (see more in Chapter 4.3 and 5). If a reader employs the willing suspension of disbelief for the

'mismatched' timeline (Millican writing vs the reader reading), the reader is likely to be entertained by the comedian's work. As a result, the written work is likely to become a success, just like the comedians' stand-up performances, which links to the next topic – shared experiences in the comedy industry and beyond that are retold and visible in comedian autobiographies.And after all,

> If there is such a thing as the story of the past and the present has to accept it, why can't the past accept the present's intrusion into its time? The answer I hear is, it can. And so, more and more, we encounter authors who are writing time-loosed journeys, bringing the how-I-remember and the what-I-remember face to face. The point is to portray that which the memoirist sees when he looks in the mirror of the past: himself, living what he is remembering. (Larson 47)

3.3 Shared Experiences (in Comedy)

What many of the comedians do and also have in common, is that they include shared experiences in their texts, which are either experiences that other comedians have experienced in a very similar way, or experiences that are shared between the comedians and readers. These shared experiences thus engage the reader. In fact, "[m]ost of us have similar experiences, but it is the way in which the individual comedian sees these experiences and what language [and (comedic) voice] they use to describe them that gives the act a unique spin" (Ritchie 26). Hills and Millican, for example, both participated in the television show *Who do you think you are?* and each of them describes the process of creating their episode differently. Bridges would like to participate in the show according to what he writes in his autobiography, but has not so far. McIntyre and Hills have both met the Scottish comedian Billy Connolly and have made jokes with him (see McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 70, 225), Bridges met Connolly too, (yet, Connolly does not mention having interacted with any of these comedians in his autobiography, however) and perhaps the most prominent agent in British comedy, Addison Cresswell, is mentioned by Bridges, Hills, and McIntyre, the latter

calling him "integral to everything good that has happened in my career [;] an incredible man and agent" (McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 367).

Furthermore, Millican states that she has "a big working-class chip on [her] shoulder" (*How to be Champion* 5), which she has in common with the comedian Bridges, whereas McIntyre likes to talk and joke about his middle-class upbringing. (More differences and similarities are in the table in the introduction.) Connolly himself states that straight from the beginning, when he was a young boy:

> I did have a vague idea, buried deep within me, that I'd like to be a comedian, but really, I might as well have wanted to be a fucking astronaut, for how likely it was. In fact, I only ever mentioned it once [when my school teacher asked what I wanted to do [after school]. 'Sir, I'd like to be a comedian,' I told him. The class erupted in laughter. 'Well, I saw you playing football at lunchtime,' Mr Sheridan told me. 'I think you've already achieved that ambition.' (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 56)

He becomes the class clown (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 20) and is surrounded by jokers and jokes throughout his childhood (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 62, 65). Connolly soon wants to be like Patter merchants (*Made in Scotland* 61), and incorporates first stand up material into his music performances. At first, he copies others (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 157), "And when I started out, my humour was totally bound up in Scotland and Scottishness" (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 5), but with his first success (see Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 120), he evolves, learning that you can swear on stage (see Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 117). "My storytelling stuff was still new and growing and I never went on stage with the first idea of what I was going to say. Often, somebody might just tell me a joke then I'd tell it to the crowd in an extended fashion" (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 153). Connolly's goal was "to go somewhere else with comedy, to get deep into ordinary life, and how people thought and talked, and politics, and to kind of be a commentator on the society that I lived in" (*Made in Scotland* 159).

Starting out as a comedian is never easy, often new comedians lack in quality or quantity of jokes, in Connolly's case, he

> didn't have a technique for changing the subject. . . I would be talking about something in the joke and it would remind me of something else and I'd go off on a limb then come back again. My theory, if I had one, was to keep talking until I remembered what it was that I was talking about. . . It was a mystery to me where it was all coming from. I never had notes, or a script. I might have a scrap of paper with a few words on it. Nowadays, I have a stool with a glass top on stage, and it has my headlines [i.e. key words] on it. (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 160)

On a related note, McIntyre puts a great focus on what his father, who was also a comedian, did before him: "It's fascinating for me to see my dad's notes. A comedian's notes tend to make little sense. They will consist of subject headings and key words. . . Comedians carry around these scribbles of key words that they hope contain the DNA of a good gag" (McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 29), saying that "I don't know if he wrote all of it, some of it or none of it. I know that comedians back in those days used to share jokes around a lot, but nevertheless it's still funny. I have gags, I couldn't really survive without punchlines, but a lot of my material is observational or mimicry" (McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 31). This is something that Connolly does too. Connolly, "was just going on stage and inventing stuff, which is what has made my name, but even now I find it difficult to analyse or describe how it works. I didn't think that I had invented a new realm of comedy, though" (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 162). It is only in the later part of the book that McIntyre comments on his own career in *Life & Laughing*, revealing that he picks up accents easily (124), has played in many Jongleurs clubs up and down the country (301ff.), and played at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe (305f.), which are all experiences that he shares with other comedians.

Millican also cares a lot about her comedy shows, wanting every tour to be better than the one before and saying that at the point of writing her autobiography she is "only thirteen years into this job, and there's a lot still to learn" (*How to be Champion* 62). The comedian tells many anecdotes about her industry experiences in *How to be Champion*, for example about life on the road 196ff., dedicating one entire chapter to advice on how to be a comedian (257ff.), and how 'Millican's Law' can be a helpful tool for every comedian, and also everyone else; the 'Law' being that "if I've had a bad gig … then I can only be sad, furious,

frustrated and annoyed about it until 11am" (Millican 192ff.), which simultaneously relates back to her autobiography being a self-help book. Like many other comedians, Millican also explains how she first got into stand-up comedy, and how it felt when she was in the early stages of her comedy career, for example, when she talks about how "when I first started doing stand-up I would get so nervous that I couldn't eat for five hours before my gig" (*How to be Champion* 44). Thereby, becoming a comedian and taking on the identity of a comedian, and then writing about it in the autobiography, is an important element in this and other comedian autobiographies in terms of transformation, narrative, and shared experiences.

More direct examples and insights from the texts of shared experiences between comedians in terms of their industry experiences are the following: Amstell admits that in the past, for him, and likely also other comedians, "jokes are not easy to come by and then the show was already too short" (*help* 57), which is the reason that he will talk a lot about his (current) happenings in his life. Amstell moreover benefits from his connections with other people from the entertainment sector that constantly inspire him, such as actors, musicians, or other comedians like Russell Brand, with whom he is friends (Amstell, *help* 191). The name-dropping of celebrities is a common occurrence of autobiographical literature by celebrities and it entices readers in anticipation of possible gossip and allows them entry to a world of privilege from which they would usually be excluded. Finally, as mentioned earlier, Bridges' autobiography contains very little about his stand-up comedy experiences, the reason for this is unclear, but sharing comedy insights would have expanded his work even more.

The conclusion from these discoveries could be that the comedians seek out and emphasise tropes of shared experiences in order to establish a connection/ sympathy in their readers. It is possible that these 'overlaps' are mere coincidences, however they do make the comedians appear more 'human' (rather than being 'heightened' celebrities) like any of their audience members and fans, which could mean that these similarities between the comedians and their readers have been carefully chosen to be mentioned by the comedians to have the

afore-mentioned effect. Then again, McIntyre grew up with connections to the comedy industry (via his father), which may have helped him especially in the beginning of his career and therefore could perhaps be seen as 'not coming from nothing' as opposed to the other "Focus Comedians". What matters though, is that the comedians share privileged insights into the comedy industry, while simultaneously trying to claim that they are just like the reader, which creates an interesting duality. Additionally, readers can gain new information about their favourite comedians and other famous people the comedians meet and mention in their texts. Comedians reveal something about their own personality as well as about the personality of the people they interact with in their autobiographies by retelling their experiences. By writing about their experiences in the comedy industry, comedians additionally have the opportunity to comment on short-comings in the industry and give an image of the industry to their readers, which may have the potential of readers wanting to pursue a career in comedy themselves, or possibly even comedy clubs etc. making changes if they are not portrayed in a positive light by the comedians.

As a final note here and bridging the topic of shared experiences of comedians (and readers) with the following sub-chapter, a study presented in *The experience of reading* by Alan Moore and Eric Schwitzgebel, shows that readers will frequently engage with visual experiences while reading, meaning that readers can easily imagine the scene described on page. Readers may even picture the comedian 'talking' to them while reading the book, practically turning the comedian autobiographies into stand-up performances. In a way, this relates to shared experiences where the reader feels as though the comedians are sharing the narrated experience with the reader. Particularly, comedians like Sarah Millican or Kevin Bridges, who have a very distinctive voice in terms of accents (and with Millican also the pitch of voice and crudeness), it is very likely for readers to 'hear' their voices while reading their autobiographies. This is relevant again at a later point in the chapters dealing with voice and personas specifically. It also links to the following sub-chapter, which discusses the text

in relation to stand-up performances and investigates the similarities and differences between the two media in detail.

3.4 The Text in Relation to Stand-up

One question, when looking at stand-up comedians and their autobiographies, is the level of contrast between the book and stand-up performances are. This sub-chapter compares comedian autobiographies and stand-up comedy performances in terms of content, voice, and other significant differences or similarities between the two media. Thereby, the term ‘text’ in this thesis refers to the autobiographical books published by the comedians. ‘Stand-up’ on the other hand, can be autobiographical too, but firstly is defined as “[a] solo performance usually involving a performer with a microphone, aiming to make the audience laugh every thirty seconds or so; but it has many variations. Stand-up can be performed to one person or many – however, its success is not dependent on the number of people but on the relationship between performer and audience” (Ritchie 12). The readership of comedian autobiographies as well as the relation between watching and reading comedy material is discussed in Chapter 6.3, this current sub-chapter looks at a direct comparison between the autobiographies and the stand-up performances in terms of content and delivery.

To start off, Amstell includes many direct quotes from and references to his stand-up shows in his autobiography, *help*, most of which are from the show *numb* (2012; see the following table) which show in particular, how closely a comedian autobiography and a stand-up performance are connected. Thus, his book gives the reader the impression of reading his regular performances instead of hearing them live, while also receiving some additional background information regarding the stand-up passage that were excluded from the shows. An analysis of the excerpts shows that they are composed as follows (a detailed explanation of the table follows):

stand-up show	**excerpts on pages in *help* (2017)**
no self (2007)	49, 50, 53f., 55, 63, 72, 96, 152
do nothing (2010)	1, 7, 9, 20f., 26f., 33, 37, 41-43, 44, 47f., 58f., 62f., 66-71, 78-83, 85f., 124, 129, 132f., 134-137, 139-141, 157, 161f.
numb (2012)	14, 64f., 65f., 72, 73, 74f., 75, 76, 76f., 102-104, 106, 107f., 114, 117, 122, 128, 129, 131, 138, 142, 143f., 145-147, 154, 155, 158, 159, 160, 163, 173, 175, 178, 179, 182, 188f., 202f., 204-206
to be free (2015)	13f., 38, 39, 39f., 45-47, 86f., 97-99, 100-102, 107, 110f., 115f., 177f., 187, 190, 191f., 195-198

Table 3: Excerpts in *help*

The right column shows the page numbers of Amstell's autobiography on which there are excerpts from his stand-up shows. These excerpts are sorted according to which stand-up show they come from, which is indicated in the left column (with the title of the show and year of performances from that tour). As can be seen from the table, the most excerpts in *help* stem from the show *numb*, whereas the fewest excerpts are from the show *no self*. Aside from all the excerpts are some more pages that feature other, different types of transcripts, for example from his television show *Grandma's House*, or excerpts from a notebook Amstell kept, to write down his experiences with the drug ayahuasca. All transcripts combined, excluding the pages with the chapter titles, the introduction, and the epilogue, but including the pages with notes from his ayahuasca experience, leaves only 65 pages that are entirely new information that cannot be found in his performances. The transcripts themselves repeat material, therefore not necessarily adding any new value for a reader. Generally, Amstell's transcripts contain the same text/ material but in a different medium (written instead of

spoken) and slightly edited (that is they are not the transcripts of the whole shows). Having excerpts from the shows in print appears to have been done according to the publisher's wishes (Amstell *help*, introduction). When presenting transcripts in his book, Amstell uses different fonts for excerpts and texts to distinguish them from the main autobiographical narrative, but also from each other. This is already indicated in the introductory note in Amstell's book, which presents the shows' titles and year of the first performance of each show in the same fonts/ typography as they appear in the autobiography.

The reader is expected to read the excerpts from the transcripts of the comedy performances, which are featured heavily in his book too, for context (for example Amstell, *help* 21). Reading these excerpts in combination with the remaining autobiographical text helps the reader to understand the information Amstell gives the reader in addition to the stand-up show excerpts. This means that the excerpts are a part of the overall narrative of the book. The transcripts are often extended by the new material and are thus viewable in a different context and order in comparison to how they appear in a stand-up performance. On top of that, the transcripts, are primarily humorous, and are what the publisher had wanted in the beginning, according to Amstell (Amstell, *help* introduction). It is possible that with this, Amstell creates an excuse for his own writing, so if the book was not received well, he could claim the publisher is to blame and not him.

More interesting, is the question of how the excerpts are transcribed from the stage performance (for example Amstell, *help* 175). After watching a few of Amstell's shows, the answer to this becomes clear quite quickly: the transcripts are actual transcripts, as claimed by Amstell in the introduction of *help* (3), as for most of the time they are exact word-for-word transcripts. Even filling words, or more conversational words like "actually" or "now" (Amstell, *help* 7), and breaks, signified by ellipses, for example on page 20 "So one day… And I know", or "…Now I…Look, it's not ideal" (Amstell, *help* 136), were noted down in the transcripts. On page 175 of Amstell's *help*, there is even a literal visualisation of an action he

does on stage transcribed in brackets as “I just did this motion… [beckons him]” in the excerpt of *numb* for context. Sometimes, the transcripts in the book are not embedded into the text in the same order as they are told on stage: for example, Amstell includes excerpts from his show *do nothing* on pages 81, 47, 33, then back to 81 of *help* if put in the same order as in the show. For a reader that spots this, the new or different order of transcripts reveal that Amstell uses similar themes in his shows, connecting the shows, and providing new context/ the text in a new light. The comedian is, for example telling one part of (entertaining) material about a specific experience or relationship in one show, and then another part that extends and reveals more about that experience or relationship in a different show. Thus, the book allows an extended sense of connection across shows for readers equipped to identify it and offers new literary value via its textual medium.

Reading the transcripts parallel to listening to the shows, it can be seen that some sentences he says on stage are not reprinted in the excerpt in the book (compare Amstell, *help* 139 and “Simon Amstell: Do Nothing Live” ca. 0:21:55-0:22:53). It is not the usual procedure for comedians to have an entire script before a show, so this observation suggests that these transcripts are not transcripts from the official DVD version, but from other performances of his tours and it also shows some editorial decisions made when transcribing texts. This discovery adds insights into the understanding of the comedy creation process, as well as the relationship between writing and performing – primarily emphasising the importance of editing.

When on stage, Amstell does not usually talk to the people in the audience/ interact with them often, making his shows feel a lot like the book, as if he was only telling the story to himself but happens to have a few more listeners around that interrupt his narrative with laughter. Yet Amstell knows that he is a stand-up comedian, someone who needs a microphone on stage because otherwise he is just a man standing on a stage (see “Do Nothing Live” ca. 0:42:54). The comedian’s theatrical background influences his shows by content,

repetition (for example “Do Nothing Live” 0:44:44), and volume of voice (in *do nothing* he says he was taught to just do everything loudly).

Generally, the stand-up excerpts in *help*, “can feel repetitive, especially since the standup often sounds flat on the page and distant compared with the livelier, more confiding narrative voice of the book” (Merritt). And it can be claimed, that “few things are less funny than a standup routine set down on the page, stripped of every crucial pause, cadence, facial expression and nuance of audience interaction, and Amstell’s deadpan style is a vital ingredient of his comedy” (Merritt). This tension also relates to the earlier passage that mentioned the implications of including transcripts in a comedian’s autobiography.

By way of comparison, Stewart Lee’s autobiography *How I escaped my certain fate – the life and deaths of a stand-up comedian* (first published in 2010) includes autobiographical elements and gives insights into the “psychology and lifestyle of a working comedian” (Bennett “Stewart Lee”), but it “seems little more than a print version of a DVD commentary” (Bennett “Stewart Lee”). Lee publishes “the transcripts of three of his solo shows with liberal footnotes about how each routine came to be” (Bennett “Stewart Lee”), which creates the impression that the book can only be enjoyed by “the most meticulous analysts of stand-up who just have to know the arcane details behind every laugh, rather than enjoying a routine at face value” (Bennett “Stewart Lee”). Thus, Lee’s book is somewhat autobiographical, but mainly a book which contains transcripts from his stand-up comedy performances, as well as additional notes/ commentary on his life or further background information about his performance that would not have fit on stage. An example of one of his annotations as written in a footnote about a performance is the following remark about a ‘conversation’ he has with the audience on page 193 of *How I escaped a certain fate*: “Here I flatter the poor fools. I make them think they are as clever and funny as me, so that we are all in the game together come the difficult second half”. And so, not only through a potentially limited readership, but

also by re-printing stand-up shows, Lee's and Amstell's books share similarities and are simultaneously being experimental with their publications.

In Amstell's work *help* there are often several excerpts in one row, all fitting, telling bits of the same story, which is very collage-like. Moreover, some excerpts are rather long, for example one continuous excerpt from *do nothing* on pages 66-71, which again, was most likely done at the publisher's request (see Amstell 3). There is a certain tension between the commercial imperatives and the comedian's integrity as an autobiographer. This tension is explicitly noticeable in almost all the comedians' autobiographies studied here and will thus be examined further in Chapter 6.2 that deals with commercialisation of comedian autobiographies. By using so many excerpts, Amstell's work delineates a lot from the classic understanding of an autobiography. However, the genre of comedian autobiographies is still exploring different forms and allowing space for a variety of publications and so Amstell's work is of value to the genre even if it is different still from most comedian autobiographies.

When comparing Bridges' book with his stand up DVD recordings, the following few overlaps can be noticed content-wise: In "Kevin Bridges - The story so far" (2010), he refers to working at TKMaxx as a teenager (0:32:37-0:33:36) and mentions a few more childhood memories that are not in the book. In the routine of "The story continues" (2012) Bridges gets more political, but makes a joke about the Paralympics which is similar to a joke that Adam Hills makes in his autobiography (0:17:30-0:19:28). Generally, however, the content of all his shows has very little to do with anything that he writes about in his book. This is a key insight from Bridges' analysis: the content of his book is different from his on-stage performances and thus the voice appears slightly different (less humorous). The autobiography is dealing with many more personal experiences than the comedian's stand-up shows, and as Bridges states in it, his book is mostly about his childhood and he ends the narrative with his first big SECC show (which is "The story so far"), which was the show that was his definite break-through in stand-up comedy. Once again, the novelistic qualities of Bridges' work come

through, as the narrative in his autobiography is reminiscent of a Bildungs- or Künstler-roman like James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Bridges' television show *What's the Story* (2012), designed to reveal more about the inspirations for Bridges' material, does not really explain more than what could already be deduced from the comedian's stand-up shows, and his autobiography goes only a little bit deeper.

In comparison, an examination of the Hills' texts and stand-up performances uncovers the following insights: Most British fans of Hills will probably know him as the host of the Channel 4 TV show *The Last Leg* or have seen him perform one of his (to date) fifteen solo comedy tours. A few of the jokes he tells on stage are written down in his autobiography *Best Foot Forward*, either directly or can be seen as being referred to indirectly. Among them is, for example an indirect reference to what may be the best joke that Hills has ever come up with as it is very popular amongst his fans: What is in the book simply written as "Captain Cook first came ashore in 1770, on the southern edge of Botany Bay" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 7), when Hills explains where he comes from, is told on stage in a far more entertaining way, which cannot be conveyed the same way on paper – as the reader cannot hear the accents Hills imitates – but can be watched on YouTube in a clip from the Melbourne Comedy Gala Festival 2006 (see Hills, "Adam Hills – Australian accents").

Another popular Hills highlight is the one where he speaks about his experiences with his artificial leg that sets off metal detectors at airports whenever he travels to other countries for performances. Written down in *Best Foot Forward* on page 172ff., the joke is also made in several of Hills' on-stage performances, most notably perhaps in his show *Happyism* (2013). Hills even writes in his book that "[i]f you've seen my stand-up, you'll know what comes next, but I want you to know the story I tell on stage is exactly how it went down" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 172). The situation is indeed told in very similar words on stage and in the book, but on stage Hills actually pats down his body and the artificial right foot sounding very different than the rest of his body can be heard (Hills, "Adam Hills Happyism

2013" 00:30:25-00:30:33). In the autobiography, Hills makes a brief excursion on other stories about his missing foot, but then continues by saying "[for the stand-up performance] I tried to find a line that would convey how ridiculous [the situation] felt to me. . . The line I came up with to describe the security guard's reaction sums up why I talk about my foot on stage: 'He looked at me with a face that says, "I don't care if the plane goes down, I don't want to offend a spastic."'" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 175), the last sentence being in the exact same words Hills uses on stage. Both in the book and on stage, the joke is followed by a re-telling of a conversation Hills had with the producer of an American TV show regarding the use of the word 'spastic', which is told slightly differently in each media but with the same outcome.

In the stand-up show, a brief anecdote about the Royal Variety Performance follows, where the same thing happened in that Hills was not allowed to use the word 'spastic' in his performance. Hills' performance at the Royal Variety Performance in 2009 is available to watch on YouTube (see Hills, "Adam Hills - Royal Variety Performance 209").[7]

In this comedy performance, Hills also tells the 'metal detector' joke (see Hills, "Royal Variety" 00:01:08-00:01:58) but in slightly different words, saying "I didn't want to offend a disabled guy" instead of the original 'spastic', adapting it to the audience and occasion of the event. Nonetheless, both on-stage performances have more similarities in the exact phrasing than each of the performances has with the passage in the book. However, the book also gives more humoristic insights into everything that happened before and after his appearance on stage at the Royal Variety Performance (see Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 267f., 273) and the book gives insights into the creation of comedy and repetition of material, which is something that most comedians reveal when talking about their profession.

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[7] The Royal Variety Performance is "the entertainment industry's annual fundraising event for the Royal Variety Charity, whose sole-Patron is Her Majesty The Queen" ("Royal Variety Performance"). The event has been running since 1912 and many popular comedians have performed at the Royal Variety Performance over the years which has thus become a marker of mainstream success in a United Kingdom context.

According to Hills, two of the people he admires the most are His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and Kermit the Frog from the Muppets. It is thus not surprising that he talks about his meeting with each of them both in his comedy performances, as well as in his autobiography. Page 281ff. deals with Hills' humorous meeting with the Dalai Lama and the comedian even writes in the book that "[s]ome of what happened made it into my stage show *Happyism*, but not all of it" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward*). The entire experience was edited down for the stand-up performance to make it more comprehensive and shorter to fit in with his set time, but in the book it is re-told in extremely similar words. However, on stage, Hills imitates the voice of the Dalai Lama, which cannot be done in written form, and there is a discrepancy between the book and the stand-up show in the continuation following the story (see Hills, "Happyism" 00:44:16-00:47:21). The Muppets are the topic of pages 285-292 of *Best Foot Forward*, when Hills recalls doing a show with the Muppets in Montreal, Canada. A video recording of this Montreal show exists for proof (see Hills, "Swedish Chef"). A reference to the Montreal show is also made in *Happyism* (Hills, "Happyism" 00:51:10-00:56:22), but the situation is described in more detail in the book: Hills does not use exactly the same words in the book as he does on stage in his show *Happyism*, and neither are the words exactly the same from the original Montreal performance, but they are a close equivalent. This is significant, because it shows how much overlap there is between the media and what new information audience members can gain from reading the book versus knowing the performance.

Also, in *Happyism* and in the book, Hills mentions his appearance in an episode of the TV show *Who do you think you are?* (2016), in which he learns that his "eleven-times great-grandfather . . . . was a pirate" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 305), which "explains why [Hills has] got one leg" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 305). It took Hills a long time to connect the fact his ancestor was a pirate to him missing a leg, which is funny in itself but somehow even funnier in the show *Happyism* (Hills, "Happyism" 00:27:01-00:27:53), where the comedian

admits that “it took me two hours to work that joke out” (instead of one and a half hours as written in book). On stage, the pirate material is extended by a story taking place in Malta, where parts of the *Who do you think you are?*-show had been filmed, and where Hills singles out two Australian-Maltese women in a crowd who were talking in an Australian accent, just by the sound of their accent alone and using an “Aussie sonar to track them down” (Hills, “Happyism” 00:33:11-00:34:38). He then imitates the sound but gets a bit distracted/ carried away on stage, which is something that does not occur to such an extent in the book. In his most recent stand-up show *Clown Heart* (2017), Hills talks about his father’s death, which is mentioned only very briefly in his autobiography (see Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 14, 326). The story goes that Hills’ father had leukaemia, and in memory of his favourite film, he and his son would end every conversation on a ‘high note’. In *Clown Heart*, this information about Hills’ father and their relationship, is extended to a shocking but humorous incident that happened when Hills was scattering his father’s ashes (see Hills, *Clown Heart* 00:48:48-00:57:46). These examples show that there are overlaps in Hills’ book between the text and his stand-up performances, although there are not as many as in Amstell’s book for example, and Hills adds further information to the stand-up stories in *Best Foot Forward*.

In summary, Hills uses a lot of dark humour, identification-based humour (in terms of creating jokes based on languages and cultures), and creates moments of laughter caused by imitating voices and accents of other people, relief and irony based comedy, all on stage and in his autobiography. On stage he moreover makes use of body language and the additional humour that comes from having a sign language interpreter with him (for more on embodiment/ voice and the humour created through his disability and sign language, see Chapter 5.2). Hills can interact very well with his audience, in fact, approximately the first thirty minutes of his stand-up comedy shows consist of him talking to the audience, joking with them and being spontaneous in coming up with witty responses on the spot. These

interactions make him digress in performances, which he does not do in the same degree in the book.

In the book, his foot is used as a source of humour too, for example in anecdotes from Hills' childhood, where a friend of his father visited them "with his leg in a cast. It was hidden below his jeans, so he knocked on his shin, which then made a loud clunking noise. 'I bet you can't do that!' he dared. I then reached down and knocked on my jeans, and the exact same sound came from underneath. He looked startled, my parents burst into laughter" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 11). The comedian's writing style is very easy to read and enjoyable, and thereby makes the reader instantly happy even after a more shocking story. This is similar to how the comedian appears on stage, where he can always be found spreading a feel-good happiness. Hills' love for music can be detected in both his book and his stand-up performances, as he also likes to sing at the end of his shows. Yet some things are better said than written and vice versa, sometimes the jokes in the book only make sense when reading them but not when spoken aloud. All in all, Hills refers to a few of his best jokes from stand-up in the book. Most times he does not simply re-tell them, but rather shares the story of how they came about, gives some additional background information or sometimes does not even mention that what he just wrote relates to his stand-up but attentive readers who also know his stand-up performances will be aware of it. The autobiography thereby is an entertaining work to read without Hills relying too much on jokes that he has already told on stage.

Despite this similarity to Hills' on-stage performances, a closer look at his autobiography shows that the foreword is entirely addressed to the reader, but other than that, there is only little, disruptive author intrusion throughout Hills' book. The first chapter of *Best Foot Forward* begins like an adventure story and if the reader did not know, it could be the beginning of a fictional novel. Hills writes in an entertaining and rather colloquial style. In short, Hills writes as if standing in front of the reader and talking to the reader in person. Examples for this from the Hills' book *Best Foot Forward* are "Aaanyway" (15), "Whaddya

want from me up here?" (25), "Ooh" (32), "(That's how we saw it anyway) … Ahem" (33), "Basically" (36), "m'lud" (37), and "Ah, yes, how terribly, terribly witty" (75). This is not something that other comedians do as frequently as Hills, in their autobiographies, even though this manner of writing forms a closer connection between the author and the reader, very similar to how Hills behaves on stage in a performance. From an autoethnoegraphical perspective, I found this way of spelling and the colloquialisms in general, make his writing more entertaining to read than many other comedian autobiographies.

McIntyre, as another example, writes passages about his life and then mentions that he has talked about the very same experiences in his stand-up performances. Among them, is a part about not looking good in photos: "I had some stand-up material along those lines about passport photos and how people hide them claiming, 'It's a terrible photo, I'm really ugly in it, I don't look anything like this.' If this was true, they wouldn't get past immigration, but the fact is they do" (*Life & Laughing* 23). McIntyre also briefly mentions "Morning breath (something I have discussed at length in stand-up)" (45) in his autobiography, and indeed the topic is mentioned for example in his *Hello Wembley* show (1:19:07-1:21:50 & 1:23:10-1:24:32), as well as in *Happy & Glorious* (0:17:14-0:17:58). When McIntyre talks about his children taking ages to leave the house (*Life & Laughing* 54), the reader who knows his performances, will know that he talks about his children a lot on stage too. The story featured in his book, about him meeting Marc Cousins (McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 227f.), is similar to the one he tells about meeting Andy Murray in *Showtime* (McIntyre 0:04:24-0:05:38). On page 199f. of *Life & Laughing*, McIntyre gives an anecdote about struggling to spread his father's ashes, which very much reminded me of the similar situation experienced by Hills (*Clown Heart*). Generally, though, there are very few content overlaps between McIntyre's book and stand-up performances.

Perhaps the most apparent difference between his autobiography and his stand-up shows is that in the book, McIntyre sounds a lot less camp, which is a big part of his on-stage

appearance/ voice on stage, even though McIntyre is not gay; and the comedian's characteristic and frequent use of body movements on stage is missing in the book, because it would not translate well. Thereby, "Gay characters have often been camp, but campness does not necessarily imply gay sexuality. Camp has always been used as a comic tool… [and it] can also be used by heterosexual stand-up comedians" (Ritchie 47f.). Campness can make a comedian stand out from others and sexuality is therefore important in the shaping of a persona. The 'camp' voice and physicality of McIntyre is thus one aspect of his persona; a topic which is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Furthermore, McIntyre's love for imitating accents can also not always be translated onto the page as his characteristic voice that would make the imitations even more amusing, is missing. Instead, the autobiography *Life & Laughing* is more personal and includes more stories about McIntyre's life, than the comedian shares on stage, where his main material is based on humorous observations.

The next and final comedian that is analysed in detail in terms of text in relation to performance is Sarah Millican, who never shies away from creating comedy by sharing very personal information both in her book and stand-up performances. Millican differs from the comedians analysed previously in that she has different overlaps to her stand-up shows in her autobiography due to its special format and framing as a self-help work.

In fact, there are few similarly phrased overlaps between Millican's book and her stand-up shows, however, there are many thematic similarities featured in all her works, including her relationships with her ex-husband and current husband, country versus city life, Millican's parents, and her body. In *Home Bird* (2014) for example, she briefly mentions her family being affected by the miners' strike (Millican *Home Bird* 1:07, *How to be Champion* 16ff.). In another show she recalls telling stories from behind the curtain (Millican *Thoroughly Modern* "the body book" 3:40, How to be Champion 4f.), and talks about moving back in with her parents (Millican *Thoroughly Modern* "wiping" 13:50, *How to be Champion*

101). Although drawn from TV broadcasts rather than a full stand-up performance/ live DVD recording as such, it is also noteworthy that some anecdotes/ jokes that appear in the book, were used in some episodes of *The Sarah Millican Television Programme*. Those anecdotes had then probably not been mentioned again in her stand-up performances as to not repeat the material too much and keep the performance material entertaining. Millican seems to have found a middle ground here with the amount of intermediality and stand-up references she uses. Much less than Amstell, but about as many excerpts and references as Bridges or McIntyre.

Concluding this sub-chapter, comedian autobiographies share similarities with stand-up comedy performances. In the simplest way, this is because the stand-up performances and comedic personas are based on the same autobiographical material of that person. Sometimes, comedians actually re-print excerpts from their stand-up shows although this can quickly result in the book not being published as an autobiography, but as a collection of humour instead. This discovery comes up again throughout the rest of the examination of comedian autobiographies. It is a questioning of whether the book is just an extension of a performance or what the exact relationship between the two media is and how they differ in terms of voice or commercialisation for example.

4. Voice

Aside from the narrative structure, an important element of comedians' works, both in performances and in texts, is voice. This voice, which may be called comedic voice is sustained across two different media (performances and autobiographies). This voice relates to the comedic identity of the performer and creates authenticity in writing. Ultimately, it is this comedic voice that readers of the comedian autobiographies are looking for. Being authentic to the comedic voice that is known from on-stage performances also provides an excuse for the comedians to be more liberal with the actual truth as long as they are authentic to what the reader believes.

Each comedian has their own performance voice, or style of speaking or writing, that can evolve and change throughout the years, but will always be one of their main characteristics, in combination with the actual (humorous) content. Thereby, (literary) voice means much more than simply Bridges' use of Scots slang, for example, or Millican's use of the Geordie dialect: Although (literary) voice is difficult to define and identify within a text, it generally describes "[a] mode of expression or point of view in writing; a particular literary tone or style" ("voice, n.") and is unique to each performer. Voice is presented in dialects, accents, or idiolects for example, including the use of swearing (Bridges swears a lot on stage and a little also in his autobiography, for example), but it also includes the structures of sentences and word choices the comedians make, as well as the frequency of humour their texts are interspersed with. As this chapter will show, voice is, in a way, ever-present and made up of a variety of literary or linguistic devices. A comedian's voice additionally is the key element of (but not synonymous with) the comedian's persona. Simultaneously, it is through the comedian's voice that a reader is influenced too and is prompted to react to texts in a certain way.

Voice is an extremely challenging topic in within literary and linguistic analysis, well explained in *Stimme(n) im Text: Narratologische Positionsbestimmungen* edited by Andreas

Blödorn et al.. Originating from a conference in Wuppertal, Germany, in 2004, the book firstly refers to well-known theoretical understandings of voice in text, from Genette, to Stanzels, Banfield, Fludernik, and Aczel. While the majority of contributions to the book are articles on voice in fictional works, most interesting for my study is the question of ‘who speaks in a text?’, or rather in this case, ‘who speaks in a comedian autobiography?’. This question is interesting in particular as in a text, “an equivalent for intonation, volume, speed of speech, melody and accent is missing” (Blödorn et al. 54; translated from German). As voice is so character-creating for comedians, how is their on-stage comedy voice represented in their autobiographies? This chapter will give some insights into the matter.

The following remark from Zymner’s article in *Stimme(n) im Text*, explains that a reader will project a voice onto a written text while reading – a function that can work particularly well with comedian autobiographies when the reader is familiar with a comedian’s voice.

> Trotz des Partiturcharakters des Textes als Struktur im Prozeß des stillen Lesens kann doch gesagt werden, daß die Transformation der Schrift in die vom Leser beim Lesen als *Inneres Sprechen* vernommene Sprache ein Eigenprodukt des Lesers ist, auch wenn er in der Gewißheit, daß der gelesene Text ja nicht von ihm selbst geschrieben worden ist, leicht annimmt, *das Vernommene* sei ein Fremdprodukt, nämlich Äußerungen und Mitgeteiltes des Schreibers. . . Es ist demnach nicht der Autor, der spricht und vernommen wird, es ist der Leser. (Blödorn et al. 329, emphasis original)

This quote can roughly be translated into English to state that even in silent reading, the ‘inner voice’ that the reader can hear by reading the writing, is ultimately a voice solely created by the reader, even if the reader is aware that he himself did not write the text in front of him. On similar lines, the study on *The Experience of Reading* (Moore and Schwitzgebel) confirmed that many readers ‘hear’ the narrators/ characters’ voices while reading, and especially with stand-up comedians, who have a very prominent and recognisable voice, this ‘hearing of inner speech’ is even more likely to happen. As explained in this chapter, however, it is likely that a reader will ‘hear’ the text in the comedians’ voice who wrote the autobiography, even if, at

the very least, it is merely the voice of the comedian as remembered by the reader and not the exact voice of the comedian reproduced.

As a final introduction to the theoretical understandings and workings of voice, Daniel Smith describes "[s]tand-up, in contemporary guise, [as] a form of autobiographical lyric poetry" (39). Although this definition of stand-up comedy may be debatable, it does hint at the fact that both the performances and the written texts by the comedians are (usually) very well crafted and designed to a comedian's benefit, whereby the more the material is shaped towards the comedian, the more a reader is willing to belief the comedian and the comedian will be more successful with the autobiography, as is further explained also in Chapters 5 on "Personas" and Chapter 6.2 "Commercialisation".

One example of the effect and importance of voice is illustrated in the review of Hills' autobiography by Steve Bennett writing that "Best Foot Forward [sic] is as hospitable, heart-warming and uplifting as you could expect from the ever-affable Aussie" (Bennett, "Best Foot Forward by Adam Hills"), which sums up Hills' typical effect of voice, the general thoughts most readers have about Hills' book. Millican, interacts a lot with the audience and calls people pet names like 'flower', which is part of her recognisable voice. Millican was born in South Shields, so she uses the dialect she grew up with to her advantage, as it makes her stand out and differ from other comedians. Connolly's work is described by Chris Ritchie in the following way: "[h]is thick Glaswegian accent, scruffy appearance and foul-mouthed though genial comedy made a hit with punters. . . His fast and iconoclastic comedy, peppered with swear words, has remained an inspiration to a new generation of comedians while continuing to delight comedy fans" (Ritchie 2). It is thereby worthwhile to acknowledge that there is a difference between voice and the impression a reader gets from reading a text versus the impression a reader gets from how a comedian appears, so when Hills' book is described as being cheerful, as seen in the review by Bennett earlier, the book really appears cheerful due to a number of reasons, mainly because of how the comedian writes about himself, but also in

the way he writes, which is through his literary voice and through the reader's ability to imagine Hills delivering the words.

The following sub-chapters explore the topics of literary devices and visual aspects (Chapter 4.1), humour (Chapter 4.2), and authenticity (Chapter 4.3) in comedian autobiographies. Although closely linked to voice, the topic of personas has its own chapter. That chapter on personas is then further separated by different persona-characteristics that the "Focus Comedians" take on, among them, persona-characteristics related to gender, disability, embodiment, dialect, and illness. Findings from the chapters on personas include that even if it is difficult to portray dialects in writing, comedians use this literary feature as one technique to form their voice in a similar manner to the voice the comedians use on stage in performances to match their persona. Authenticity to persona is extremely important for the comedians as it secures the commercialisation of authenticity (see also Chapter 6.2). In addition to that, many literary devices and other humorous elements are used in the comedian autobiographies as one of the main characteristics of comedic voice in those books.

4.1 Literary Devices and Visual Aspects

Humour can be created by using literary devices just like verbal ones, and these writing techniques can distinguish the comedians from each other through their voice on the page as they engage different literary devices. A link between voice in performances and texts, and key attributes to comedian autobiographies are author intrusions, for example. Author intrusions break the fourth wall similarly to comedians conversing with the audience at a live performance. This literary device is used frequently among comedians in their autobiographies as my analysis shows and resembles a theatrical aside.

As an exemplary case study, the comedian Amstell sometimes poses (rhetorical) questions to the reader, for example "I've never deliberately thrown up food, but I did

occasionally try much too hard to poo. Is that an eating disorder? Is it an eating disorder if it includes poking a finger in, to get things going? It's not classic bulimia" (Amstell, *help* 76).

Every now and then, Bridges interrupts the reading flow to pose some direct, rhetorical questions to the reader, similar to what he does on stage: "it wasn't about catching the crowd off-guard … it was about connecting with them and being bang in the centre of yourself, talking to them directly and just getting funnier and funnier" (Bridges, *We need to talk* 455). In texts, this literary device feels somewhat similar to when a comedian breaks the fourth wall and interacts with the audience at a stand-up performance and deviates slightly from the 'script' that the comedian might have, by exchanging words with the audience. Bridges' writing is self-reflexive, conscious of writing, and sometimes provides a commentary on past events from his life, for example Bridges page 117, in which the comedian comments on his relationship with his father, his father's career and support of the family: "I write this, and as much as it's sad and easy to think what my dad could have done with himself, he's never been bitter about any of it" (*We need to talk*). These author intrusions are a noticeable feature of Bridges' autobiography, even if they do not occur frequently. The comedian also likes to mock himself for writing an autobiography at such a young age, which brings an element of humour into the work but is also showing a false modesty, for example "here we are, another comedian writes an autobiography" (Bridges, *We need to talk* 3), or "I think I'll go for a font change here. . . I'm not sure if you care which font I'm writing in, but that's where we're at. I feel it's important to keep the reader in the loop" (Bridges, *We need to talk* 14f.). Drawing attention to the writing process and thereby preventing the reader from becoming immersed in the story is a meta-narrative technique.

In contrast, there are a lot of 'literary jokes' in Hills' written work that are not author intrusions: Seemingly Hills' favourite humorous technique to use in writing, as it appears very frequently, is to use similes like "I folded like an origami swan" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 26), or "Hen nights … are a riddle wrapped in a Doberman" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 43). "I

was more excited than I had ever been, and accepted the congratulations of passing audience members like a proud bridegroom" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 29), is a simile through which the reader can imagine exactly what the situation had been like after one of Hills' first stand-up spots. Using similes is thereby particularly popular "in British comedy and [has] been for a long time. In comedy, the simile is often used in negative context, for example… she was as big as a bus. They are also used in comedic context where a sensitive subject is broached, and the comedian will test his audience with response to a subtle implicit simile before going deeper" ("What is a simile?"). Hills is aware of the effect similes can have on an audience or reader and jokingly admits when he is trying too hard to depict a scene: "The anger, the incentive, as he stood above me like an angered god, striking shards of lightning upon me. OK, maybe I'm getting carried away with my analogies, but you get the gist" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 39). This extensive use of similes does not appear to such an extent in his stand-up shows or is at least less prominent on stage.

Another literary device that Hills uses in his autobiography, and which clearly stands out within the text, is alliteration. Most times the alliterations occur by coincidence and simply because some words begin with the first same letter. On page 118, however, the coincidence is too obvious, prompting Hills to specifically comment on the alliterations. Combined with the metaphor used in the short paragraph, the text becomes entertaining:

> Eventually a good Samaritan stopped, however not before at least twenty devil worshippers sailed blithely past, ignoring the panting pleas of my open bonnet, and the steamy sighs of the exasperated engine. (Ooh, I got all metaphoric then, and slightly alliterative. Yes, Mum, I remember what you said about the parentheses.)
> (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 118)

The sentences in the parentheses additionally comment on the use of parentheses themselves, which are punctuation marks that can easily be used in writing but are more difficult to produce on stage. For Hills, these parentheses are yet another way of entertaining in a literary manner.

The comment in the parentheses refers to an explanation Hills made earlier on the same page, where he noted down his mother's urgings in parentheses, among them the plea to "check the radiator" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 118) and, (ironically also, but here used on purpose,) to not spend "too much time writing in parentheses" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 118). Hills goes on, still in the same parentheses, admitting that "[a]ctually she's right, I have spent far too much time in these parentheses, but there's no way I'll admit it to her" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 118). This entire joke based on parentheses uses punctuation as light humour that is featured in Hills' autobiography and comedy prominently. As the other analyses show, comedians use punctuation for comedic purposes in their autobiographies in varying degree of frequency and extent.

Further examples of literary devices that Hills turns into sources of humour are the anti-climax "Back at high school, while other kids were looking to careers in medicine, or sport, my main goal was to deliver the farewell to the teachers when we left" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 20), or "'Oh, you poor thing,' he said, dripping with sarcasm. 'You're gonna be famous in *another* country.'" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 308), which is irony indicated by italics.

By using hooks, like "It started as a dumb idea" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 86) at the beginning of a chapter, he motivates the reader to continue reading and proves that he can write just as well as he can perform on stage. As another literary device, and since Hills is well-known in both Great Britain and Australia, he often explains, for example, Australian slang words or cultural differences to British readers and vice versa. On page 25, for example, Hills reprints a joke that he performed very early in his career, which "was a fairly obvious line about a local rugby coach, who had allegedly been caught in a compromising position in a Gents' toilet block. [Hills] offered the thought that he originally wanted to become an Aussie Rules football coach, but was turned down because he only knew how to score behinds" (*Best Foot Forward*). Hills then explains in parentheses that "[f]or British readers, a

'behind' is one point in Aussie rules, as opposed to a 'goal' which is six" (*Best Foot Forward* 25). At times, 'translations' like these then makes the stories funnier as they can be enjoyed by a larger readership and readers can even see additional humour in both 'languages'. On the other hand, it can also feel like Hills is telling the same joke twice; and as is common knowledge, jokes usually die when being re-told just after you have already heard them, unless they can be given an extra twist.

Michael McIntyre starts his book *Life & Laughing* by commenting on his writing procedures: "For the last six months, I've been looking to create the perfect writing environment. Aside from the new computer, I have a new desk, a new chair and a new office with newly painted walls in my house" (1) and quickly (and somewhat jokingly) realises "that I have to be careful about how much personal information I reveal. I think there's already enough to answer most of the security questions at my bank and get access to all my accounts" (8). Throughout *Life & Laughing*, McIntyre comments a lot on what he is writing, for example, when he writes about his complicated family back story: "Are you following this? I'm not and couldn't at the time" (14), and his father originally being "named Thomas Cameron McIntyre, but changed his name to Ray Cameron to make this book slightly more confusing" (25). On page 53, the comedian gets "carried away a bit there with eighties television – back to the story. . . My family. All together. But not for long. That's a very dramatic end to quite a light chapter. It's designed to make you read on" (*Life & Laughing*), which is a self-reflexive device and can be an effective hook. Self-reflexivity thereby relates to a meta-narrative and more so to meta-fiction: "*Metafiction* is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality" (Waugh, *Metafiction*, 2). Thereby, "...metafiction is not so much a sub-genre of the novel as a tendency *within* the novel which operates through exaggeration of the tensions and oppositions inherent in all novels: of frame and frame break, of technique and counter technique, of construction

and deconstruction of illusion." (Waugh, *Metafiction*, 14). This tendency of meta-fiction appearing in literature, as well as the use of self-reflexive devices are elements common in comedian autobiographies which lie on the border to the genre of fiction anyway. This results in the creation of what may be called meta-autobiography for an overarching genre of comedian autobiographies particularly due to the mixing of writing techniques, the unique authenticity to a known comedic voice, and the creativity of writing autobiographically.

McIntyre shows an awareness of writing, for example when his family buys a new house: "So that was it, a new chapter in my life was beginning. Annoyingly, this is my autobiography and I haven't actually reached the end of the chapter – bad planning on my part. . . . No, maybe I should end the chapter here. I think I will" (*Life & Laughing* 87f.). Other expressions of awareness are "Wow. That was a little heavy. Let's lighten the mood" (McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 160) at the beginning of a chapter, or "A new chapter in my life had begun. I didn't know it at that time, but it was Chapter 7" (McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 89). In all of these examples, McIntyre becomes aware of writing, using this awareness as a source of humour and commenting on his writing plans to the reader.

To not lose control of the content, McIntyre regularly brings summaries of what had happened in his life so far (see *Life & Laughing* 139, 356). On top of that, the comedian is reflective, visible in the following textual examples from *Life & Laughing*: "It's only looking back that I realize how dangerous this was, not to mention highly illegal" (McIntyre 96), "In retrospect, I think saying this out loud was disrespectful" (McIntyre 174), or "This is a recurring theme of my youth. I was desperate to be attractive… but did myself no favours whatsoever" (McIntyre 188). Like many other comedians, McIntyre uses author intrusion to interact with the reader. In a chapter about girls, he says, for example "[t]here are girls reading this book: 'Hi.'" (*Life & Laughing* 119) and has entire paragraphs of insertion and author intrusion on pages 144ff., for example the comment to the reader to "brace yourself for this" (McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 145), although it is debatable how necessary for the narrative

these intrusions are and how much value they add. Further examples of author intrusion can be found on page 187 of *Life & Laughing*: "'Why did you keep your mullet?' you are surely asking" and page 245: "Now I'm sure as you're reading this, you might be thinking of your own grandmothers". Generally, author intrusions can bring the author closer to the reader, although they can simultaneously have the opposite effect of disrupting the reading flow and the reader's immersion in the text, potentially turning the reader away from the book as the author intrusions may not add anything to the narrative that the reader is interested in. So, although the necessity of author intrusions in autobiographical writing is debatable, in comedian autobiographies the literary device is practically an ever-present key feature of this sub-genre, as it is a form of reproducing an on-stage stand-up comedy performance in writing.

This is a device that goes back to *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* by Laurence Sterne (1759-67) who often addresses his readers as sometimes male and sometimes female to comic effect. It is usually done with a wink at the real reader.

McIntyre also tries to explain things to younger readers who might not know what he is talking about, trying to make his work understandable for everyone: "Many readers will remember, but for younger readers who don't, Kenny Everett was a sensation. It's difficult to think of the equivalent today" (*Life & Laughing* 60). Occasionally he shows a linguistic awareness and comments on his own voice, for example in the sentence "I looked at Lucy's empty wall in the crepuscular (surely the most impressive word I've used so far. It basically means dim) light" (McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 134). He also gets extremely creative in representing the accent that his Hungarian grandmother speaks in, on paper. McIntyre tells the reader about her that she is "[a] true character. I will do my best to convey her accent when I quote her. 'Helllow, daaarling', that kind of thing. This is actually how she wrote English as well as spoke it" (*Life & Laughing* 10). Another instance being the title "$H_4E_1N_1D_2$" (*Life & Laughing* 243) which combines the already creative representation of his grandmother's accent, with her favourite game, Scrabble. This literary creativity is one of the key features of

McIntyre's work both in writing and in on-stage performances, reminiscent of Millican, but not used to the same extent by McIntyre. The extent and effect of using dialects in writing and comedy shows is expanded on further in Chapter 5.3 on the subject of personas.

McIntyre also frequently uses TV and film references as analogies, (for example 120, 140, and more) and even writes in scenes on page 156, or film-like on page 269: "Finally I got my romantic comedy ending. The credits would roll over snapshots of our future together, on our wedding day, sipping cocktails on our honeymoon, cradling our newborn in the delivery room, that kind of thing" (*Life & Laughing*).

What is unique for McIntyre's autobiography *Life & Laughing*, is that he writes as if writing someone else's autobiography on page 42: "After I moved to Tanta in Egypt with my Lebanese Catholic parents Joseph and Abia… (Oh no, I've slipped back into Omar Sharif's autobiography. What is wrong with me?)". And more importantly the "historic moment: the overlapping of two celebrity autobiographies. It's interesting, the different perspectives" (McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 86), in which McIntyre quotes a passage from Sharon Osbourne's autobiography talking about the house in which he had lived before, but McIntyre himself had described the house himself too, differently, and now comments on the different perspectives.

As a different case study, Millican plays with the reader in *How to be Champion*, (in footnotes for example) "Learn more about how I lost my virginity in the chapter entitled Married!* *This is not a chapter. Just a joke. But you get the message, yes? Good" (25). First the comedian tricks the reader into believing there is a chapter with the mentioned title before revealing in the footnote that it does not exist and was actually meant to be a joke. On page 20, she encourages the reader to do just like her: "The bloke on the till said, 'And your email address is…' And I said, 'Irrelevant.' You can use that. It's great fun" (Millican, *How to be Champion* 20). Again, being asked for an email address during shopping is an experience that many people have regularly – the comedian gives the reader now a comedic

response to use as a reply. The comedian creates further humoristic content by giving one chapter the title "The Six Men I Have Loved" (Millican, *How to be Champion* 160ff.), before mentioning Kirstie Alley (a woman), her former husband, her current husband, specifying that "[h]e rocks and is my rock. Verb AND noun" (Millican, *How to be Champion* 164), and her dog. The comedian justifies herself in the tip box at the end of the chapter by writing that "The people you love can come in many forms. Men, women or dogs" (Millican, *How to be Champion* 164). The humour is created here by Millican setting up a certain expectation of a reader with the chapter title but then not matching this expectation, which is incongruity based humour.

The common pet names that Millican uses frequently thereby fit to her persona and also her appearance of being a huggable and friendly 'mother' of pets but the pet names stand in contrast to her crudeness. Millican's persona becomes trustworthy and likeable through this; people are likely to want to connect with her and go to her shows if what they hear makes them feel good. Millican gains additional humorous passages from this for her book. After only a few pages of reading the comedian's book, it becomes clear that Millican enjoys creative writing, when Millican admits that she remembers "very little about the substitute teacher, just that she made English fun and creative and interesting" (*How to be Champion* 12), and then even reprints a photograph of a hand-written excerpt from one of her short stories that she wrote for school. In addition to that, Millican often comments on her own writing processes in a self-reflective and meta-narrative manner: "When I started writing this chapter I thought it would be funny to list all of the ridiculous things I was bullied for, but I was horrified by how many there were and that's what instigated the following chapter. So, stop crying, grab a biscuit. The next chapter is more fun" (Millican, *How to be Champion* 39). As the just mentioned example shows, Millican is aware of the genre codes of autobiographical writing (revealing childhood information and not shying away from sharing unhappier moments of her life). At the same time, the comedian catches herself playing to the

stereotype of autobiographical writing and decides to move away from the convention in the chapter that follows her list of things she had been bullied for, by writing about positive experiences.

Millican also recalls that “When writing stories in class I often ran out of time. . . On those occasions, I’d quickly add the line ‘So they all went home and had their tea’, which seems to end all stories really well” (Millican, *How to be Champion* 44). From this anecdote, it comes as no surprise what the last sentence of the autobiography is. The reason why her book is so scrapbook like and not like a classic novel, especially considering her interest in writing is not explained. The influence of publishers/ her management is also not indicated, but may have added to the end-product. Perhaps, Millican was working against a deadline to deliver a manuscript while simultaneously making progress in other aspects of her career, which would remind us that comedian autobiographies are cultural products rather than literary works.

Furthermore, *How to be Champion* does not have to be read in one order and Millican herself keeps referring back and forth throughout her work, for example “Turn to page 27 for the list of things I was bullied for” (14, also foreshadowing), “see page 247” (39). She also encourages the reader to interrupt the reading and look at the photos, for instance by saying “there’s a photo in the photo section. Go, go. I’ll wait” (Millican, *How to be Champion* 7). Millican frequently gives interactive reading instructions in her autobiography *How to be Champion*, for example, “Read this one really fast please” (18), “Please stop reading to google this” (56), “Read that again” 119, “I urge you all to google it” (233), which relates to theories of reader response (see Wolfgang Iser), which posit that a reader is needed to interpret/ understand the text. The reader response theory originated from the idea that literature should evoke a reaction or emotion in a reader (see Habib 154) and Iser furthermore remarks that “[w]e cannot identify the literary work with either the text or the realization of the text; it must lie ‘half-way between the two’ and in fact comes into being only through the

convergence of text and reader” (Habib 155). Thus, it is possible to say that a comedian autobiography is a work written by the comedian but the subjective enjoyment/ reaction by the reader is just as important. At the same time this relates to a point of authenticity of truth, in which perhaps not all a comedian writes is factually true but the reader may perceive it as such.

Generally, Millican’s writing is conversational. She asks many rhetorical questions in *How to be Champion*, for example “What would everyone think?” (103) and the text reads itself as if the reader was directly with her as she is typing (see the ‘conversation’ with her husband Gary on page 2, or “last night. . . At the time of writing” on page 223). This special narrative temporality that appears in Millican’s book can be confusing to the reader, as unavoidably some time has passed between her writing the sentences, and the reader reading the sentences as has been explained in Chapter 3.2. Millican often uses footnotes (indicated by asterisks), to explain what she wrote, give more details, or stay up to date (see footnote regarding *Doctor Who* on page 153). On page 23, even the footnote has a footnote, which is a meta-narrative element used for comedic effect but not usually found in literature.

Aside from footnotes, Millican’s use of language stands out. Millican uses, for example, capital letters, as well as comments in between special signifiers, for example“° sniffs and coughs…°” (*How to be Champion* 17) or in brackets. Instead of deleting ‘wrong’ words, she strikes them through (“I’m a good cat mam, a good dog ~~wife~~ mam”, Millican, *How to be Champion* 187), which brings more attention to the sentence and what is supposed to be funny. Very briefly, this is also similar to what Perkins does: Perkins gets creative using the medium of print on page 135, when she writes about putting on plays, like “Lorca’s *Blood Wedding*? In Spanish¿ Naked? Knock yourself out” (135). This is thereby, as a side-note, the exact reprint of how the passage appears in the book. The ‘Spanish upturned question mark’ being used incorrectly according to Spanish punctuation rules, as it is only used after the word

in Perkin’s book and not as it should be, an upturned question mark in front of the question, followed by a ‘normal’ question mark at the end of the question.

Millican uses the literary device of foreshadowing in *How to be Champion*, for example “more on her later” (105) or “see below” (228); uses hooks, like “This was my last proper job. There was something excellent around the corner” (121) to keep the reader interested; and uses repetitions, both in actual content (for example 29 + 37, 157 + 264) and phrasing (that is parallelisms/ anaphora; see 286, or pages 245 and 250, on which Millican starts two consecutive chapters with the phrase “In 2014 I”). The comedian gets linguistic, talking about nouns and adjectives (Millican, *How to be Champion* 164), uses words from the Geordie dialect and foreign words, and sometimes phrases that may be difficult to understand for non-native speakers in *How to be Champion* (for example “promiscuous” on page 153, the portmanteau “Incomespasticty benefit” on page 119, “which is a portmanteau of Income Support and Incapacity. And Incaptivity benefit, which is mostly for pandas”, “NVQ” on page 4, “chutzpah” on page 119), especially also, because she does not explain these terms/ words. Millican is imaginative, for example in the sentence “I tried to think of what a tabloid newspaper might call my book and came up with ‘Cakey Cakey Fat Cunt’” (*How to be Champion* 3) – again, note the body- and crudity-focused voice. Millican is also creative (for example deliberately searching for wordplays on page 3 of *How to be Champion*), and interactive (for example “title generator” *How to be Champion* page 81). All of these literary devices showcase Millican’s creative style.

One of the most prominent features of Millican’s autobiography, which is the use of lists, is a device often used in creative non-fiction because it “can enumerate feelings, sense impressions, intuitions, or thought without using complete sentences. Lists are time-savers and time-condensers” (Rainer 73). Almost half-way into *How to be Champion*, on page 137, Millican proclaims in a footnote that “[she] love[s] a list (as you may be able to tell from this book)”, which has become obvious while reading. Yet, as much as she likes to use lists in

her writing, there is an inconsistency with them. Sometimes they are numbered, for example, sometimes she just uses bullet points (for example Millican, *How to be Champion* 64ff.), or simply separates the points with headings (see Millican, *How to be Champion* 150ff.). The chapter on how to be a comedian (Millican, *How to be Champion* 257ff.) is also a list of sorts, but this is only noticeable through the changes in the content. Whether this 'list' is deliberate, or an effect of bundling material is unclear. The described inconsistency in the formatting of lists in Millican's book can be irritating for some readers, but generally having lists makes the content easy to read and gives an effective overview.

Having a non-uniform manner of using lists in a comedian autobiography also shows up in Alan Davies' *Just Ignore Him*. One of his lists is lettered, for example, like a multiple choice list but with a rhetoric question that cannot be answered:

> I wonder what he said?
> a) 'You all right, love?'
> b) 'Bloody hell, you must be freezing.'
> c) 'What the hell are you doing?'
> d) 'Mum? Oh Jesus, sorry, I thought you was my mum.'
> e) 'Where do you think you're going?' (Davies 86)

Only two pages later, the comedian includes another lettered list in his autobiography, but this time, it is not a multiple choice question. Later in *Just Ignore Him*, there are some numbered lists too, for example on pages 116 and 167 and before that on page 42f., there is a list of memories written out in bullet points.

As a summary of the previous insights, the following can be said: All comedians analysed in this thesis, have a distinct presence in their writing, most visibly through the literary device of author intrusion. This literary technique means that the comedians directly communicate with the reader and address the reader such as by posing rhetorical questions, adding reading instructions, or further commentary, for example on the writing process itself, which has already been mentioned earlier on in this chapter. Not only does this create a possibility for humour, it also takes some techniques used in stand-up performances, connects the comedian with the reader, and grabs the reader's attention.

One of the most interesting features of author intrusion as used in the autobiographies of the studied comedians are Hills' 'author's notes' that look like this example:

> AUTHOR'S NOTE
> *The girlfriend referred to in these diary pieces is no longer my girlfriend, and she didn't become my wife. Turns out, the choice of either staying at home while I travelled the world, or coming with me while I vomited in hotel rooms wasn't an attractive one. There was more to it than that of course, but the time away from each other and the unsociable hours of a stand-up comic (not to mention my single-minded obsession with comedy itself) put a huge strain on the relationship.*
> *She once told me if we ever had children, the only way I'd notice them is if we named them 'laughter' and 'applause'. I pretended to be offended, but deep down all I could think was 'I wonder if I can use that line one day.'*
> *We're still friends now, and I'll be forever grateful she supported me through these crazy times.* (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 220, capital letters, line break, and italics as in the original)

In these notes, aside from showing how life can be (used as) art, and that comedians always seem to look for material, Hills comments on diary entries from 2003 that he included in his autobiography. Although the example above is perhaps not a usual version of author intrusion – see "Sorry, I'm going to interrupt myself because I've just remembered a little story about Harrow-on-the-Hill" (McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 144) in comparison – it is effective in providing additional, informative commentary on the text (similar to footnotes), which does not usually appear in stand-up performances and thereby being only occasionally humorous. Having said this, author intrusions – if they directly address the reader (for example McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 14: "Are you following this?") – can make the written text similar to a stand-up performance, during which comedians frequently interact with the audience members, but at the same time the author intrusions may also disrupt the reading flow (slightly). Hooks have the complete opposite effect in comparison. They are used much less frequently by the comedians in their autobiographies, an example being the cliff-hanger "[b]ut before my eighteenth birthday my life would be changed forever" (McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 191). In fact, of all the works mentioned in this thesis, Manford has perhaps the most effective hook of all the comedian's autobiographies: He pictures a scene in which

he talks to his girlfriend. She says "'I'm pregnant and it's not yours'" (Manford 255), but then the chapter ends. The reader has to actively turn the page, to find out that the new chapter starts with "I'm only messing, it was mine – I just thought it'd make that chapter end a lot more dramatically. I'd even like you to go back again and imagine the *EastEnders* drums after she said it" (Manford 258) – Manford definitely achieved his goal here. Hooks like those incentivise the reader to keep reading by foreshadowing/ hinting at something important or unexpected happening next. In the autobiographies just as in stand-up performances, it is thereby important to keep the reader/ audience entertained and to have a coherent narrative/ structure to the performance or written text to prevent readers/ fans from ceasing to read the autobiographies or listen to the on-stage performances – comedians have to gain and retain attention and know how to regain attention; an essential skill for comedians that improves with experience.

Perkins even gets her parents to 'write' themselves, "I have asked my parents to recall the night they met" (23), which is followed by direct quotes as they remember it with commentary provided by Perkins (see Perkins 23ff.). The chapter "Pets" is written in the third person in the form of diary entries, showing how in hindsight Perkins perceived the situations involving pets (43ff.). Perkins later writes a letter to her dog (287-292), and compares two versions of conversations depicting how to and how not to "tell a woman she can't have children" (264).

Throughout the autobiography, asterisks are used to add extra information or clarify (for example page 21), a list is used to rank Perkins' most terrible comedy performances (152ff.). Perkins also reprints one of her own old stories from her childhood and then says "I have asked for the author's permission in publishing these extracts…" (52). Every now and then, Perkins admits to digressing (for example 201), but this does not downplay her writing skills. And although Perkins knows that she is a writer and could write a happy ending, she specifically chooses not to, as it would not feel right (285), again signifying her skills as an

author, and 'authentic' comedian. Particularly the creativity in writing is similar to Millican's work however this does not mean that all female comedians produce similar autobiographies.

Returning to the matter of self-reflexive devices, frequent uses of author intrusion, rhetorical questions, and conversational commentary directly speaking to the reader (used in autobiographies and on stage), the conclusion could be made that the reader is needed for the text to be understood fully (this relates to the previously mentioned reader response theory). Stand-up comedians usually perform in front of audiences of varying sizes and will often try to perform together with their audiences by interacting with the audience. Comedians can also judge their own success of their jokes by the audience's laughter. And, comedians live off the audience (quite literally – the members of the audience are paying the comedians' (life) expenses by paying for their show tickets). In the autobiographies, the comedians often 'talk' to the reader directly, as if it was merely an extension of one of their performances, delivered in a different medium. Having said this, they cannot expect the reader to answer back, or follow their instructions, for example "Turn to page 27 for the list of things I was bullied for" (Millican, *How to be Champion* 14). From my own experience, I can say that as a reader, I very often did not follow the comedians' reading instructions so that my reading flow would not be disrupted. As a scholar and researcher, I did always follow their instructions just to see the result/ effect.

I discovered that following these instructions only occasionally adds to the narrative, for example when the comedians ask the reader to listen to a song while reading the following paragraph or to search for a video online; these 'excursions' from the plain narrative then may add some additional sources of humour and enjoyment but are usually not necessary for the general understanding of the original narrative as understood by the reader. From a comedian's perspective, using intermediality[8] and literary devices like author intrusions look

[8] Intermediality is a complex concept (see Jens Schröter, Werner Wolf, or Gabriele Rippl) but very broadly describes the combination of two or more media. Rippl says that "Intermediality

slightly different – they could include such techniques for a variety of reasons, mainly, to connect/ interact with the reader in a performance-like manner, or to reference other works by themselves. Lastly, the literary devices used by the comedians are generally not different from literary devices that would be used in a 'normal' autobiography – rather, the comedians use them to create a different effect in a meta-autobiographical manner, usually to create humour, which is the topic of the next sub-chapter. Before discussing humour, however, the visual aspects of the comedian autobiographies need to be looked at in this second part of this sub-chapter.

Visual aspects, are something that can improve sales, such as when readers are attracted to a book because of its cover, or when comedians include photographs in their books that they have not previously shown anywhere. Photos in autobiographies (which are another artefact of life, apart from the content of the autobiographies/ the life stories), can have several functions. Firstly, photos can enrich the reading experience and give a glimpse into the lives of the writers. Secondly, they can be used as a source of humour, when inscribed with funny captions (see the following example of a photo page in Millican's autobiography).

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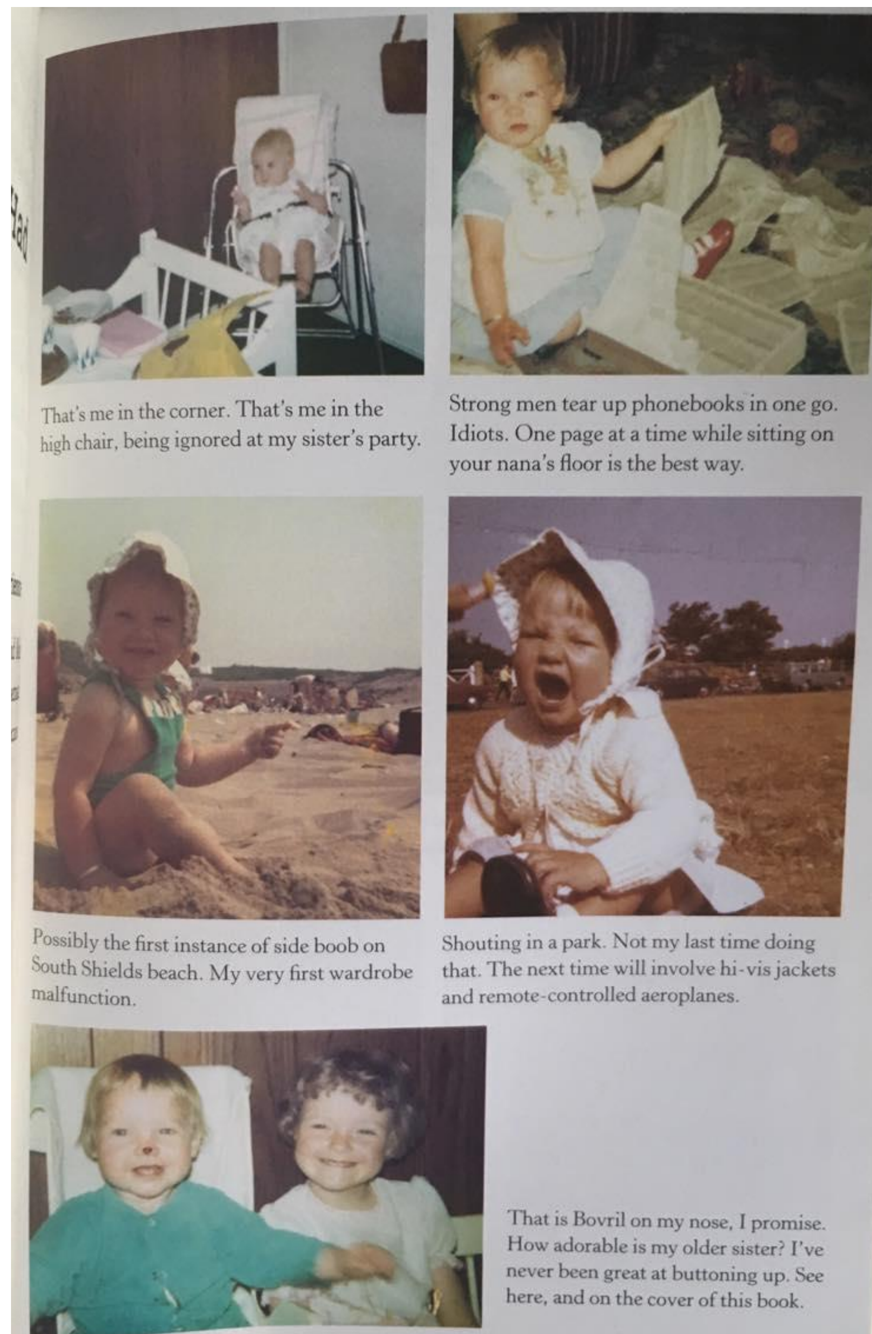
is a semantically contested, inconsistent term whose various definitions refer to a general problem centered around the term 'medium,' which itself has accumulated a wide range of competing definitions" (6). Gibbons uses the word 'multi-modal literature' instead and thereby refers to, "unusual textual layouts", "varied typography", "footnotes", "mixing of genres" (Gibbons 2).



That's me in the corner. That's me in the high chair, being ignored at my sister's party.

Strong men tear up phonebooks in one go. Idiots. One page at a time while sitting on your nana's floor is the best way.

Possibly the first instance of side boob on South Shields beach. My very first wardrobe malfunction.

Shouting in a park. Not my last time doing that. The next time will involve hi-vis jackets and remote-controlled aeroplanes.

That is Bovril on my nose, I promise. How adorable is my older sister? I've never been great at buttoning up. See here, and on the cover of this book.

Figure 1: Millican Photo Page. The first page of Millican's photo section with humorous, self-deprecating captions fitting with the comedian's characteristic voice in *How to be Champion*

In addition to the previous two functions of photos, photos are also proof of specific moments in time and can therefore help with recalling memories. As will be mentioned in the later chapter relating to memory and authenticity, the comedians potentially looked at some old photos of their childhoods for example, to remember certain events, and then decided to

include the photographs too. Additionally, photos add a sense of authenticity as they are a significant indication for the autobiographies being a work about a real and true life. "Photographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it" (Sontag, 5). There even is a body of scholarship dedicated to photography and/ as autobiography. While this area of research may stray too far from the topic of this thesis, it is interesting to note in summary that one of the general debates around photography in combination with autobiography surrounds the question of photos being staged or selected deliberately to present a certain view and impression of the photographed (see for example the books by Linda Rugg or Td. Adams).

In the case of the comedians, the reader can be aware of some childhood photos being 'staged' to an extent which the reader would have most likely experienced in their own childhoods as well (for example parents telling children to stand still and look at their camera while taking photos) and other photos simply being taken of the young comedian in the moment. Photographs of comedians that were also used in press releases or for tour posters etc., will be staged to a much higher extent and most likely also edited – with comedians wearing makeup or having their photos technologically enhanced through editing programmes (for example Photoshop). Additionally, there will always take place a careful selection and curation of photos. The photographs can add to the narrative and complexity of the temporality in the comedians' autobiographies and are often referred to within the actual narratives, for example "there's a photo in the photo section. Go, go. I'll wait" (Millican, *How to be Champion* 7). What is important to keep in mind is that "[a]utobiography [in general] is a form of narrative characterized by a desire both to reveal and to conceal, an attempt at reconciling a life with a self" (Adams 483) – the comedians will have always carefully selected (and modified) any information they give the reader/ fan in their autobiographical texts and performances for a variety of reasons but mostly, as has been shown, to create humour.

Yet, all in all, no one writing an autobiography is required to include photos – in the introductory chapter it was already mentioned that there are many different approaches to autobiographical writing (see for example Frow) – and even if someone shares photos, it can be done in many different forms, in accordance with the publisher. Hills, as an example, included sixteen pages of colour-photographs documenting various stages and moments of his life. The images of the "Focus Comedians" often have informative and sometimes humorous captions but can usually be viewed on their own and do not really need additional background information from within the written text to understand them, as the captions are informative enough. Sometimes the photographs are not even directly related to the passages from the book. Amstell did not include any photos at all, other than putting one small childhood photo and a current one of himself on the cover of the hardback version of his book. Photos in general, are another signifier for the previously mentioned and interesting concept of temporality and indicates the growth the comedians went through and describes in their texts. As an example, and practically foreshadowing of what is to come in the book's content, Amstell thereby also crouches on the last letter of significantly larger size of the word/ title *help*, which could be a hint to Amstell's characteristic self-deprecating style of humour, as well as Amstell's attempt to help himself by writing (humorously) about the troubles in his life. The paperback version of his work features a large headshot of his face on the cover (in this case the comedian's face can also be seen as a brand image or marketing tool of the comedian). Having a large image of the comedian's head on the front cover of the book, makes it easier to spot the comedian in a row of books and identify him. Note also that the subtitle of Amstell's work "Comedy. Tragedy. Therapy." is very prominent on the paperback edition. Both versions are furthermore categorised as "memoir".

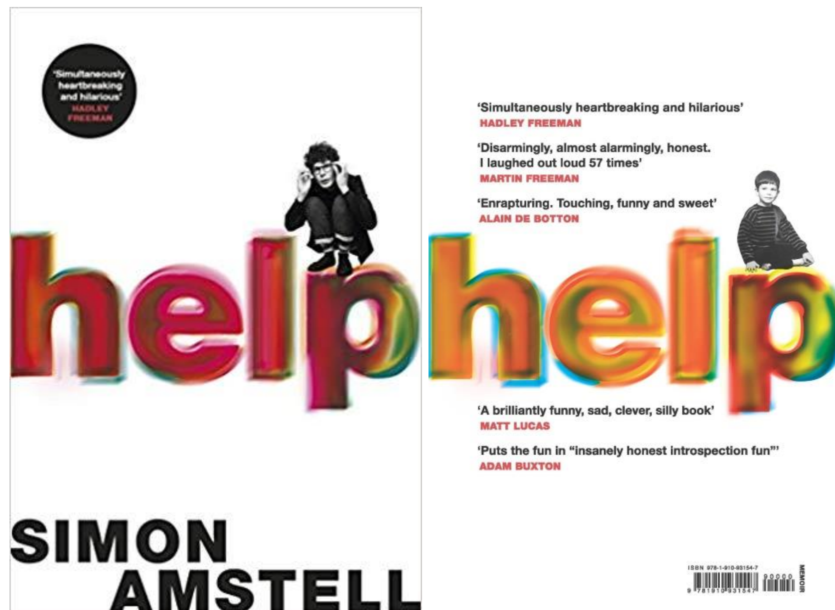


Figure 2: Hardback Cover *help*. the original hardback cover version of *help* by Simon Amstell (2017). Images via www.amazon.co.uk/Help-Simon-Amstell/dp/1910931543/

Figure 3: Paperback Cover *help*. the paperback cover version of *help* by Simon Amstell (2019). Images via www.amazon.co.uk/Help-Simon-Amstell/dp/1784705691/

The other comedians do not have such differences between their paperback and hardback versions of their autobiographies. Bridges, McIntyre, and Millican's book covers do not drastically change from hardback to paperback, and Hills' paperback version simply changes colour, the background of the hardback version of *Best Foot Forward* is yellow, in the paperback version it is blue. Usually, large fonts are used "on book covers since the rise of Amazon: if you're viewing a book cover on your phone it can often be less than one inch tall, so legibility can be a real issue" (Baverstock, et al. 38). All of this careful planning of visual imagery, is part of

> the apparatus of external cues that surround a literary text: such things as the author's name, the book's title, the preface, and illustrations accompany the text 'precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text's presence in the world, its "reception" and consumption' (Genette 1997:1). Many of these external cues, or *paratexts*, have to do with the material form of the book: even before we begin reading we are given information by the book's size and format [etc.] . . . [and] we make deductions from [these pieces of information]. (Frow 105, emphasis original)

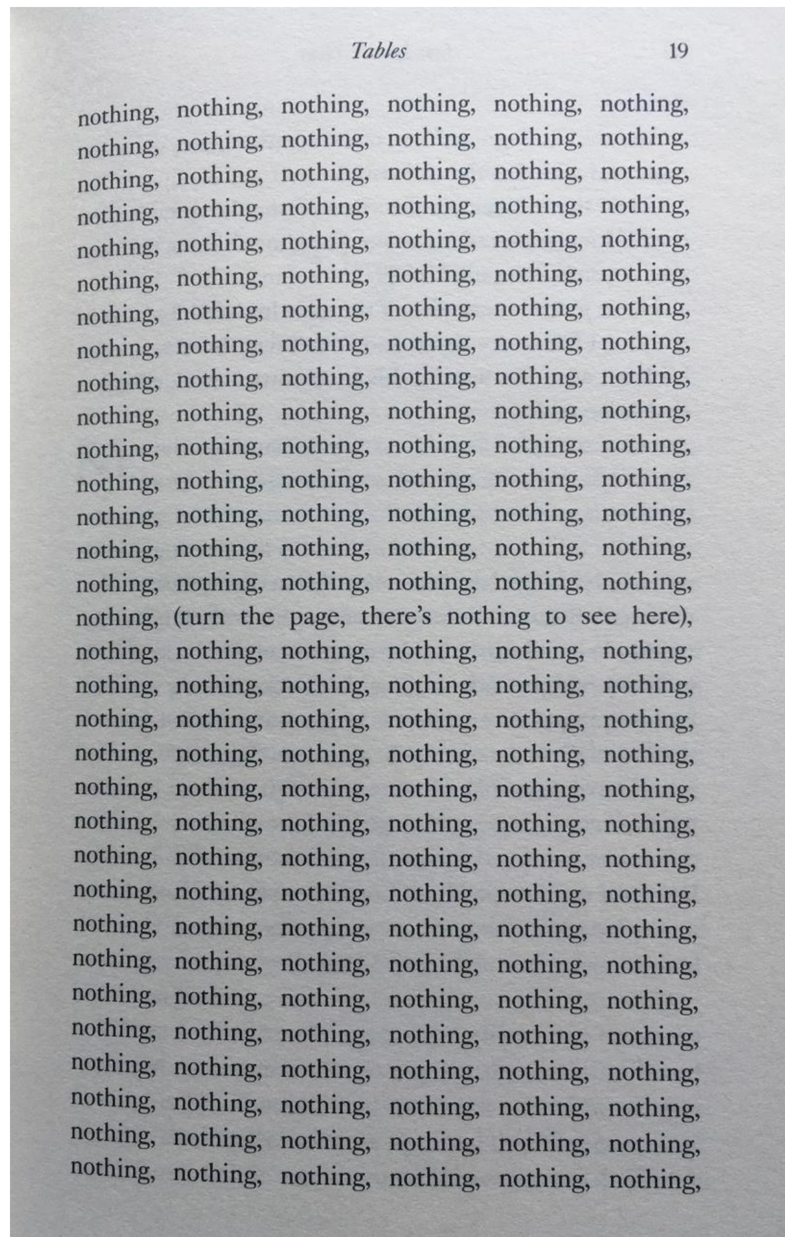
These deductions further the reader's pre-existing expectations of the book that are then ideally met by the comedian and the content of their autobiographies. McIntyre, for example, has an image of him on the paperback cover in which he looks very cheery, on the back, he is even laughing in a smaller image. Thus, a reader may expect his autobiography to be funny.

When looking at the book covers, another interesting discovery can be made. With Bridges and Millican, the names of the authors/ stand-up comedians are roughly of equal size to the titles of the books. Amstell's title *help* is about twice as large as his name, whereas Connolly's, Hills', and McIntyre's names are much larger than the titles of their books. This could indicate that Connolly, Hills, and McIntyre are more popular 'brands' than the other comedians (raising a potential question of whether straight men are more marketable); but really if someone picks up the book, it will be likely because they read the comedian's name first, before the title can have any impact on the reader and give a first impression.

Another visual aspect that stands out in the autobiographies studied is the layout of text in Amstell's *help*. The book was published in a relatively small format for a hardcover

version and is only 210 pages long, “with suspiciously wide margins” (Bennett, “Help, by Simon Amstell”), making it the shortest autobiography among those dealt with in this examination of comedian autobiographies. The layout of the text implies that Amstell, his management, or his publishers attempt to re-sell material by subterfuge. Having wide margins uses more pages and thus makes the book appear to be longer but does not give the reader more value for their money. Among the autobiographies studied, Amstell is the only one that does so to such an extent.

It is thereby not unusual for comedians to consider a specific layout for their texts in their autobiographies (although this is also a common feature in fictional books). The comedian Alan Davies has an entire page printed with ‘nothing’, which he thought of to write following a story in which his father says “If you haven’t got anything nice to say, just say nothing” (18).



Tables 19

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Figure 4: 'Nothing Page'. Photo of Davies page 19

Stand-up comedians being so deliberate with the layout of the texts and visual aspects of their autobiographies, may be, in the case of Simon Amstell a request by his publishers (Amstell, *help* introduction), whereas a play with the layout can also create humour.

Perkins too, provides a humorous commentary from the present to the past, when she in hindsight criticises a teacher, who had once told her that her project was not interesting enough. Thereby, Perkins firstly includes a scan of the original work she did at school, before writing a letter of complaint to her teacher "Lady-Whose-Name-I-Can-No-Longer-

Remember" (350), ending the part with a new drawing in the same (criticised) style of the original, meaning to mock the teacher (349ff). Lastly, Perkins tells the reader that "[i]f you enjoyed SPECTACLES you might like to read the following titles by the same author…", and then includes three scans of covers drawn by her as a child for stories she wrote then. This is an entertaining contrast to other comedians who often simply advertise their stand-up DVDs on the last page following the acknowledgements.

4.2 Turning Life into Humour

I have already recorded that several of the comedians producing autobiographies end at their first big gig or point of recognition. Part of the attraction for the reader in these autobiographies is to find out what it is that gives the comedian the ability to be funny (which is proven by their success and the fact they are publishing an autobiography). But how did they gain that fame and power? The comedians may not perhaps always directly reveal at what point they considered themselves successful and the exact amount of effort they had to put in before they were popular can only be estimated. Nonetheless, comedians give insights into the comedy industry and usually attempt to explain how they made it. For a better understanding it is also useful to look at theoretical works that exist about humour and the creation of a stand-up comedian.

There are many guidebooks on how to become a stand-up comedian and use humour effectively as means of a profession. These guidebooks are interesting in that they offer an insight into the comedy industry and explain what techniques stand-up comedians are likely to employ in their on-stage performances: books like *Step by Step to Stand-up Comedy* by Greg Dean, Oliver Double's *Getting the Joke*, and Chris Ritchie's *Performing Live Comedy* explain how jokes are created and improved, and how on-stage performances are done, combining theoretical notions and real-life examples of where the mentioned techniques have been used. Looking at the books in more detail, Dean's work is a classic guide book on how

to do stand-up comedy, explaining how jokes work, how you can write and improve them, and how on-stage performances are done. A glossary explains the most important comedy-related terms in a simple but effective way. The chapters are in fact well-researched and touching on a deeper level of understanding, for example, how jokes work and how they are written. In the first chapter, the author Greg Dean refers to Victor Raskin's "script-based semantic theory of humor" (Dean 3), but says that he actually "altered Raskin's term from *script* to *story*, which made it possible … to apply this concept to all forms of humor, not just language-based jokes" (Dean 3, emphasis original). Dean's premises are that "a joke requires two story lines" (3), "every part of a thing you *imagine* exists – but aren't directly perceiving – is an assumption" (6, emphasis original), and lastly, that "the aim of the reinterpretation is to shatter the target assumption" (10). According to this theory, the setup of a joke is followed by a logical first story, (or an expected statement), whereas the punch line of the joke reveals a second, unexpected story (or result). Thereby the target (or audience), makes an assumption of what comes after the setup but can then be surprised by creating such a punch line that a reinterpretation of the situation becomes necessary and results in a completed joke and lots of laughter from the audience (see Dean 3ff.). This theory is useful for me to keep in mind when analysing, for example, direct quotes from performances that the stand-up comedians include in their autobiographies and the perception of a reader/ viewer of comedian autobiographies/ stand-up comedy.

Ritchie's *Performing Live Comedy* is a handbook for stand-up comedians, including "all aspects of performing live comedy: from how to write material to structuring a stage persona, from organising an open-mic spot to running your own venue. It is aimed at comedians who are just about to start their careers as well as those who have got a few gigs under their belts" (viii) and although it reveals what is important for a stand-up comedian to learn, such as what a performance looks like, the book cannot guarantee success if someone follows Ritchie's suggestions and is ultimately a very theoretical basis. Marc Blake's *How to*

be a comedy writer: secrets from the inside, also sounds interesting and relevant initially, but a closer look at the publication reveals that it is about writing comedy for stand-up comedy performances, sketches or television sitcoms. Blake even has a chapter on how to write joke books or comedic novels, but does not mention comedian autobiographies.

Clearly these books can be seen as a valuable resource for anyone that wants to be a stand-up comedian, as they explain how one can become a comedian in theory, but do they explain how to be funny? Theories of humour abound, including Henri Bergson's and Sigmund Freud's writing among others. Their work has been explained and extended by John Durant and Jonathan Miller in *Laughing Matters* (1988) which is still relevant and a good source of inspiration regarding humour studies. The contents of the chapters range from *Neuropsychological insights into humour*, to children's humour. The chapters are short but impart the ideas and thoughts on the topics very well. The importance of humour is made clear throughout the entire book, and Michael Neve's chapter on *Freud's theory of humour, wit and jokes* is a good introduction into Freud's thoughts on humour (see Durant and Miller 35ff.). Furthermore useful for theories of humour are Elliott Oring's *Joking Aside* and particularly Dan O'Shannon's *What are you laughing at?*, in which O'Shannon comments on existing humour theories briefly, before explaining his own theory of humour. Complete with figures reminiscent of classical linguistic concepts, O'Shannon presents a new view on humour. Alison Ross' *The Language of Humour* looks at different ways of creating humour, and Jon Roeckelein's *The Psychology of Humour* starts with definitions of humour (also wit, comedy, satire/ irony/ pun), coming to the conclusion that humour is extremely difficult to explain, and that " 'Dissecting humor (jokes) is an interesting operation in which the patient usually dies' – A.A. Berger 1976" (Roeckelein 63), which is also one of the reasons why I am not dissecting jokes but rather pointing out common (literary) features of comedian autobiographies. Roeckelein's work continues with a history of humour in Chapter 2, and brings up brief insights into modern theories related to humour. Although explanations of

theories are always positive, unfortunately, Roeckelein does not explain them in great detail and does not evaluate them. Then again, *The Psychology of Humour* is first and foremost a reference guide and an annotated bibliography, thus that service is definitely fulfilled perfectly.

Generally speaking, these more theoretical works as they were just reviewed, offer methods to analyse jokes and identify different types of jokes and are thereby at times technical and often focus on the linguistic structure/ phenomenon in jokes. But although this sub-chapter is titled ‘Turning Life into Humour’, it is not the primary aim here to analyse jokes and identify set-ups or punch lines, as first of all, such jokes are not included in the comedian autobiographies as frequently as they would appear in on-stage comedy performances.

Most humour in *help* comes from the odd stories that Amstell tells, shared primarily through excerpts from his stand-up shows. Alys Key describes the general style of Amstell’s comedy very well: “His style of humour combines self-deprecation and sadness with a wry smile and tight delivery. . . . Amstell’s shows deal with depression, heartbreak, and loneliness, all of which he treats with an engaging honesty” (Key). Instead of making jokes based on his environment, or for example, wider political situations, Amstell creates a sense of intimacy in his shows and book, and talks apparently sincerely about personal matters, thoughts, and experiences. For one critic, this makes “him a brilliant self-critical comedian, though not always a happy person, as *Help* makes abundantly clear. There is genuine pain behind the over-analytical, self-deprecating quips he makes, and he finds dry humour in his situation. After all, that’s his coping mechanism” (Bennett, “Help”). Amstell says about his comedy that “it all comes from pain, but it should eventually be funny. I don't see the point of doing comedy unless it comes from pain” (Hattenstone). The comedian sees stand-up comedy as a form of therapy.

In another interview, the comedian claims that

> 'It's not that I'm exaggerating a part of myself but I am editing. I'm selecting the funny parts of myself; those are the worst bits of myself' [and that] 'It's not as good as actual therapy, but it is very helpful,' [when asked] whether it feels good to talk through these things in front of a roomful of strangers. 'Once I've turned something traumatic that happened into a story, I realise that actually it was all just the perception of an idiot. And so I feel healed by making up these stories.' (Key)

This quote brings up some points that will come up again later in Chapter 5.6: the editing of autobiographical material and the therapeutic effect of comedy and writing, as well as what a comedian's personality can be like. An important key insight at this point is that Amstell appears to admit that his autobiography is constructed, edited, and made up (see the previous quote from Key).

In comparison, *We need to talk about... Kevin Bridges* "[is] not a laugh a minute book but there's plenty of amusing stories to make you want to keep reading" (Welsh). Furthermore, the included photos have amusing captions and some anecdotes and memories of childhood experiences are entertaining to read. Other than that, whenever Bridges comments on his writing, he creates humoristic passages through content; one example of this being the acknowledgements at the end of the book that show an awareness of what the reader may think: "I usually skip this bit of a book, the bit where the author thanks the publisher, the publicist, agents and all these people you don't know, but if you bear with me, I'll keep it brief" (Bridges, *We need to talk* 479).

It is important to know that Bridges' book does not appear to be as humorous as some of the other comedians' autobiographies, as this questions an assumption that many people will have when hearing the words 'comedian writes book' – namely, that the book will be funny. Thereby, Bridges' autobiography not being too humorous is not necessarily a shortcoming. Indeed, it is one of several approaches for a comedian writing an autobiography - Romesh Ranganathan's memoir *Straight Outta Crawley* (2018), features a very similar writing style. The comedians here are thereby not failing to reach a certain standard for publication, as there are no rules that say a comedian's autobiography must always be funny; a comedian can write whatever they want in whatever way they want, even if, as seen with

Amstell, the publishers may urge a comedian to include certain elements and after all, Bridges' autobiography has certainly become a bestseller. Ultimately, the voice that comedians use in their writing creates enough of a difference from more traditional autobiographies to result in its own sub-genre.

Bridges' autobiography includes some quotes from stand-up performances that the comedian delivered, as well as newspaper reviews about them in italics and bold respectively (for example Bridges, *We need to talk* 344ff. and 402). On stage, Bridges' jokes are observational, sometimes regional, when they are anecdotes from his hometown Glasgow, for example – other times they are more universal. In his autobiography, the few humorous instances he produces are instead based on his life experiences.

In contrast to Amstell's and Bridges' few humorous features, Hills incorporates many different humorous elements in his book. As is probably expected by most of the readers, who are likely to be fans of his comedy performances, the comedian brings some of his on-stage jokes into his book, shares additional humoristic material but also personal stories; he uses the medium of print in a clever and fun way and plays with words. A selection of examples from the book is presented in the following paragraphs, together with interpretations and analyses of them.

Hills' autobiography contains many stories from various stages of Hills' life and experiences he made, whether they were about other people "truly [embodying] the phrase 'stand-up comedy'" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 36), or about Hills witnessing a rabbit perform a full comedy show on stage (see Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 235ff.). The stories thereby focus less on his childhood but more on his work experiences in radio, television, and stand-up comedy. And they are not always purely funny stories; some of them are rather shocking and will leave the reader with a bad feeling about having laughed at something that should not be as funny as it is in hindsight and when reading it on paper. A good example of an anecdote featuring dark humour as used in *Best Foot Forward* is from when Hills was working at a

radio station in Australia: The day after a shooting had happened in Tasmania and killed numerous people, the station played a tribute to the victims, with the station ID luckily being changed in the last minute or else “Adelaide listeners very nearly heard a moving tribute to the dozens of victims indiscriminately shot dead by a lone gunman, followed by a booming voice pronouncing: ‘Hit, after Hit, after Hit, after Hit. More hits, more often, on 107.1 SAFM (Woosh).’” (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 97). This anecdote can still make people laugh, because they are relieved the shocking situation did not go this far in the end (see O’Shannon 3f.), while others may have the opinion that it is inappropriate to laugh at this point. Either way, this section has the opportunity to create humour and is reminiscent of stories that Hills would tell on stage, which could be the reason, as to why Hills included this story.

As another creative source of humour, Hills wrote down song parodies in his book, for example a combination of ABBA’s *Mamma Mia* and changing song lyrics to regular text (see Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 227f.), encouraging the reader to sing along and try out the lyrics. Lastly, it should be noted, that content-wise, Hills even retells jokes made by other people, which are also funny, of course, but not his own (for example Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 43, 90). These jokes (for example Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 9), sometimes become less funny when reading them instead of hearing them, and especially also, when the reader is not familiar with the necessary information needed when trying to understand references to other comedians that Hills makes (for example Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 13, 29, 42, 45), however, most of the humour comes from himself. Perhaps, Hills is right in saying “sometimes a comedian is just a person that funny stuff happens to” (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 152), but it takes talent and skill to perform on stage, and probably even more so to put the stories into a book that is so close to his personal life. Hills shows through his autobiography *Best Foot Forward* that he can perform and write well. Thus, as can be seen from all the examples mentioned in this sub-chapter, Hills uses a variety of sources for humour and gets at times very creative with different styles, showcasing his talent for writing humour.

McIntyre uses quite a few different sources of humour in his autobiography, ranging from observations, for example on language (page 38 of *Life & Laughing*: "When my mum fell pregnant (an odd expression: 'Wow, you're pregnant, what happened?' 'I fell… on top of that man')"), and building up on these observations (for example when he names a few artists with original names, then adds own invented ones, see *Life & Laughing* 26; similar with list on 110, repeated on page 155 of *Life & Laughing*). The comedian makes simple but effective jokes/ word plays ("I got 4 per cent in French, 7 per cent in History and got lost on the way to the Geography exam" (McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 105)), but also makes jokes that do not work very well because information is missing or because the joke simply is not funny: for example the failed/ misunderstood/ unsuccessful joke mentioned on page 180 of *Life & Laughing* ("I decided to break the atmosphere with a joke. . . . This, I repeat, was a joke. I thought that was obvious. Apparently not"), or when he has to add in a footnote that "This joke requires the viewing of *The Karate Kid*, the original film starring Ralph Macchio" (McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 22) but could not be understood otherwise. On page 154, McIntyre is almost trying too hard to joke within parentheses, only making it confusing when he talks about his half-siblings: "My real father and Holly also married . . . [a]nd they too produced children… another half-brother and half-sister for me. Bringing my total to one sister, one half-sister and four half-brothers (the equivalent of one and a half sisters and two brothers)". Sometimes McIntyre has to explain himself and say "I'm kidding" (*Life & laughing* 170, 278). Readers may find that some anecdotes are simply funny on their own, the most hilarious one perhaps being the incident with the drug dealer in Edinburgh (McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 219ff.), or the conversation in a partly Italian accent in the restaurant (McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 298f.) – McIntyre likes to imitate the voices and accents of others. More 'basic' jokes are made on pages 236 or, for example, the "we'll just have a drink to start" which prompts the waiter to ask if they wanted "it on the rocks", upon which McIntyre replies that no, they will "have it here on the table" (*Life & Laughing* 239). As a last

source of humour that I will mention here, McIntyre includes excerpts from his previous stand-up routines (for example *Life & Laughing* 332, 343, including the first jokes he made on page 249, one-liners like "I remember when I was born because it was the last time that I was inside a woman who looked genuinely pleased when I got out"). Generally, some of his jokes are self-deprecating, but most of his humour style is observational.

The humour in Millican's autobiography is usually dark, based on her being bullied, or having experienced negativity in her life. At one point, the situation described even makes her exclaim "I would have made an incredible Nazi" (Millican, *How to be Champion* 51), which fits with Millican's 'crude' comedy style as really no one should compare themselves to a Nazi just for a joke. Subtler and less dark sources of humour include the mentioning of incidents that are shared experiences (for example Millican, *How to be Champion* 14, 29). Because readers may have had similar situations in their lives, the material can become amusing, as if the reader was saying 'oh, that's so funny, this is also something that I have experienced'. One example of such a shared experience between Millican and a reader is on page 54 of *How to be Champion* where Millican retells had always been picked last for teams in Physical Education lessons, so the teacher gave her the opportunity to pick teams and Millican decided to pick the least athletic people on her team. This form of authenticity and honesty draws readers into a shared understanding where they can possibly see the humour in the experiences from a reflective point of view.

4.3 Authenticity

To be able to discuss the concept of authenticity in more detail, some premises have to be understood initially: Generally, "[c]reative nonfiction demands spontaneity and an imaginative approach, while remaining true to the validity and integrity of the information it contains" (Gutkind, *The Art of Creative Nonfiction* 5). And rather than trying to define 'truth' it is more useful to look at how truth works in (creative) non-fiction:

> Readers of nonfiction (creative or otherwise) enter the text with an understanding that the story is linked directly not to the world of the possible but to the world of lived experience. It often reads like fiction and … strives for the timeless emotional truths of human experience that brings us closer to a greater understanding of ourselves and each other. But creative nonfiction also explicitly engages the concept of the truth, both emotional and literal ... to make sure the architecture of his story is based on authentic and reasonably verifiable experience. (Gutkind and Fletcher 149)

Authenticity itself is "the quality of being real or true" ("authenticity") and always comes down to personal judgements and how willing someone is to believe or mistrust someone else. As I will show, there is a complex relationship between authenticity and comedian autobiographies. It is difficult to determine how much of the text is a performance, an act, and how much is 'honest'. It is therefore more productive to accept an uncertainty regarding this matter and instead focus on the evidence that the text provides but acknowledge in the back of the mind that the content will have been edited and cannot be taken as the complete truth. Or as Smith and Watson put it: "While autobiographical narratives may contain 'facts', they are not factual history about a particular time, person, or event. Rather they offer subjective 'truth' rather than 'fact'" (10), but "any utterance in an autobiographical text, even if inaccurate or distorted, characterizes its writer" (12). An explanation of autobiographical writing and creative non-fiction has been presented in Chapter 2.

In the autobiographies, many times the comedians consciously try to recall memories to tell their life stories and make an effort to get them right, possibly also to create an impression of authenticity. Signifiers like 'I remember' or 'I do not remember (… but)' are used frequently. It is common knowledge that "[i]t's impossible to remember everything that has happened to us in our lives. Given that we can't remember everything, what we need are some tools for helping us to stretch our memories to bring to mind as much as we can" (Corder 23). These tools include the use of memorabilia, like diaries, school reports, letters, and photos or to talk about the past, or using topic headings, such as "First Job" (Corder 27), under which notes can be gathered (see Corder 24ff.). British presenter and stand-up comedian Sue Perkins, for example, opens her autobiography by saying how her

mother had kept all old documents etc., and even includes some within her work (15ff.). Every now and again, the other comedians, too, share that they looked at old recordings of their performances, old reviews that their parents kept, or notes. Despite having tools to make remembering easier, many researchers have shown that memories are, as Perkins calls them, “slippery bastards” (312). In academic terms, Perkins’ suggestion means,

> [m]emory, as we all know, is subject to the vagaries of time. The ways in which we recollect events changes as we grow older and with repeated telling. Some memories fade, others grow in significance, some disappear altogether. . . The writer also makes choices, consciously or subconsciously, about which memories to include in life narratives, and how they are portrayed. (Freeman and Le Rossignol)

Smith and Watson say that “remembering involves a reinterpretation of the past in the present” (16) and that “[t]hus, narrated memory is an interpretation of a past that can never be fully recovered” (16), which also adds another level to the previously mentioned complexity of temporality again. A study from the United States shows that:

> Every time you remember an event from the past, your brain networks change in ways that can alter the later recall of the event. Thus, the next time you remember it, you might recall not the original event but what you remembered the previous time. . . The reason for the distortion, Bridge [who led the study] said, is the fact that human memories are always adapting. “Memories aren’t static,” she noted “If you remember something in the context of a new environment and time, or if you are even in a different mood, your memories might integrate the new information.” (Paul)

In the autobiographies that are being examined here, the comedians frequently acknowledge the uncertainty of memory. This acknowledgement is not uncommon in autobiographies, although comedians sometimes use it as another way to bring in humour and joke about it. Millican, for example, writes in her autobiography “I never normally remember which year I did what, which is why this book is occasionally quite vague. I sometimes just remember things by hairdo” (*How to be Champion* 241), which creates an amusing visual image about hair styles that stand out, but also explains that not everything the comedian writes, will have happened as depicted. If the comedians willingly admit to not being able to remember everything, which a lot of the comedians do in their autobiographies it may make the book’s authors appear more trustworthy and reliable.

Scientifically, Malim and Birch explain how memory works and changes throughout life. Peter Graf et al. analysed the *Lifespan development of human memory*, which furthermore confirms that memories get lost and changed over time, stating that, for example, "flashbulb memories, which require a strong visual component, would be more likely to form earlier in the lifespan (see Cohen, Conway & Maylor, 1994, for some support), and childhood memories should have less narrative coherence" (177), and that the older someone is, the more memories have to be stored which may make it more challenging to recall them, with further effects on memory coming from the environment and even the language used. And although, at this point I could look at how exactly memories work, this undertaking would not be too beneficial for this thesis, as it ultimately is incredibly challenging to determine the amount of truth in comedian autobiographies.

As an example, Michael Jungert questions the truthfulness of memories by providing an answer to the question: If memories change with time, how true can then the recollections of events (that the comedians share), be? As Jungert explains, in theory, a memory is true, "when the content corresponds with the objective reality" (Jungert 188, translated from German). Yet interpretation influences truth, as does manipulation, and especially emotion (which again can change over time), so that "in some cases a person may correctly remember the emotional significance of a past event, but err concerning the factual content of the memory" (Jungert 194f., translated from German). This means that although facts are incorrect, everything can still be true on a deeper, (emotional) level, and emotional memories can be found frequently within the comedians' autobiographies. In summary, there is no possibility of being able to determine a definite true or false memory, especially, because the normal reader does not personally know the comedians, or will not have been a direct witness of the events the comedians talk about. What can be done, however, is to judge how likely a memory is true or false, which means that unless a memory has been invented and never experienced after all, all memories will be at least partially true (see Jungert 204). So although

comedians may have embellished some of their stories, or used, for example exaggeration to make them more humorous, or perhaps changed the names of people involved, the memories will generally be more or less true.

In addition to Jungert, Tunku Badli and Mariam Dzulkifi, and Hwiman Chung and Xinshu Zhao have written about the effect of humour on memory – unfortunately not directly related to comedian autobiographies – Chung and Zhao also focus on the role of humour in advertisements, but transferable to my study it is useful to know that humorous things (be that advertisements or events, for example) are remembered more easily than non-humorous material. A very interesting remark comes also from Patricia Waugh in her publication *Practising Postmodernism, Reading Modernism*, when she states that "I believe we can live without truth, but not without truth-effect" (163). The meaning of this quote in relation to comedian autobiographies will become apparent in this chapter.

What can be taken away from these academic publications on memory is that memories are vague and difficult to fixate on a singular truth. And so, just like some memories are closer to the actual truth than others, some narrators are more reliable than others. Despite "Michael Steinberg (2013) allud[ing] to the impossibility of a reliable narrator in memoir due to the fallibility of memory" (Freeman and Le Rossignol), it is clear, that when reading autobiographies, "[r]eaders want to trust the narrator as a reliable witness, a source of authentic information" (Gutkind and Fletcher 70). And while the comedians often correct their own statements (for example Millican, *How to be Champion* 9: "We were such a crazy bunch, always up to mischief. . . When I say we, I really mean 'they'"), at other times comedians narrate past incidents where they have lied – presenting an account of lying but not directly lying itself in the 'current' writing of the book/ performance material (for example, when McIntyre wanted to get a youth hostel card but had not reached the necessary age yet to obtain one, see McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 164). But through telling the reader in the autobiography that they lied in these situations in the past, the comedians tell the truth again,

in hindsight. Connolly says in his book that in his acts he always tries to tell the truth: "In fact, I used to specify exactly where [I grew up], onstage: it was on a kitchen floor, 'on the linoleum, three floors up'" (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 5).

Stand-up audiences will most likely tolerate this 'lying' – either not caring about the 'truth' or not needing the 'truth' as the 'lie' – if humorous – is satisfying for the audience and is therefore not questioned or wished for to be heard differently (see the earlier explanation of the 'suspension of disbelief'). Thus, the value of telling the truth is peculiar. For the comedians it is likely that, unless they must change information to protect the privacy of others, they will not care too much about the actual true incidents that they are re-telling, as it is probably most important for them that whatever they are saying is funny and entertaining and the whole autobiographical text will be a performative act, at least to some extent. McIntyre's autobiography appears to – deliberately or accidentally, the extent of his awareness is not clear – mock the peculiar relationship between comedy, life writing, and truth. On page 7 in his book *Life & Laughing*, McIntyre writes: "According to Wikipedia, I was born in 1976 on 15 February. However, according to my mother, it was 21 February 1976. I don't know who to believe". This quote perfectly demonstrates that not everything/ everyone can be fully trusted – Wikipedia now states his birth date being 21 February 1976 – but it also shows the amount of humour that can be constructed through misinformation: it is an example of humour created through the discrepancy between facts (mother's knowledge versus Wikipedia's claim). At the same time, McIntyre himself should know when he was born and celebrates his birthdays and would not have needed to mention the incongruity. Thus, the authority of the autobiographer is questioned too. But it is the authority and more so the authenticity that is relevant when looking at autobiographical texts by comedians, rather than literal truth and factuality or accuracy, as some sort of deviation from the actual facts, or a degree of fictionalising always takes place:

> Philippe Lejeune famously suggests that there is a pact implicit in the autobiographical act between the writer and the reader, according to which the writer undertakes, even

> if not fully consciously or with integrity, to tell the reader the truth of his experience as far as this is possible. Of course, [a] fictionalising often takes place. . . [A]n autobiographical narrator can only ever be a partial and temporary self-representation …Yet conceptually, autobiography remains rooted in truth-telling. (Hunt 234)

On what could be called a deeper level of understanding content/ incidents (and the minds of the comedians), self-reflection can also be used as introspection or self-evaluation and is usually used to process experiences, learn from them, and can also help to determine the truth. In the autobiographies, the comedians do reflect now and again. After all, "[b]iography is not only a sequence of events, but also a reflective interpretation of the events" (Jakubowska 62). Generally, however, it is almost impossible to identify direct lies within the autobiographies but then also it does not really matter for the purposes of this research project at least. Despite this notion, it is still worthwhile to have mentioned it, because the question of authenticity and truth is not only an important part of the genre creative non-fiction, but it is also a question that probably every reader of a comedian's autobiography or audience member of a comedy performance asks themselves – is this true? Did that really happen to the comedian? Is this a created performance? Once again, this whole matter of authenticity and memory leads back to voice and personality – the comedians making sure that whatever they write suits their act and is congruent.

How then, does humour affect autobiographical writing and authenticity? As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, humour firstly and mainly affects the authenticity and amount of truths in the books: very often, the 'true'/ actual stories told are embellished and changed for comedic purposes. Some of the comedians do this openly and inform the readers about changes, such as Amstell, but this is not always indicated clearly at the specific passage, but rather in a statement in the beginning of the book/ front matter (Amstell states in a note before the table of contents in his book *help* that "[s]ome names have been changed to protect privacy"). Other comedians do not usually have such statements at all, which makes it even more difficult to evaluate whether something is 'true' or not. And although the genre creative non-fiction allows some leeway in terms of truth, a certain amount of truth, or at least

emotional truth, is needed to still make it possible that the work can be classified as one of non-fiction as opposed to a completely invented fictional story. On the other side, the use of humour ensures that the autobiographies and memoirs by the comedians are works of creative non-fiction in the first place as opposed to 'drier' non-fiction books. Humour is created through creative freedom and can make books much more entertaining to read than other books, although not all comedians necessarily make use of this advantage. As mentioned earlier, there is no need for a comedian autobiography to be humorous, after all, autobiographies by non-comedians work just as well.

In addition to all the points made so far, the amount of humour featured in the texts makes readers open to 'new' truths and leads them to not question the truth of the experiences, given that it still feels authentic to the characters and authors/ comedians. In summary, using humour in literature makes the works more difficult to define and the variety in what the comedians created with their autobiographies makes it difficult to put them into one specific, already existing category, as they usually take on elements from different variants. Although the comedians' rise to success follows a certain pattern, at the same time their life stories are so different from each other, that it seems like really the only common feature is that the books were written by stand-up comedians and that the works are edited for humorous purposes. Regarding the editing, Larson writes:

> Imagine ten siblings, … each of whom, … writes a memoir about growing up. Reading those ten memoirs, we would find agreement, in general, only on the barest facts. Everything else— pecking-order differences, stronger and weaker egos, parental favoritism — would be subject to individual perspective, in part because each kid had fought hard to be heard or had wilted in the competition. Which book is true? All are true and none is truer, though each of the ten writers would defend his or her truth forever. (Larson 22f.)

And after all, "[a]ny life story, whether a written autobiography or an oral testimony, is shaped not only by the reworkings of experience through memory and reevaluation, but also by art [(in this case the art of stand-up comedy and humour in particular)]" (Chamberlain and Thompson 1). This indicates that the comedians' creativity in written texts works well. Or as

this quote puts it: “A good memoir requires two elements — one of art, the other of craft” (Zinsser 6) and the comedians try to combine both in their works. Looking back at the theories relating to genre and autobiographical writing my discoveries regarding comedian autobiographies do not go against any established concepts but rather add to them as so far these literary works of comedian autobiographies have not been explored in such detail.

When Amstell writes about experiences in his book, they can sound somewhat unbelievable and fictional, for example when he moons his grandmother to test “whether something shocking and unacceptable could still be met with love” (*help* 21). Whenever Amstell tells a story on stage, like the aforementioned ‘mooning of his grandmother’, the story does not sound ‘truer’, or more likely to have actually happened than the way it is described in the book, especially when he is exaggerating/ overacting with the movement of his hand to accentuate what he says and his body language is visible. These insights into the perception of the narrative and stage performance, that is, understanding that comedy routines can appear more or less factual and real, link to the role that voice plays in both media. Briefly here, Amstell’s voice is consistent across the different media, especially since he reuses a lot of stand-up material in his autobiography.

He also states that he “was tricked into this book. I was asked if I’d be interested in having the transcripts of my stand-up published, and rather than saying, ‘Thank you, but I don’t think there’s any need to do this,’ I said, ‘These words must be written down.’ And who for? ….” (Amstell, *help* introduction). It is a valid question, and although there is a readership for his book, at times it rather feels like Amstell wrote the book just for himself, not only because he is self-reflective for example “Why couldn’t it have been both, Simon?” (Amstell, *help* 149), but also because he is so seemingly brutally honest/ authentic to his persona for example “I’m not sure if that paragraph was worth the truth” (Amstell, *help* 76), not appearing shy at all (as he often seems to be on stage), but rather extremely open, perhaps even sharing too much information for a reader, best suitable for a self-study. In fact, he himself thought at

the first book signing that his written work should not be read by anyone, because it “is very personal” (“An Interview with Simon Amstell” 0:12-0:16).

A final example of what is funny and more or less truthful in Millican’s book for the purposes of this analysis, can be found on page 165f.: “For this story [Millican’s husband] Gary’s version of what happened will be in brackets”. Millican then proceeds to tell her view of the story whereas Gary’s comments in the brackets tell something different. Having these two different versions of events is a relationship dynamic that many readers will recognise: The male point of view in the brackets is exaggerated for dramatic and comedic effect.

> For this story Gary’s version of what happened will be in brackets. We went to stay in a log cabin (chalet) in the Lake District and had a wonderful time. He was living with a flatmate and I was living with my parents, so a few days of just us was amazing. We’d brought a disposable barbecue with us and Gary lit it rather lethally (very safely) on the steps of the log cabin (chalet). We were caught by the woman who ran the place, who asked us not to light a fire on a wooden house. Fair enough (bit dramatic).
>
> One night, we went out for a walk in the pitch dark where he saved me from a badger (bear).

Figure 5: Millican Brackets. *How to be Champion* Millican, page 165 via https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=rWM8DgAAQBAJ

Millican thereby creates two possible readings and understanding of this passage. She highlights and makes fun of the stereotypes that men will exaggerate, for example their role in ‘saving a woman from danger’ (Millican saying it was a badger in comparison to her husband claiming it was a bear). Since bears are not native to the United Kingdom, it is clear whose version of the story is intended to be accurate but the humour relies on the reader’s shared knowledge of the location to point up the impossibility of it having been a bear. A passage with such literary effects of using brackets to convey a second meaning cannot be created

effectively in the same manner on stage, which leads me to the next sub-chapter. Effectively it introduces a second voice as counterpoint.

In summary, Millican stays largely true to her performance of her 'self' in terms of humour and voice, in the book as she does on stage.

Perkins gives a warning about not taking her exact words for true, right at the beginning. Before the preface the comedian explains that

> [m]ost of this book is true. I have, however, changed a few names to protect the innocent, and the odd location, too. I've skewed some details for comic effect, swapped timelines and generally embellished and embroidered some of the duller moments in my past. I have sometimes created punchlines where real life failed to provide them, and occasionally invented characters wholesale. I have amplified my more positive characteristics in an effort to make you like me. I have hidden the worst of my flaws in an effort to make you like me. I may at one point have pretended to have been an Olympic fencing champion. Other than that, as I say – I've told it like it is. (Perkins)

Generally, Perkins tries not to lie and makes an effort to tell the truth. This is not always successful (see page 76, when she openly lies about which play her school performed), yet her objectives are made clear throughout her work. "When I began writing this book, I went home to see if my mum had kept some of my old stuff. What I found was that she hadn't kept some of it. She had kept all of it – every bus ticket, stub, programme, letter, postcard and picture, every school report, essay, poem and painting" (Perkins 15). Perkins even reprints her mother's diary entry of Sue's birth (31ff.), which proves that she is telling the truth. Perkins appears to be authentic, but admits at several points that memories are a tricky thing.

"[M]emories are prismatic" (Perkins 5), she declares. "I have my recollections, but they may well be totally different from those of my family. I want to see if I can integrate our perspectives so we can all be happy with the end result" (Perkins 5). The family suggests changes for the section in her autobiography about them, like saying she had only one sibling, not swearing, making someone taller than they are. Chapter 1 then starts with a story featuring all their suggestions (still believable somehow) and ends with "*This is ridiculous*. Honestly. Let's just say it as it is. . . . I'm doing this book my way" (Perkins 14). This is an interesting

comment by Perkins, as it raises the questions as to how much of the book is her own writing and how much the publisher or someone else would have asked her to include or do with the book, a question which cannot really be answered unless Perkins is interviewed about this.

Sue Perkins also reveals she "always wanted to be a writer" (Perkins 1), and first was encouraged in a meeting to write a fictional story, but now it's turned out to be "something a little more me" (Perkins 5):

> it has been painful – to go back and see in such forensic detail and with such unimaginable clarity the person I was, trying to become the person I wanted to be. Sometimes we don't want to be tethered to yesterday. It's nicer to forget. Maybe the gaps in our memory are there for a reason, evolutionary perhaps, to give us the space to grow, to get away from childishness or childish things. Or maybe it's so we have the chance to invent, or at least include, some magic in our yesterdays. (Perkins 16)

She continues by realising that "A memoir, after all, is as much about what you don't shine the light on as what you do. It's about judicious choices and edited picks. With that much primary and secondary source material, it would feel more like I was writing a biography than an autobiography" (Perkins 18).

The scholar of comedy Chris Ritchie states that "[w]e all have the capability of being unique performers and we need to talk about our own experiences and ideas so that the audience will 'believe' and listen to us" (Ritchie 26). Stand-up comedy is a performance, an act, and it does not have to be true to be effective and fulfil its purpose. Sometimes, lies may even be funnier, but that depends on the joke. Generally, readers may expect autobiographies to be completely true, but as seen from this study, especially with comedians' autobiographies, this is unlikely to ever be achieved fully as some form of editing always occurs. Concluding this section, it can be said that "[e]veryone who has ever performed comedy has their own definite ideas about how to be funny. But the simplest and most basic concept may also be the most effective. *The truth is funny.* Honest discovery, observation, and reaction is better than contrived invention. After all, we're funniest when we're just being ourselves" (Halpern et al. 15, emphasis original). Charna Halpern et al. continue by saying

that in a way, stand-up comedy is not much different from telling a funny story to a few friends, only that usually the audience is bigger, claiming that "[t]he … most interesting comedy is ... based … on exposing our own personalities" (Halpern et al. 16), hence also stand-up's connection with autobiographical practices. In regard to telling, or remembering jokes, Sinbad gives a particularly interesting thought: When asked whether he could "tell the same story twice", Sinbad replied that "[i]t changes all the time. You add to it, and it moves, and it should" (Ajaye 219). In summary, like Sinbad shows, misremembering, or not remembering everything is natural, and may in fact even create a new situation of humour because of it. Thus, rather than questioning the actual truth or authenticity of everything a comedian says, it should simply be appreciated that no matter how far away from 'reality' every statement is, it is delivered in a humorous way, tells a joke, or gives new information about the comedian, either to shape their personas or new information about the 'true self'. Interestingly, and linking to the following aspect,

> [p]sychological research demonstrates that the recalling of autobiographical memories is influenced by the same factors that are decisive in the selection of information for public self-presentation…The fact that subjective interpretations of one's life history may be constructed in order to be favourable to the appearance of the narrator does not necessarily imply that autobiographical narrative is completely false. (Jakubowska 62)

This quote is significant, because, when looking even further into the analyses of the comedian autobiographies, at times, it can feel as if the comedians are purely self-advertising through their books, as well as basing their writing on their brand. The comedian autobiographies thereby move on from truth of content to authenticity to persona, which ultimately turns into an authenticity to their known brand and commercialisation.

Millican and Hills, for example, quite often refer to shows they participated in, or ask the reader directly to look at videos featuring the comedians. McIntyre and Manford have actual advertisements for tours and DVD recordings at the back of their books, indicating that everything can be commercial. Amstell, as another example re-uses many excerpts of his stand-up shows. And while Amstell's work may generate interest in the reader to re-watch the

on-stage performances, on the contrary the reader may also feel like it is then not worth buying the DVDs as a lot of the performances' content has already been shared in the book (see also the paragraph on value earlier in this chapter). Larson concludes that "[m]emoirists [which the comedians can be seen as] have their special interests— to be self-aggrandizers, to be self-deluders, to be self-celebrants" (113) – or especially in this case of the stand-up comedians – self-promoters, which is something that is explored further in the chapter on commercialisation following a look at personas, with sub-sections focussing on, among other characteristics, gender, disability, and dialects of comedian personas.

5. Personas

Having a strong or interesting personality or persona is essential to being able to perform on stage as a comedian and write an autobiography, but what makes those characteristics? There is some psychological literature on comedians. As reported by Michael Wilson, emphasising certain traits of a personality is valuable in the comedy business, with the comedian having to try and stand out as well as being memorable, which is confirmed by Gil Greengross and Geoffrey Miller. Further explorations of personas are done by Sara Eskridge, the fundamental concepts and theories surrounding 'the self' and personality shaping/ development are explained in detail in Paul Brinich and Christopher Shelley's *The Self and Personality Structure*, and *Introductory Psychology* by Tony Malim and Ann Birch. Understanding personas and personalities is important regarding the examination in my project of the self on stage and performing the self. Additionally, it helps us better identify the differences between a persona, a heightened version of oneself, or the 'real' person.

Already mentioned earlier, Quirk and Double make some interesting revelations about personas. Quirk argues that stand-up comedy personas manipulate the audience to lead them to a certain reaction, while the personas also "involve some manipulation of perception and some honest reflection of the performer's real attitudes" (133) within the creation of a persona. Meanwhile, Double finds that

> Truth is a vital concept in most modern stand-up comedy because of the idea that it is about authentic self-expression. The boundary between offstage and onstage is blurred, and in many cases, the audience believes that the person they see onstage is more or less the same as the person they might meet offstage. This inevitably means that there's often an assumption that what the person onstage says about his or her life is more or less true. If comedians say they are gay, or they just went on holiday, or they hate Mexican food, we generally believe them. (*Getting the Joke*, 160)

This chapter here deals with the manifestation of personas as presented in the comedian autobiographies that are studied in this thesis. A particular focus lies, for example on Adam Hills' prosthetic foot and how the comedian uses his disability as a source for humour, but also how he uses his voice and performances for more inclusivity. In addition to that, I will

also look at different accents/ dialects that comedians use in their written works, for example, Bridges and Connolly using Scottish slang, and Millican the Geordie dialect of her hometown. Apart from portraying a suffering character, Amstell is gay and talks about that frequently on stage and in his book, using his homosexuality as a source of humour, whereas McIntyre is not gay but still jokes about his 'camp' appearance every now and again. In any way, the comedians' embodiments are generally emphasised more on stage than in the autobiographies, because the comedians can use their bodies/ embodiments during a performance (visually versus textually in their books) to emphasise what they are saying/ joking about. For example, having a visual image of Millican in front of one's eye while she talks about her figure, can make the verbal (joke) more effective as it adds another level to the joke (making it a sort of visual and auditory joke rather than linguistic only). Hills, on the other hand, is known to show off his prosthesis when performing live and uses it as part of his act.

With a persona, comedians emphasise one or more specific characteristic of themselves; they "base their persona on themselves and their experiences, but 'heightened' – that is, comedians emphasise certain aspects of their true personality and their life while playing down others" (Ritchie 26). The persona is essentially what an audience sees on stage, and what will attract an audience apart from the actual humorous content that is being performed, or in other words, a "persona means the public face [a comedian] present[s] to the world" (Murray 67).

> As stand-up comedy has become a form of 'excavation of self', it has relied less and less upon 'joke jokes'. Gone are 'one liners', and if they remain they become a niche ('one liner comedians', such as Jimmy Carr); but neither have they become 'storytellers' where humorousness is incidental to a yarn (as with Dave Allen). Rather stand-up comedians have adopted a practice of 'wittification of self', an economisation of 'who they are' and commodification of self (a persona which can be peddled). (Smith, Daniel *Comedy and Critique* 35)

This quote not only emphasises the autobiographical nature of the material (speaking of a self/ persona) but it also relates back to the topics of value, image, and marketing of the books and

comedians. It is, however, often difficult to determine if comedians use a (subtle) persona on-stage or are being themselves. In the case of Amstell, for example, “[h]is stand-up persona is different from the Simon Amstell who presented *Buzzcocks* and *Pop World*, but his real constancy is in his honesty” (Key) – or possibly his (faked/ carefully constructed) projection of honesty. In the comedy industry, comedians are encouraged to emphasise significant personality/ character traits to make them stand out and be more recognisable/ memorable. This thinking leads to the creation of a persona, which can include an emphasis on general looks, clothing styles, size, weight, ticks, accents, or speech patterns, and more. Hills has his prosthetic foot (and in the United Kingdom his Australian slang) as a stand-out characteristic trait of his persona; the significant feature of Millican is her Geordie dialect and figure along with her crudeness. Bridges and McIntyre, some of the most beloved comedians in the United Kingdom are known for their observational comedy, with additional attributes of Bridges being ‘Scottish’, ‘young’, and ‘working class’, and for McIntyre ‘loud’, and ‘pseudo-camp’. Amstell’s persona could be described as ‘depressed’, ‘shy’, ‘homosexual’, and ‘never-aging’. These are, at least, the attributes that can be most likely put towards these comedian’s personas, but it does not mean that a persona cannot change over time. Most importantly for such attributes is, that the audience can believe a comedian’s persona and that the attributes/ personas fit with the jokes: “There has to be a realistic connection between the persona onstage and the material being used in order for the comedy to be convincing to the audience. Although what the performer says may not be factually true, it has to be true to them; it has to appear that this kind of thing could well have happened to that persona” (Ritchie 26). The comedians analysed in this study seem to be very much like the actual people (unlike the popular persona/ comic character Alan Partridge for example) or at least their personas are believable. This believability helps a reader to picture the ‘characters’/ comedians in the autobiographies and can influence the reader to like the comedian more.

In 2009, Greengross and Miller conducted a study looking at "the personality characteristics of comedians [in the United States of America] based on a Big Five personality scale" (80). The researchers wanted to find out whether comedians had a certain type of personality or skill-set unique to the people of their profession and they did this by letting comedians fill in "a short demographic inventory and the NEO-FFI-R survey ([developed by] Costa & McCrae, 1992) of the ''Big Five" personality scale (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism)", which asked the participants (among them "31 professional comedians … and 9 amateur comedians" Greengross and Miller 80) to rate themselves by agreeing or disagreeing to statements in varying degrees (for example strongly disagree or strongly agree) (Greengross and Miller 81). The conclusion of the study was that

> [p]rofessional comedians are high on openness to experience, compared to the sample of college students, but lower than comedy writers. Professional comedians are also relatively low on conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness. As predicted, comedians are more open to experiences than the average population. Stand-up comedy requires a fresh and innovative look at things around us and staying in tune with popular culture events that interest their audience. (Greengross and Miller 82)

On top of that, "[c]omedians, like other creative people, are also low on conscientiousness" and "slightly low on agreeableness, especially compared to writers" (Greengross and Miller 82). "There were no differences among the groups on neuroticism", but "the most surprising finding was that comedians are more introverted than other people" (all Greengross and Miller 82), which immediately reminded me of Amstell, who always appears somewhat shy and very introverted on stage. The suggestion by Greengross and Miller – comedians being more introverted than other people – will usually sound very unlikely to regular audience members. It is through their autobiographies that the comedians often reveal their thoughts about going on stage and performing in front of many people. They may make it look like they are comfortable with being famous and performing in big arenas, but this does not always have to be the case. Millican, for example, says she has "never been great in

crowds" (276) but performs in front of big audiences because "[t]here's a gap; [she's] up high. It's very different" (276). When meeting fans on the streets or after shows she gets anxiety (Millican 280) but the comedian apologises and asks her fans to respect that. Her nervousness before going on stage seems to subside once she starts her show and is not very noticeable to a member of the audience. In their book on jokes, the stand-up comedian Jimmy Carr and scholar Lucy Greeves see another trait that is shared by stand-up – "a need for love, for popularity, to be noticed, to show off" (114). I shall extend this list by stating the obvious: comedians want to perform, they enjoy it and more importantly, often simply 'live' for laughter.

5.1 Gender

First of all, because of Millican being a woman and the rest of the "Focus Comedians" being men, this chapter will go in depth with the matter of gender and women in comedy and I will demonstrate how Millican defies expected gender stereotypes with her persona. In terms of gender in comedy, where "only one out of ten performers is a woman" (Ritchie 44), the following is one way of explaining this male/ female comedian imbalance:

> Countless writers and critics have argued that femininity and a sense of humour are mutually exclusive and that women's "natural" inclination toward emotion and sensitivity has left them incapable of possessing a quality-humor that many feel is dependent on "masculine" traits such as intellect and aggressiveness. Women, the argument goes, are far too refined and delicate to be funny. (Wagner)

Furthermore, the "inherently aggressive nature of comedy is also diametrically opposed to the cultural ideal of femininity as defined at the turn of the twentieth century, with its emphasis on submissiveness, deference, and passivity" (Wagner).

In addition to Wagner's remark, humour research revealed that gender and humour even affects relationships, as "'[a]lthough both sexes say they want a sense of humour, in our research women interpreted this as 'someone who makes me laugh,' and men wanted 'someone who laughs at my jokes,'' says Rod A. Martin of Western University, Canada"

(Nicholson). The advantage of comedy is that the genre has always pushed boundaries and provided a new view on stereotypical gender roles (see Wagner or White and Mundy 177ff.). Millican, for example, is not only a female comedian, but she also frequently talks about her body image on stage, something which she mentions a lot in her book as well. On page 227 of *How to be Champion*, she complains about some show reviews mentioning her figure, yet at the same time this is what she bases a huge part of her jokes on, which is apparently contradictory or is possibly Millican making those jokes herself but not giving everyone else the right to do so too. This focus on body image could be part of a bigger, gender-related issue: In *Voices Made Flesh* by Lynn C. Miller et al., it is rightly noted that, "[w]omen are taught to regulate their physical presentation to 'fit in' with standards of mainstream beauty and behavior. . . To be unkempt or overweight is to create a spectacle for others to observe as 'abnormal' and thus invite ridicule" (16, 17). It appears that Millican is aware of this and uses her appearance, character, and voice as an advantage to produce comedy. According to Miller et al., "Jeanie Forte also notes that women's autobiographical stage performance challenges patriarchy by moving female life experiences from the private realm into the public. She writes that women's autobiographical performance is also connected to female sexuality" (15). The final two sentences of the quote from Miller seem to apply to what Millican is doing: Millican may want to use herself as an encouragement and inspiration for others (especially other women), talking openly about private/ intimate situations, her body etc., which is not necessarily liked by everyone that watches, reads, or listens to her humoristic texts and performances. This resistance of Millican towards the patriarchy may be a political/ ideological effect – the comedian is working to challenge patriarchy through her publications, texts, and voice, which means that many people that are used to the status quo could find her material uncomfortable. In short, Millican breaks taboos about the female body. Ultimately,

> A female writer, according to Virginia Woolf, traditionally encounters two fundamental problems. The first is the "severe severity" with which men condemn

> women's behaviour and curtail their freedom to self-expression. She explains the second and more difficult problem as that of: "telling the truth about my own experiences as a body… The gendered body continues to be one of the most controversial preoccupations of the modern age, and the ability to "tell the truth" of the body perplexes many feminists and women today. (Grace 9)

Both bodies and (usually non-male) gender are often heavily criticised and observed by a mainly patriarchal viewpoint. This can be discouraging for people of a non-male gender to take up performing publicly as a stand-up comedian, but comedians like Millican show that the struggle can be worth it.

In her book, Millican also includes humorous acknowledgements, thanking "caffeine and sugar" (*How to be Champion* 298) and more, the comedian does one more thing that none of the other comedians have done in their works: Millican re-prints a recipe for a cake at the end of her book, which fits very well with her 'character'/ persona. Sharing a cake recipe follows the recurring theme of weight in her life, book, and stand-up performances and possibly also draws on gender stereotypes. Although the recipe is not a joke per se, Millican has many jokes based on her figure, for example "If you're fat, only go on the run where other fat people live" (*How to be Champion* 274). In terms of gender and comedy the following quote summarises the current situation:

> Women comedians do feel that there is more pressure on them than on men and that men are looking at them not only as comedians but also as women, so they feel that they have a harder job. Julian [Hall] also sees some venues and audiences as difficult regarding attitudes towards women: 'There are still venues that are perceived as women-unfriendly and of course this is as much to do with the audience as the MC or the visiting acts.' …Some women comedians claim that the prejudice they encounter from some male audience members reflects the situation in society at large – men are encouraged to be funny and it can be a valuable social asset, therefore we are used to it. For a woman to be funny is viewed by some people as 'unladylike', so we are less used to it. Men often feel undermined by women who are funnier than they are. When asked how women are viewed in live comedy, British Asian comedian Shazia Mirza said that women were perceived 'generally as unfunny. Or not as funny as men'. Just as in everyday life. (Ritchie 45)

Female comedians may always have to deal with stereotypes, whether they fight or follow expectations. Millican and Perkins may do so very successfully. As Gadzepko and Smith state, it is important to look at how media is portraying women: "Among concerns relating to

representation is the stereotyping of men's and women's roles in society, and how media objectify, sexualize, commodify, and vilify women" (257). This includes comedy. Where comedians have a wide reach, there is then potentially also a need of comedians to "educate …, to cover gender more fluidly and we must interrogate old assumptions" (Gadzepko and Smith 265).

5.2 Disability

The comedian Hills has a different stereotype to work with than Millican. Hills looks more serious in the images on the dust-jacket of his autobiography than other comedians on their covers, which hints at the next point. Aside from entertainment, comedians can also use their public voice and humour to raise awareness about more personal or serious issues. Hills has a prosthetic foot and so, disability humour is included here – a type of humour that is not without prejudice, because:

> Drawing attention to disability humor … raises a hidden paradox that makes many people feel uncomfortable. What is so funny about having a disability when others think it is a tragedy [or] not politically correct. . . This black humor is ill fated; it can only lead to being morose and depressed. Disability humor is powerful for it elicits strong emotions such as anger and fear and often produces reactions against the instigators of cruel jokes. (Albrecht 67)

Yet, as will be explained in this section, joking about disabilities can be beneficial. Hills has an artificial leg that nowadays often becomes the foundation of his jokes, even though he was advised to establish himself as a 'regular' comedian first before talking about his foot, that is being known as a comedian rather than the comedian with the artificial foot/ the 'one-legged comedian' (see Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 58f.). In addition to frequently showing off his prosthetic foot on-stage and handing it to the audience so that it can be studied in detail, Hills frequently uses a sign language interpreter with him on stage who translates his show into sign language; thus adding another kind of performance and intermediality to his show. Thereby, Hills often points out the sign language signs for some words if they look particularly amusing (especially rude words or swear words) and makes the sign language

interpreter repeat them, or he asks the sign language interpreter to sign in different accents/ dialects (see “Adam Hills On Healthy People” minutes 5:44 – 7:36 as an example). Working with a sign language interpreter can be funny for primarily non-deaf or non-blind audience members as they can see the actions in combination with Hills’ comments and are usually not in contact with sign language on a day to day basis. In fact,

> [Hills] did a show in Adelaide a few years ago for a disability art conference and they provided a signer and two things happened. First, deaf people in the audience were connecting with [his] material, and second, [he] was getting laughs out of the sign-interpreter because the hearing people were fascinated. Now [Hills has] hearing people who will only book [for signer shows]. (Di Fonzo)

Hills, by commenting on and interacting with his sign language interpreter on stage, breaks the fourth wall in a way, especially also when he asks audience members for words to sign next. He deviates (deliberately) from his actual on-stage narrative to add this inclusive practice, which could even be seen as a form of intermediality, as a source of humour. Interestingly, Hills never really considered himself as being a disabled person (see Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 255), but he nowadays does give disabled people a voice by talking about it so openly and ‘normalising’ it. In more general terms, the connection of disability and humour means:

> Disability humor is just plain good entertainment, but it also has emancipatory potential. It can challenge negative assumptions, reverse stereotypical and hierarchical relations, serve as a means of catharsis and coping for disabled people, or promote social change. . . To these comedians, being disabled is simply one possible feature of being human. By joking about their unique problems in terms of situations everyone encounters, they connect with their audiences. (D. Kim Reid et al.)

Some of the best examples for this quoted idea, come from Hills’ chapter titled “Para-Dise”, in which the comedian talks about his experiences of the 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing, China. According to Hills, “[p]aralympians . . . make the most offensive disabled jokes ever” (*Best Foot Forward* 263). The comedian is surprised by this new, unexpected knowledge at first but then quickly feels like he belongs to the group, as a comedian, and as a disabled person.

Following the Paralympics, Hills noted down his experiences, including ‘offensive disabled jokes’ made by the athletes he met, and also comes up with his own jokes about the matter. Once returned to the United Kingdom, Hills has the urge to tell his stand-up comedy audiences about his experiences, which according to the Chef de Mission, Jason Hellwig, was “the best thing [he] could do for the Paralympic movement” (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 265) to promote understanding and awareness of people with disabilities. A few years later, Hills then hosted the Channel 4 show *The Last Leg*, which covered the Paralympic part of the London 2012 Olympic Games. Following the immense success/ interest and ‘practical necessity’ for such a Television programme, the show still exists today, hosted by Adam Hills, with Alex Brooker and Josh Widdicombe. Recently, Hills even helped setting up the Physical Disability Rugby League in the United Kingdom, as is described in the final chapter of his autobiography (*Best Foot Forward* 344 – 347). Generally, whereas in the past, disabled people had often been the butt of the joke, things are different now: “A blogger on the BBC’s Ouch! Disability website noted that a ‘plethora of disabled comedians’ participated in the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2012. . . Furthermore, a number of disabled comedians, such as Francesca Martinez, Adam Hills and Tanyalee Davis, have achieved international acclaim, regularly touring across the globe” (Lockyer 1398).

5.3 Dialect

Not directly an embodiment but certainly an important part of the voice of a persona is the use of dialect. When looking at *Made in Scotland*, for example it becomes clear very quickly, that Connolly swears a lot, with the reader being able to spot a swear-word (for example ‘fuck’) on almost every page in his book. It is something that made him famous as a comedian. It worked well with the audience (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 163), and he sees it as a characteristic of coming from a place, where people simply spoke like that (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 163f.).

Coming from Scotland, Connolly frequently uses Scottish words (Scots) in *Made in Scotland*, like “teuchters” (15), “girnin” (37), “shanned” (40), “sleekit” (51), “birl” (61), “winchin” (78), “skiffed” (110), “glaikit” (241), or “wean” (242), which are usually indicated in italics in the autobiography, but not always explained. Connolly says that “the Scottish language is a strange and wonderful thing” (*Made in Scotland* 241) and with his book, he brings back an awareness of it to the reader’s minds. Connolly also writes that his success also “meant playing to people who might struggle with the Scottish accent. . . [Some] say that I speak a lot clearer now and they ask me if I deliberately changed the way I talk, and if I was ever advised that I needed to. The answer is, no, I didnae and I wasnae” (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 172). Connolly always stayed true to who was, and created a unique comedy style, even if at the very heart it “is all about observing people leading their day-to-day lives and finding what is funny in them and about them” (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 173) and sometimes “[i]t’s hard to explain what I do, in a way” (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 175).

Bridges imitates accents of other people when telling jokes and also speaks in his Scottish dialect which is not reprinted extensively in his autobiography. The latter thereby is a big element of Bridges’ self and persona. Bridges uses dialect writing in Scottish slang words, as that is one aspect for which he is known as a comedian. On page 416 in the book, for example, Bridges makes a joke featuring many Glaswegian terms and describes that for a London performance, he ‘translated’ the word “ ‘rammy’ to ‘riot’, which sounded nowhere near as funny” (*We need to talk*). He says he changed the words where necessary so that people ‘down south’ would understand him. Yet all in all, Bridges stays true to his Scottish-ness, while also (almost) jokingly admitting to the reader that he hopes “it isn’t fucking exhausting to take all of this in and maybe there should be a Rosetta Stone-type translation disc available with this book” (Bridges, *We need to talk* 416). Bridges’ Scottish stand-up performance voice thereby only comes through occasionally, mainly, because the book is not written in Scots, so his accent can be re-created on paper only with difficulty although fans of

the comedian that have seen many of his stand-up shows may be able to 'hear' Bridge's voice while reading. That is not impossible to write in accents/ dialects, is illustrated in Jane Hodson's *Dialect in Film and Literature*, which states, that dialects can, for example be found in direct speech sections of works of literature, in free direct discourse (see Hodson, 83ff.), or, as in the case of comedian autobiographies in narrative voice. In literature, dialects are then presented through the use of dialect-specific vocabulary or grammar, or through phonetic spelling – that is spelling a word as it would be pronounced (see Hodson 90ff.). As has been demonstrated already, comedians use a combination of those ways of representing dialects and accents in literature. The popularity of Scots in non-fiction in particular is then explained in Derrick McClure, who writes about the use of Scots in the Scotland-based newspaper *The National*. Either way, the comedian's working-class upbringing and especially Bridges' Scottishness differentiates him from most of the other comedians featured in this thesis. Bridges' emphasised awareness of what autobiographies look like and him having read a few, will also become relevant again in the conclusion.

5.4 Illness

Also related to persona are the following insights about Billy Connolly: In 2018, the Scottish comedian Billy Connolly announced he was no longer going to perform on stage because his Parkinson's disease affected him too much.

> [He] was diagnosed with Parkinson's [disease] in 2012 and . . . [T]he Parkinson's disease is staying with [him]. It's never going to go away. [He has] learned to live with it: [He gets] up every morning and [does his] exercises, [he takes his] medication, [he has] learned to take it easier and to look out for when the shaking starts (which is always [his] left hand). It is the first thing [he thinks] of every morning when [he wakes] up… but [he is] coping with it and [he is] hanging in there.
> (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 177f.)

Parkinson's disease is common among older people and there is no cure for it yet. The illness often decreases the speed in movements and creates a tremor, among many other things. It can also affect memory negatively and lead to memory loss. Connolly recently said that as the

disease progresses, "talents leave and attributes leave. I don't have the balance I used to have, I don't have the energy I used to have. I can't hear the way I used to hear, I can't see as good as I used to. I can't remember the way I used to remember" (Allegretti). Hearing this, it is understandable that his illness led him to retire from the comedy business. This is unfortunate not only for his fans but also because comedy is known to affect memory positively and can improve the mood.

A close reading of Connolly's memoir *Made in Scotland*, resulted in me coming to the following conclusions. It could be argued that the older a comedian is – up to a certain point – the better their comedy will be. Comedians have the chance to fine-tune their material and may find it easier to generate comedy in the first place so that they will be able to create effective and amusing comedy performances thanks to their experience. (As a note here, good comedy thereby is effective comedy, or a comedy that evokes a reaction, however, taste can depend on the background of the addressee. In "What is good comedy? The answer probably depends on your social background" Sam Friedman shares some insights into an investigation that he did and finds that "respondents felt that comedy should never be just funny, never centre purely around laughter, or probe only what one respondent referred to as 'first-degree' emotional reactions. Instead, 'good' comedy should have meaning – whether this is a political message or an experiment with form". This means, that different people can find different comedy funnier than other.) But really, comedy is possible at any age. Connolly, for example, has had a long comedy career; Kevin Bridges, as another example, started doing stand-up when he was 17 but is still young now whereas other comedians realised relatively late that they wanted to perform comedy for a living. So although age may not play such a big role in comedy in general, it can have negative effects, especially in terms of memory skills. A lot of comedians base their material on their own experiences and memories. The older someone gets, the more likely it is that memories are forgotten and thus it gets harder to create comedy. This is particularly true for people suffering from dementia or Parkinson's disease (like

Connolly). On the other hand, studies have shown that comedy can improve memory skills and boost the mood and make people happier (Stevens, Badli and Dzulkifli, Chung and Zhao).

John Stevens did not study people having Parkinson's disease and humour, instead he examined how actively engaging with humour can have a positive effect on people with dementia:

> Findings from this study indicate that the stand up comedy and improvisation workshops provide an activity for people with mild dementia that is enjoyable, age and dementia appropriate and potentially therapeutic. The data from interviews and observations suggests that the workshops produced a lot of laughter and it seems mild dementia did not prevent participants from laughing a lot. . . The data suggests that mild dementia does not have to be an impediment to developing skills in and performing stand up comedy and, especially, improvisation. (Stevens 69)

Stevens findings lead him to the following hypotheses, which include and are not limited to the following

> (1) stand up comedy and improvisation workshops have a positive effect on memory, learning, sociability, communication and thus potentially self-esteem for people with mild dementia; (2) Mild dementia does not prevent people from laughing or creating humor; (3) People with dementia are suited to performing improvisation comedy because it does not require a reliance on memory to produce successful results; (4) Having to actively perform to create laughter has a greater therapeutic effect than passively induced laughter on memory, learning, sociability, communication and self esteem [does]. (Stevens 71)

This means, that humour can improve memory, which can help a stand-up comedian when creating jokes based on anecdotes, or, particularly in the case of Connolly also when writing an autobiography.

Despite being 76 years old, Connolly still has a lot of childhood memories, even if they are fading. In his book, the comedian jokingly says that “When you see photos of Glasgow from the post-war era they are all in black and white, and I think my memories are as well” (Connolly *Made in Scotland* 13). Some of his memories are being reinforced in his mind, through repetition, or because they are have a great significance to him (see Connolly *Made in Scotland* 18, 227, 229, 15f., 25f., 38). These memories are usually indicated by the signifying words “I remember” or “I will never forget” (see Connolly *Made in Scotland* 47,

57, 67, 71, 84, 108, 229). Connolly wants to get straight to the point (*Made in Scotland* 23), but is sometimes also a bit vague in his book (*Made in Scotland* 34), or exaggerating (*Made in Scotland* 139) and admits when he cannot remember everything which makes him even more authentic (*Made in Scotland* 24, 45).

As to the question whether ageing comedians are wiser aside from knowing better how to create effective performances, it is interesting to note that Connolly himself states he has "mellowed as [he's] got older" (*Made in Scotland* 4). And although the comedian sometimes reflects on his experiences (for example Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 94), he does not per se comment on the therapeutic effect reflecting and writing down his life-story has; this is emphasised by other comedians instead and has been proven in other studies. The comedian Simon Amstell for example cannot emphasise enough in his autobiography that is aptly named *help*, how therapeutic and insightful it is to write about past experiences. Similarly the comedian Sarah Millican, as another example actually wrote a combination of an autobiography and a self-help book.

Connolly's focus of the book is simply a different one, especially because he does not like "misery memoirs" (*Made in Scotland* 12) as he calls them. No matter how hard his childhood was, or how much his ageing or illness affect him, Connolly always has a joke ready, which means that he can find humour even in non-humorous situations and puts an emphasis on sharing the humorous situations in his book and on stage.

The following is an excerpt from the last chapter of Connolly's book, illustrating what I said before: "Of course, my Parkinson's disease dominates my life to quite a large degree nowadays" (Connolly *Made in Scotland* 260), he writes in his book:

> It occupies a lot of my thinking time every single day. When I go into a restaurant, I have to look around and work out where to sit and choose somewhere that it won't take me a long time to get up from. . . The thing that I find hardest about my Parkinson's is coming to grips with the fact that *it's never going to go away*. . . I've only been on tour once since I got diagnosed with Parkinson's. I wasn't sure how it was going to go because I knew that my body was different, so I thought the best thing to do was to acknowledge it. I came on stage to 'Whole Lotta Shakin' Goin' On', and when the audience applauded me, I said 'Och, you're only doing that because I'm not

> well!' I explained to them at the start that I have Parkinson's disease and that they shouldn't worry about my left arm, which might creep up until I looked as if I was carrying an invisible raincoat. . . The Parkinson's has trapped me a little in my shows now in that I can't prowl the stage any more like I used to. If I went to move, I limped, and I didn't want to do that, so I just stayed where I was. . . [T]he audience didn't seem to mind. I was getting the laughs every bit as much as before – maybe even better than before. . . Having Parkinson's disease… has inevitably made me think sometimes about my death. . . Somebody asked me if I wanted to join a suicide society. It's some organisation in Edinburgh that helps people to commit suicide and I believe that a lot of Parkinson's sufferers choose that course of action. But I don't want to. I'm too interested in what is going on around me. In any case, [they] didn't even offer me a lifetime membership (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 260 ff.).

As can be seen from this excerpt, especially for Connolly, ageing and Parkinson's disease can be a big deal for a comedian, and yet, Connolly tries to have the last laugh. Of course, having Parkinson's is not really a laughing matter, and the comedian says himself that "Getting older isn't funny. . . Nobody warned me about this. Or, if they did, I wasn't listening" (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 184). He also says this about ageing in an honest, authentic and still entertaining manner:

> *Being old* takes some getting used to. When I turned sixty, I thought *pfft, so* what? And I had a great big party. But turning seventy felt different. People start to phone you up *just to see if you are OK*. . . I think the whole thing to acting your age is deeply over-rated. Acting your age is about as sensible as acting your street number. There's no sense to it. But I do have to admit that odd things happen to you that you have to pay attention to. (Connolly, *Made in Scotland* 259)

Maybe in the future, there will be more "older" comedians or more comedians working together with people affected by Parkinson's or dementia for example, as a therapeutic intervention. After all, people do not say without reason that laughter is the best medicine and maybe it is one aspect that allows healthy ageing. By now, Parkinson's disease is affecting Connolly a lot and the disease has had an impact on his persona and career and is still likely to worsen his memory. At the same time, Connolly can use his status as an advocate to bring awareness to people about the disease. When diseases such as Parkinson's or Alzheimer's come together with narrative, interesting things can happen, such as a lack of "temporal coherence" (Zimmermann 8) but simultaneously also an "emphasis on significance" (Zimmermann 8) of the writing. It is interesting to see how people with Alzheimer's write

autobiographically (see Zimmermann 78-91). Yet, Connolly does not comment on his struggles extensively, and his work is also written in an entirely coherent manner.

5.5 Different Selves

What has become apparent, is, that in the autobiographies there are many different personas among the comedians. It is, however, a little more difficult to extract/ define a persona by the writing; stand-up DVDs and live performances seem to help here. Whether there is an actual loss for the comedian in the transition from stage to page is debatable, as once again, the different media require different things from the comedian and in the ones studied here, their (comedic) 'self' is congruent in both media. A believable persona essentially all comes down to an effective voice (see previous discussion about (literary) voice) but it is worth noting that the multiple selves that the comedians embody. First and foremost, there is always their underlying private or everyday self (underneath the persona/ comedian), then there is the comedian, who, when talking about the autobiographies, is also a writer at the same time and must make sure their voice and content suits their persona. Since the life-stories that are being told often go back many years, there automatically also is a reflective self that looks back at a past self. Lastly, there is the self that is seen (and made up partially) by the audience. All these selves may be interlinked and interwoven freely with the different selves being almost mixed up entirely, but when looking closely, they are always noticeable, particularly in combination with author intrusion (see the following diagram, the first part emphasising the temporality of the selves, the part showing how the comedic persona is created/ involved in the concept of having different selves as a writing comedian). It is also important to notice that everyone is perceived differently by everyone and everyone behaves differently among different people:

> When engaged with others, most people quite naturally assume that they are interacting with another person and are thus responding to that individual's characteristics and behaviors, but they are mistaken. In reality, people are interacting not with another person but rather with their own impressions of that person. That is, they are responding to their mental representations and inferences about the person's characteristics, motives, attitudes, intentions, and so on. (Leary)

Therefore, I have titled one self as a public self (the comedian/ persona) and in combination with that stands the private or everyday self. This everyday self is the self that can be seen primarily by the comedian's family and friends, as well as encapsulating the personal self of what the comedians think to themselves away from others.

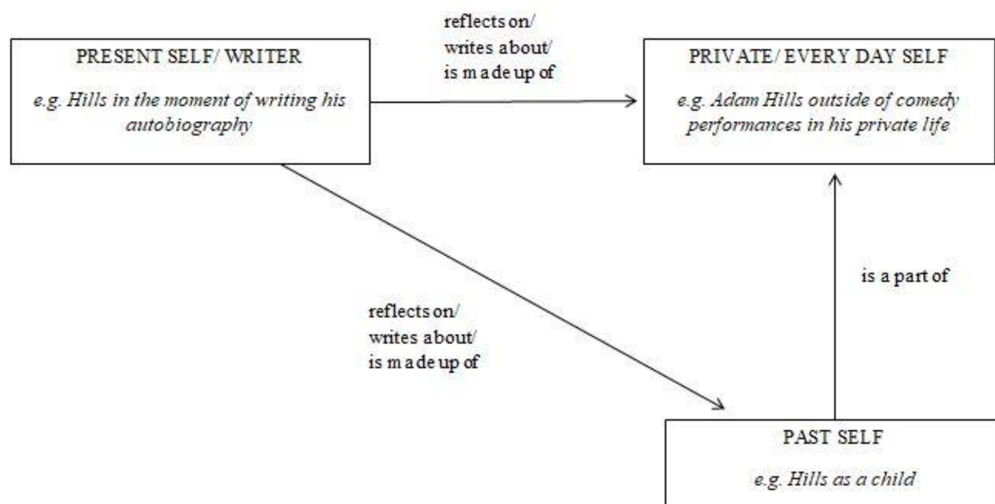

Diagram 2: Different Selves Part 1

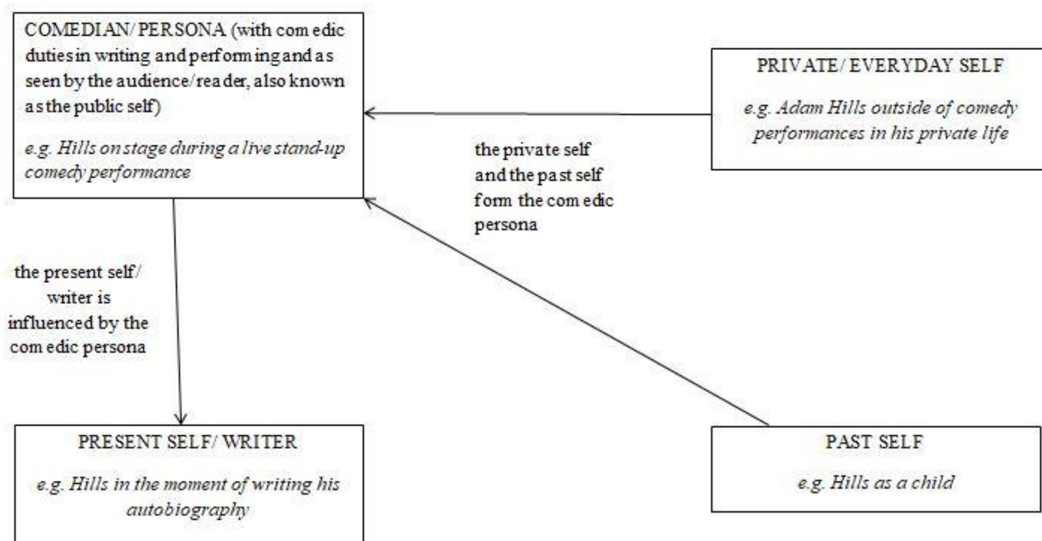

Diagram 3: Different Selves Part 2

(a visual representation of the many selves of a stand-up comedian that writes an autobiography, with examples in italics)

To illustrate my theory, Hills, for example, becomes very reflective in his autobiography, commenting on past events and having realisations about them in hindsight (for example *Best Foot Forward* 107). At one point, Hills tells a humorous story that he experienced, making sure that it is true to his persona by mentioning his friend's "Aussie drawl" (*Best Foot Forward* 105) that he would surely imitate if performed on stage and making the story sound as humorous and gripping as possible, thereby also fulfilling his 'comedic duties' of being entertaining. Following a short and summarising paragraph on the situation his past self was in, his present self (the writer/ true self) chimes in by asking the rhetorical question of "[n]ow where was I?" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 105), before continuing to describe his past selves' story. While reading, an author intrusion like this is usually not too jarring. And while the author could delete his own remark of having distracted himself or forgetting where he was in the narrative, it does function as a break in the story and

gives the reader time to breathe and pause. It is also likely that the author was writing down his thoughts as they came to him in a stream of consciousness and then decided to keep it during editing. An alternative assumption could also be that the comedian wanted to draw attention to his narrative voice.

Generally, the assumption that the comedians can be more honest and freer with what they are writing, because the books do not have to generate laughter all the time as opposed to on-stage performances, is reasonable. However, the publishers seem to usually ask for a humorous work, as it is what the reader may be expecting and preferring. There is no evidence for this although most comedian autobiographies seem to be humorous by nature. This does not mean that the comedians do not also share more 'serious' stories or get very personal, which again is attractive for a reader in terms of gaining new information about the comedian they like and want to know more about. Thus, personas work better on stage, especially since the comedians often get very personal in their autobiographies which could potentially deviate from their personas. One of the key insights from this sub-chapter is that as Carr and Greeves rightly state, "[a]lthough the comedian's on-stage persona may be every bit as assumed as the character played by the actor, it will usually be presented as the real deal: this is me, exposing the humorous side of my life" (113). This presentation is done through a comedian's voice and appearance of authenticity and the recipient's interpretation of it. In the autobiographies then, these qualities which are part of a comedian's overall persona, are the only representations of the comedian's persona in the written text.

As a side note, there are people who can suggest gags to comedians. They might work on a stage show rather than the autobiography, but they have fed the comedian persona. Officially, these people do not seem to exist, similar to ghost writers. This suggests that a comedic persona is a composite work created by a number of industry professionals and means for comedian autobiographies that several people may have worked on it rather than only one solitary writing self which underpins the traditional version of a memoirist.

So, in a comedian autobiography, the comedy persona is created by voice, appearance of authenticity and the reader's interpretation of it in the book. This stands in comparison to having the look and body language (visual) aspect, the voice (spoken and written), and appearance of authenticity (through content, body language, and voice), adaptability (fluid performance in which the comedian can directly (inter-) act with the audience vs. static/ fixed written text) in a live performance on stage. These elements all influence the understanding of the material that the comedians present in either media.

5.6 'Better' Selves (Comedians and Therapy)

Related to the strand of research on therapeutic writing are Deborah Philips et al. (*Writing Well: Creative Writing and Mental Health*), Fiona Sampson (*Creative Writing in Health and Social Care*), Gillie Bolton (*Write Yourself: Creative Writing and Personal Development*), and Bolton et al. (*Writing Works: a Resource Handbook for Therapeutic Writing Workshops and Activities*), who comment on how creative writing can help with physical and mental health issues. Some of these authors even present writing tasks that often encourage reflection and focus on positive thoughts. The idea of those books is to use their prompts in therapy sessions as a form to reflect on the current situation, express feelings, and offer space for self-development. That writing can be therapeutic or helpful is further confirmed in the studies of Jen-Ho Chang et al., M. Suhr et al., Mandy Bruce, and Joseph K. Neumann who wrote about the health benefits of diary writing and Arnold van Emmerik, Carol Ann Ross ("The Benefits of Therapeutic Writing in Acute Psychiatric Units"), and Bodil Furnes and Elin Dysvik, who explore the benefits of writing for a variety of different health problems and (clinical) therapy settings. Richard Riordan explains scriptotheraphy; Sofie Bager-Charleson writes about reflective practice in counselling and psychotherapy, which provides interesting background information in terms of therapy and writing. Even Freud's "A Note Upon the 'Mystic Writing Pad'" (1925) and the talking/ writing cure could be linked to the

comedians. The concepts of comedy and therapy are significant for my project because some of the comedians I have selected write about how therapeutic they find it to reflect on their past and write down their thoughts and talk about their experiences without the need to be funny in a book. However, none of these works deal specifically with the struggles stand-up comedians deal with as part of their career. All that can be taken from these academic publications is that writing can be beneficial and help create a (more) positive mental health.

My research here links Therapy, Stand-up Comedy, and Writing. A particularly generative source is Jonathan Wyatt's book *Therapy, Stand-up Comedy, and the Gesture of Writing*, with the author stating that he wants to connect "therapy, stand-up comedy and writing-as-inquiry.

Wyatt finds the following parallels between stand-up comedy and therapy:

> The first connection is you go to both to feel better. There are things going on in your life, things from your past you want to sort out. Maybe it has been difficult for a while, and you go to a therapist. You spend a while there— a few sessions, a few months, a few years— and when you finish you feel better. Just the same in stand-up: there's some things going on in your life. Maybe you've had a hard week at work, you need to get out of the house, whatever, and you're feeling like you need to let off steam, get a different perspective. You go out, have a few drinks, chat to a few people, have a few laughs, and go home feeling better. (Wyatt 167)

Even if Wyatt perhaps thinks more in terms of an audience member here, it also coincides with comedians saying that stand-up comedy and/ or writing is therapeutic to them.

The second parallel that Wyatt found is that "in both stand-up and therapy people talk about really intimate things. . . You find yourself with someone you trust and you know what you say won't go anywhere else, you know you won't be judged. You find yourself able to talk about things you've maybe never told anyone else before. In both people say the unsayable." (167 f.) In fact, there is a confessional element in stand-up comedy – often humour is created through embarrassment or a misfortune of others and as the comedians reveal this, confess to their actions, they entertain and can heal at the same time by feeling relief upon sharing their confessions. It is interesting to mention at this point that this confessional element of comedy is not explored in classic guidebooks to performing stand-up

comedy. Ritchie, for example, explains that humour can be created through one-liners, call and response, puns and other wordplays, for example, and even though Ritchie also talks about the art of observational comedy, he does not mention that it is through confessing to possibly intimate and embarrassing anecdotes that humour is created.

About this, Vivian Gornick writes,

> The writing we call personal narrative is written by people who, in essence, are imagining only themselves. . . The connection is an intimate one. . . Out of the raw material of a writer's own undisguised being a narrator is fashioned. . . This narrator becomes a persona. Its tone of voice, its angle of vision, the rhythm of its sentences, what it selects to observe and what to ignore are chosen to serve the subject." (6f.)

Again, the importance of voice is indicated in the above quote. Yet, Gornick continues, it is a difficult procedure to write about oneself as "The persona in a nonfiction narrative is an unsurrogated one. . . It's like lying down on the couch in public" (7) and very intimate and personal information is revealed and made available for criticism.

In "No Greater Foe? Rethinking Emotion and Humour, with Particular Attention to the Relationship between Audience Members and Stand-up Comedians" Tim Miles records interviews with both stand-up comedians and audience members at stand-up performances to explore the relationship between humour and emotions, and comes to the conclusion that comedians and audience members can find stand-up comedy therapeutic. This result confirms previously mentioned theoretical beliefs as well as what the comedians share in their autobiographies as analysed.

In terms of the analysed comedian autobiographies, the following insights can be presented: Millican has experienced periods of depression (before starting in comedy, see Millican, *How to be Champion* 136ff.) and uses her autobiography as a self-help mechanism. Amstell has also experienced bouts of clinical depression and equally uses his humour and reflective writing/ autobiography as some type of therapy that may also help others. As is written in a post on BBC Radio 1's *Life Hacks*, Amstell reveals a lot of information about himself.

> Despite that, he says the stand-up shows can be a form of therapy – at the end of a tour he says he knows himself "a bit more". [The comedian explains:] "I ended up doing quite personal therapy… I mean personal stand-up… The stand-up that I do, it's not just self deprecating, it's self revealing, so I understand who I am at the end of a tour a bit more than I did before." ("Simon Amstell: Once you take the mask off, everything relaxes")

The comedian admits that what he does is risky, but he keeps sharing these private stories nonetheless as a form of connection between him and his audience. Amstell says:

> The great lesson that I learned from doing stand up comedy is that there will be something that I feel I cannot ever say out loud; not to a friend, certainly not to an enormous audience, and then I say it. I think: 'God it's so embarrassing, it's so shameful if I admit this. That'll be it, it's over, I'll just have to go live somewhere else'. Then I say it, people laugh, and in their laughter, what I feel they're saying is either, 'We feel that too you are not alone' or 'It's fine that you feel that, it's strange, but we still love you' and that's [sic] happens every single time. It's a feeling of connection and it heals the feeling of isolation and shame. ("Simon Amstell: everything relaxes")

In a way, this openness and style of humour based on personal struggles, is also exactly what Amstell is known for as a comedian. So, for him it is not only therapeutic to perform and share his stories but ever since he became more widely known it is probably also what is expected of him at a performance. Amstell's self-deprecating and personal comedic life-story telling is appealing to people that watch his performances, as it can be helpful for an audience member to connect with the material and learn something from it that they can apply or relate to in their own life. As is explained, writing about his thoughts, feelings, and experiences in his autobiography has a similar (therapeutic) effect for the comedian and can be just as helpful for a reader as one of his performances (especially also since so many of his performance transcripts are included in his autobiography). Having Amstell publicly share his struggles and insecurities has the potential to encourage conversations among the public, audience members in his performances or among the readers of his autobiography and therefore have a societal impact.

By writing, Amstell can reflect on his past experiences and bring something to paper to get his thoughts out of his head, which Amstell finds therapeutic. After all, his autobiography is called *help* – subtitle "Comedy. Tragedy. Therapy." and one of the reasons

for this title is that "it was a help for me [that is, Amstell, writing it and reflecting about the past], and might be a help for other people" (@SimonAmstell). By following the comedian's example of reflecting on life and questioning past choices (for example Amstell, *help* 148f.), the readers themselves are encouraged to reflect on their own past. Amstell not only finds writing therapeutic, but talking about his 'issues' in stand-up performances too. Hills discovered for himself that comedy "[m]ay cause happiness, may improve your mood, may have health benefits, may change the way you look at yourself and the world around you" (*Best Foot Forward* ix). Bridges does not write about the connection of therapy and comedy in detail per se, but he describes some small gigs he did during a break from touring as therapeutic (*We need to talk* 18). McIntyre does not comment on the therapeutic effect of comedy at all. Millican, on the other hand, provides actual pieces of advice and self-help tips in her written work. However, Millican also writes that she has received counselling for "[d]ealing with being recognisable and the oddness that goes with it" and "[t]ouring and being away from home a lot" among other things (all Millican, *How to be Champion* 140).

Many audience members that see some of Amstell's work appear to respond positively to the comedian's performance style and comedic content and voice, character/ stand-up persona as well as seeing the connection to therapeutic elements; with one viewer commenting that the "stand-up was somewhere between a stand-up and a TEDx talk" (Mayart), while another viewer thought it was the "[m]ost interesting stand up I've seen in years. Funny, touching and inspiring" (Chris McKenna). And indeed, Amstell's stand-up performances can be seen as "a self-help seminar as well as a discussion about achieving happiness under capitalism" (Garland):

> Almost every joke revolves around mental health, social anxiety, wider economic turmoil and intimacy issues. It's a search for happiness in an environment where the odds – absent parents, bigotry, your own terrible personality – feel stacked against you, and where happiness itself often ends up being the punchline. (Garland)

But Amstell also brings an impression of hope to desperate situations by talking through his experiences as if he was in therapy (after all, he sees stand-up comedy as a form of therapy) and talks to the audience in a very personal manner, sharing sensitive topics and revealing personal information.

> Honesty [and talking about very personal matters] leads to peace, in Amstell's mind, both personally and on a wider scale. Embarrassment and shame are dismantled mainly through self-deprecation but, while the majority of his sets are spent being critical of himself and others, they conclude with surprising kindness. (Garland)

This combination of criticism and kindness works because today many people can identify with the 'problems' Amstell talks about, even if not everyone appreciates his particular style of comedy (Garland). And although it may not seem possible when knowing just how much of his personal life and feelings Amstell seems to share in his stand-up performances already, his autobiography appears to go deeper still, into his mind, feelings, and experiences, in comparison to what he does in his performances. Amstell creates this 'depth', through the content of the sentences in which the comedian reveals a lot of his inner thoughts, practically soliloquy-like. Although it seems that many comedians aim to be open and revealing, Amstell's text stands out particularly, as this aspect of vulnerability is the main strand of his persona and comedy material.

Arguably, Amstell sharing his personal experiences and struggles in life attracts readers to his text and performances, because readers may be able to identify with the feelings Amstell talks about, even if they have not experienced the exact same situations as the comedian; and by hearing someone else being so open about them, there is a mutual understanding and perhaps even a mutual healing of the performer and the fan.

More generally, Amstell often explains in his book what did not fit on stage for time or content related reasons (see *help* 163f.). Telling the truth about personal experiences is important for the comedian. It is what he finds interesting and by turning it into humorous material, he finds solace. In fact, Amstell is not worried about revealing too much of his

personal life and thoughts, but constantly questions himself if he "really said the actual truth of this situation here or did I just get a laugh with it and that's safe to stay there. I always think there's somewhere deeper to go and somewhere more interesting" ("Imagine" 5:36 – 5:50). In the same interview, Amstell admits that especially negative experiences in his life become material "too quickly". Even if it is some sort of consolation, it "sometimes means that [he is] not feeling things fully", which leads to his stand-up performances not being as therapeutic as they can be as the humour instantly heals on a surface level ("Imagine" 6:55 – 8:00). This view of Amstell and his voice makes him sound profound and wise (if perhaps also he again veers between (false) modesty and hubris). In Amstell's autobiography and other comedic outputs, the comedian's wisdom seems to come from him being an over-thinker and over-analyser, but also from his quasi-Buddhist knowledge and mind-set. The comedian clearly is well-informed about all things related to Buddhism (see Amstell, *help* 49, 65). Additionally, the older the Amstell gets, the more comfortable and happier he seems to be in life. The book gives no indication of what lies ahead for Amstell; following the release of his semi-autobiographical film *Benjamin* (in which he tried to figure out what was wrong with him in his twenties), the comedian had a Netflix comedy performance special titled *set free* (2019), which however, was mostly a combination of material from previous shows ("simon amstell: set free"). Considering the results and insights from Amstell's works, Amstell recycling material again, is not surprising and somewhat of a consistent feature of his works.

The emphasis of Bridges' autobiography is also on the comedian's experiences with episodes of anxiety but "[s]elf-awareness and emotional honesty have always been a hallmark of the precocious Glaswegian's stand-up, so a portrait of the artist as a driven and focused young man ultimately emerges" (Jay Richardson).

At the end of almost every chapter of *How to be Champion*, a 'tip box' can be found, through which Millican gives advice which is based on her own experiences,

the encouragements she would have liked to hear in her past. These pieces of advice are occasionally humorous. Examples of sentences included in such tip boxes are the somewhat clichéd "Be you in everything you do" (Millican, *How to be Champion* 15), or "Don't give people a picture of your big nose if you don't want them to use it" (Millican, *How to be Champion* 89). The tips thereby always relate to the chapter preceding the box and occasionally serve as a summary of the chapter. This order resembles a lot of other/ classic self-help books (see Jen Sincero's *You are a Badass*, in comparison for example). Millican then writes about her interest in theatre and how writing creatively has helped her get through difficult periods in her life. In the manner of a Bildungsroman, the chapter then ends with Millican taking part in a performance workshop, doing her first stand-up show, and explaining how comedy gigs work (see, *How to be Champion* 126ff.). In the following chapter, Millican mentions some competitions she did, and the reader can read a transcript of the set she used for the competitions, some parts of which she later included in her stand-up tours. Industry insights like these add value to the text and give the reader new information about the comedian and the comedy industry too. Throughout her career, Millican learnt a lot, stating that "While I was telling the audience who I was, I was learning about myself as well" (*How to be Champion* 153) which resonates with Amstell's view of comedy being therapeutic and filled with life lessons. Among the things Millican learnt about herself, is that she is "not very good at being famous" (*How to be Champion* 276). And while she jokes about it in the beginning of that chapter, she soon admits that "[f]ame was a hard subject to write about. I can't imagine it'll be an easy read" (Millican, *How to be Champion* 276). Although the impression viewers get from her on-stage performances may disagree, Millican describes herself as shy, not good in crowds, embarrassed by being recognised, struggling with meeting fans, and fearing the dark sides of social media. She apologises to the reader about this, saying that "[t]his is my thing, not yours. It's just a bit weird and I'm crap at this side of things. Forgive me. And feel free to wave" (Millican, *How to be Champion* 280). Not every

comedian comments on how they are dealing with their fame and popularity, but for Millican this is an opportunity to justify herself. This ending passage of the chapter sort of marks the beginning of a not-that-humorous section in the book used as a fade-out to her work. Although this change could possibly indicate a rushed production process where the comedian had not had enough time to write 'a better ending' or even a lack of editing (which also springs to mind when thinking back to the non-uniform use of lists in her book), the contents of the final chapters make sense, as they relate to Millican's work and her way of being. However, the change in tone/ voice is clearly noticeable; it does not quite fit in with the rest of the text and creates a slight tonal mismatch, going from humorous to serious (#Joinin, see Millican, *How to be Champion* 281) to slightly humorous again (cake recipe, see Millican, *How to be Champion* 287). It is almost as if the comedian was throwing a new light on herself, allowing the reader to get a glimpse of a 'different', perhaps more honest and real Millican.

Like many of his fellow stand-up comedians, Jason Manford's comedy career is studded with ups and downs, including one point where he gave up stand-up for a while. Brutally honest, he admits: "It's not something people think about, I suppose. How is a comedian supposed to make people feel good when he doesn't feel good himself? Well, some comedians can channel it and still create gold" (Manford 261). Manford could not do this and so he stopped performing live for a while, which agrees with Millican's experience that sometimes comedy is therapy, but sometimes, therapy is required because of comedy. Alan Davies too says about comedy: "I went on to a Drama degree at the University of Kent where I spent four years acting in plays and trying comedy. By the time I graduated I decided to fake a smile, hide my fear, and be a stand-up comedian" (228). This statement of putting on a fake smile for comedy appears to be a common occurrence. Yet, as seen with Amstell before, comedy can be produced from pain. Romesh Ranganathan writes in his autobiography that "If you haven't had something happen to you in your upbringing that messed you up, you should

leave comedy" (93). Even the following excerpt from an interview with Connolly confirms this:

> A therapist might, [the interviewer suggests], see humour as a way of repressing bad memories, neutralising them. "That's bullshit," [Connolly] retorts. "I think most comedy, most good comedy, is born of darkness. You know, people are orphans or they were abused or some kind of darkness has happened to them, or they've even been brought up in poverty. It seems to kindle humour. It's a great survival route." (Billen)

Finally, as Ritchie summarises humour and truth leads to a better understanding of people and the world:

> There are many reasons why we want to perform live comedy: it can connect with an audience in an exciting way; it is an unrepeatable experience with others whom we may never see again; and there is the sharing of a moment that we do not get in everyday life. There is a lot of truth in comedy and it can tell us something about our lives that we recognise. The art of comedy, if there is such a thing, is the ability to point out old truths in a new way or help us to recognise things that we already knew but did not realise we knew. It can change the way we think about all sorts of things, from relationships to politics. (15f.)

Together with the therapeutic and confessional elements included in the comedian autobiographies, the following attributes and summaries of insights from Chapters 2-4 now then explain what comedian autobiographies can look like – a matter that comes up again in the final part of this thesis.

In terms of narrative structure it can be said that comedians do not necessarily follow a particular linear structure and comedians share whichever anecdotes they want, with a possible aspiration of creating a beneficial image of themselves. A broad variety of different literary techniques can be found in comedian autobiographies, but as seen in Bridges' autobiography, for example, there is no need for diverging from the basic autobiographical model. Very often, comedians will reflect and comment on past experiences and frequently comedians will talk about similar experiences, such as having performed at the same clubs. Although Amstell's *help* is likely to be an extreme, comedians sometimes refer to on-stage comedy performances they did and may even quote from their performances. More often than not, there are parallels noticeable between stand-up performances and the comedian

autobiographies, in particular regarding the themes talked about and the voice used, which also includes the use of author intrusions, which resembles a comedian conversing and playing with a live audience. In addition to that, the comedians usually provide more contexts to on-stage sketches in their books. An important insight is that on-stage comedy performances are as a general rule, autobiographical material exaggerated for comedic effect.

Looking at the voice that comedians use in their autobiographies and on-stage, it becomes clear that there are big overlaps between the two. First of all, comedians attempt to recreate their accents in their books as far as possible. A second insight is also that readers are likely to ‘hear’ the comedians’ voices while reading their autobiographies, as Chapter 4 has revealed. Humour is added to the autobiographies in a variety of forms, ranging from reprinting stand-up material, to writing out jokes, playing with literary devices, or sharing humorous anecdotes. Most important for comedians writing their autobiographies is that the comedians stay authentic to their on-stage personas and this is possibly even more important than telling the actual truth of events.

On the topic of shared experiences, an extensive study from 1981 by Rhoda Fisher and Seymour Fisher, confirms there is a common theme among comedians, their behaviours and personalities, which is still occurring today. According to Fisher and Fisher, “comics are usually funny quite early in life. A majority [of the interviewed comedians] recall that as kids they enjoyed saying and doing funny things. They especially recall being funny in school. Again and again they remember being the ‘class clown’” (2). This description fits especially with Bridges who talks about exactly that at length in his autobiography and could even offer a justification for comedians writing so much about their early life in the autobiographies. It is a fair assumption that readers of comedian autobiographies will want to know where the ‘funny’ came from and what led the comedians to pursue their careers in stand-up comedy. Many comedians also “grew up in the worst of deprived circumstances. So often they came from broken families. They were exposed to unusual demands to grow up

fast and to take adult-like responsibilities early in adolescence" (Fisher and Fisher 10, see also Bridges again, or Millican). Fisher and Fisher's study additionally uncovered that "[q]uite frequently, too, the comics seemed to put up a screen by retreating behind a barrage of jokes" (200), while "[m]any comics [also] speak of their need to express through their humor private feelings they cannot 'get out' in any other way. This would fit, of course, with Freud's views that important classes of humor serve primarily as outlets for repressed (hidden) wishes and feelings" (201), which is reminiscent of Amstell in particular. Not only does Amstell say he was relieved "to have all these stories out of [his] head and in a book where they can't confuse [him] any more" (Amstell, *help* introduction), the comedian also talks, for example, about being shy and lonely in his works, turning his feelings into jokes (for example Amstell, *help* 6f.): "I thought a cat would ease my loneliness. But then I realised a cat is not going to make me feel any less lonely. A cat is only going to provide a mascot for my loneliness. So if anyone does come round they go: 'Oh, you've got a cat, are you lonely? Ah... what's he called?' 'Solitude.'" (Amstell, *help* 62f.; this quote is also an excerpt from his stand-up comedy show *do nothing*). By making such jokes, Amstell tries to deal with his feelings, as if turning them into self-deprecating jokes will help him cope with those feelings.

In all cases of comedian autobiographies, the book becomes an 'artefact of life' – documenting a large span of the comedians' (past) lives. The text can thereby become an extended (in terms of covered lifetime), often heavily edited (to make them more humorous/ fitting their public comedy voice), public 'diary' – a collection of different moments in time described in detail, sometimes including reflections. A relevant remark here comes from Merry: "the diary is an intimate journal, a personal dialogue between the writer and his private *persona*, in which anything can be discussed outside the push and pull of editorial fashion" (3, emphasis original). This use of the word 'persona' is particularly interesting in terms of stand-up comedians, considering the many different selves that comedians inhabit as I argued in Chapter 5.5.

The comedians may not share every moment of their lives, but they very often share a great number of significant anecdotes in detail, as well as insights into their lives, thoughts, feelings, experiences, and the stand-up comedy industry. From the outside, it seems that anything could happen when a comedian writes a book. In some cases, it does not even end up being an autobiography but just a humorous book (see for example *Parsnips, Buttered: How to win at modern life, one email at a time* by the stand-up comedian Joe Lycett, first published in 2016). When comedians do write an autobiography, they usually show that there is much more to their lives aside from their on-stage or interview presence and tell their 'origin story' of how they became a stand-up comedian.

It is of course, difficult to determine how much of the comedians' stories accurately reflect their lived experiences and how much is invention used to entertain and create humour. This is a question that can be asked with all autobiographical texts yet it is particularly relevant to stand-up comedians because of their personas. The public personas then subsequently influence the reader and the reader's understanding and expectation of the text.
Ultimately, most comedians aim to give the reader new information that they did not already share in stand-up performances and try to not repeat too much material to add value for the reader and give them something new for their money. Millican's *How to be Champion* has another benefit: her book is a combination of autobiography and self-help book. The tips at the end of most chapters in her book are broadly useful, serious, and applicable to anyone's life. Whenever Amstell or Hills talk about their life-experiences with depression or disability respectively, it leads to a mutual benefit for the comedians and their readers, as their stories can not only be inspiring and hope-giving for the reader but the reflective and open manner of writing can also be beneficial for the comedians themselves. In addition to that, the comedians may also gain new fans through their publications as they use a different medium to publicise themselves or explain their reasoning for their humour. These explanations may make the comedians more understandable for comedy-fans that may not fully be convinced or

won over by said comedian yet knowing where someone came from and what their life journey is usually helps in the understanding of that person and their actions. Thereby, comedians will edit and portray themselves most likely to come across as likeable as possible and thus influence the reader with their writing. Comedian autobiographies are, in summary, peculiar, combining so many different elements in one book, from multimodal references (see Gibbons 2 and Chapter 6.2 of this thesis) and stand-up performance excerpts, to intriguing narrative structures and the important authenticity to their comedy persona voice.

6. The emerging Sub-genre of Comedian Autobiographies

Chapter 2 provided explanations of what can be understood by autobiographical writing and creative non-fiction. Chapters 3-5 then looked at comedian autobiographies specifically and illustrated key characteristics of such publications. This next chapter is now separated into three sections. Firstly, comedian autobiographies are defined, before I explain the commercialisation of the publications. The last section deals with the readership of comedian autobiographies and summarises, why comedian autobiographies are so popular.

6.1 How to define Comedian Autobiographies

In their autobiographies, stand-up comedians primarily talk about their life, career, and humour in combination with elements of other literary genres, used particularly to present a certain impression of the comedian but often also as a way of helping themselves – be that through the therapeutic effect of writing or gaining more money/ fame through their literary publication. The comedian autobiographies' common qualities form their generic distinctiveness as literary works. My research shows that comedian autobiographies are likely to include many humoristic elements, such as transcripts from shows or literary devices, the amount/ extent of which often depending on what the management/ publishers want. The autobiographies thereby appear shaped and edited towards a maintaining of the public persona of the comedian. There are overlaps in the experiences of the 'becoming of a comedian' that are shared among and in most comedian autobiographies; and there are also similarities in terms of the usage of the comedy persona voice, visual elements to the texts, and the mixing of elements from other genres (for example self-help) among comedian autobiographies.

This section is essentially about the different writing styles that the comedians employ in their works. Thereby, the writing styles are usually functioning in congruence with the comedian's on-stage persona and are potentially specifically constructed in such a way that

creates this congruence. Millican, for example, would score highly in terms of authenticity to persona in her autobiography, using her passion for creative writing, which she frequently mentions in *How to be Champion*), similar to Bridges. Amstell too, would score highly in authenticity but low on originality as he simply re-prints a lot of stand-up excerpts. Hills and McIntyre on the other hand, would score highly on either, both comedians having produced a book that is authentic to their public stand-up persona, as well as being executed with literary skill. Connolly's autobiography with the interviews that are included in the book is a little more difficult to judge. Of course, each book is different and any such judgement as made in this paragraph – mentioning scores of any kind – can only be done with great caution and on an extremely hypothetical level. Nonetheless, the following is a more visual comparison which a useful attempt to map and define the sub-genre of comedian autobiographies precisely.

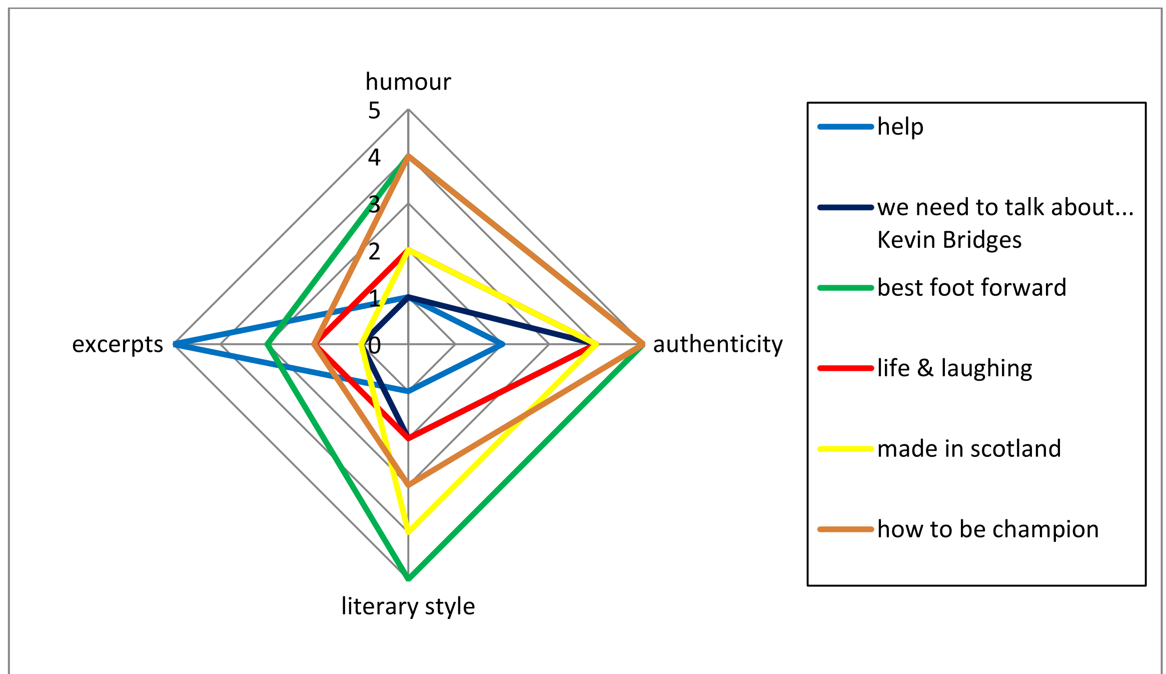

Diagram 4: Importance of Attributes

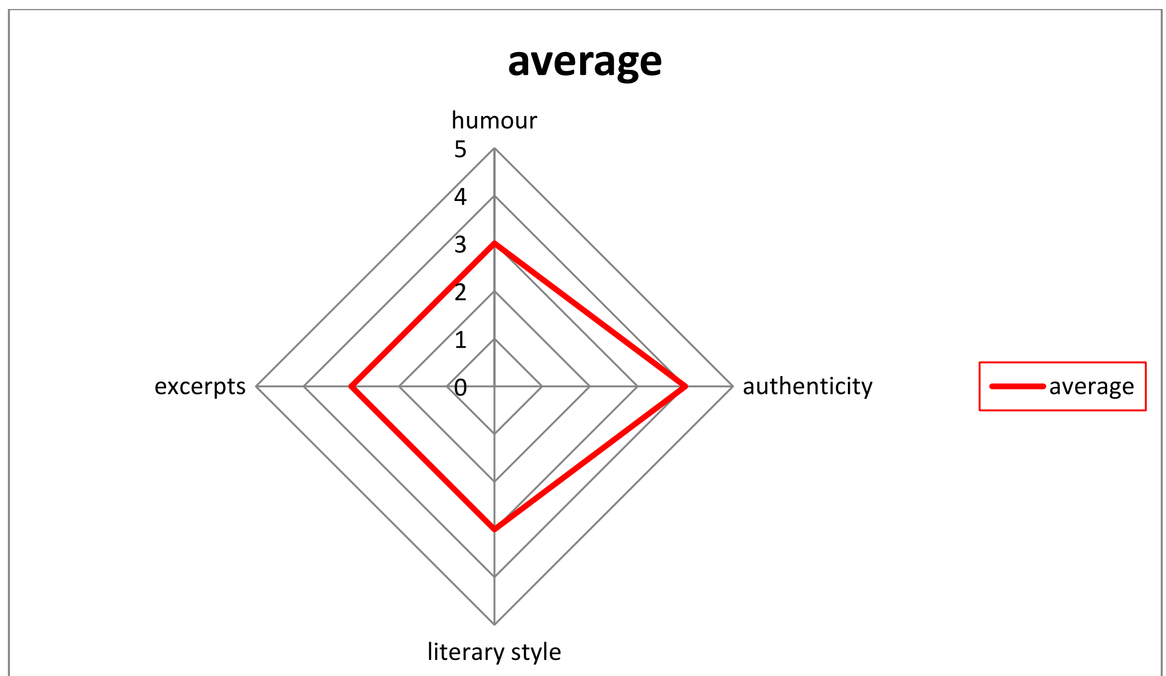

Diagram 5: Average Style

In these diagrams, the ranking is this: a 5 indicates that an attribute is very important in a comedian autobiography for it to be successful whereas a 1 means that the attribute is less important for it to function and be understood as a comedian autobiography. The above diagrams show, for example, that Simon Amstell's autobiography *help* is characterised by a huge amount of excerpts, small amount of literary style and humour, and only puts slightly more importance on authenticity. Adam Hills' *Best Foot Forward* instead shows a high importance and high level of literary style and authenticity, with humour scoring almost as high but excerpts not being of the same importance. The red line in diagram 4 then indicates the average of those six representative comedian autobiographies and comes to the following conclusion: for a comedian autobiography it is not so important for it to be humorous, include many excerpts, or a skilled literary style, but most important is by far the authenticity to persona. Of course, these six comedian autobiographies analysed in detail in this thesis are merely a small selection of available books but they are representative and based on the numerous other comedian autobiographies that I have read, such as the works by Sue Perkins,

Alan Davies, Romesh Ranganathan, or Jason Manford for example, the average line appears to be a highly accurate indication of the defining qualities of a comedian autobiography.

In my opinion, a further distinction within comedian autobiographies could be made: under the (sub-) genre of comedian autobiographies, the works can be separated into three sub-categories. Falling into the first category, are more traditional comedian autobiographies, such as Kevin Bridges' or Michael McIntyre's books. The second category is made up of comedian autobiographies that are actually humorous and have a high amount of jokes or entertaining literary qualities incorporated, the comedian autobiographies from this category play with the text. One example of this category is *Best Foot Forward* by Adam Hills. The third and final sub-category of comedian autobiographies then are the extremely experimental publications – books that go beyond the traditional understanding and expectations of (even) a (comedian) autobiography – done so by Simon Amstell and Sarah Millican, as this thesis has demonstrated. Of all the comedians mentioned, the following self-explanatory table illustrates which sub-category of comedian autobiography they fall into:

Comedian autobiographies with a traditional narrative (novel-like) structure	Humorous comedian autobiographies	Experimental comedian autobiographies
We Need To Talk About… Kevin Bridges by Kevin Bridges	*Best Foot Forward* by Adam Hills	*How to be Champion* by Sarah Millican
easily distracted by Steve Coogan	*Spectacles* by Sue Perkins	*help* by Simon Amstell
Brung up Proper by Jason Manford	*Saturday Night Peter* by Peter Kay	*How I escaped my certain fate* by Stewart Lee
Straight Outta Crawley by Romesh Ranganathan	*The Sound of Laughter* by Peter Kay	*Made in Scotland* by Billy Connolly
Just Ignore Him by Alan Davies		*I, Partridge* by Alan Partridge
Life & Laughing by Michael McIntyre		*How to talk dirty and influence people* by Lenny Bruce
		The book that's more than just a book by Peter Kay

Table 4: Sub-categories of Comedian Autobiographies

The question remains, however, what does the use of humour do to literary genre? The answer to this question again is a matter of authenticity, which has already been dealt with in chapter 4.3. So far we have come to the understanding that authenticity to persona is potentially more important in a comedian autobiography than the actual truth of events. Comedians may claim to try to accurately recall, for example, childhood memories, but at the same time, many comedians consciously and deliberately edit the truth for reasons of privacy and even more so for comedic effect. In terms of the combination of genre, authenticity, and stand-up comedy/ humour, Jesse Rappaport and Jake Quilty-Dunn wrote the interesting article "Stand-up Comedy, Authenticity, and Assertion". As the two researchers state in the abstract to their paper,

> Stand-up comedy is often viewed in two contrary ways. In one view, comedians are hailed as providing genuine social insight and telling truths. In the other, comedians are seen as merely trying to entertain and not to be taken seriously. This tension raises a foundational question for the aesthetics of stand-up: Do stand-up comedians perform genuine assertions in their performances?

And even if this article does perhaps not focus on comedian autobiographies specifically, it nonetheless provides valuable insights into the linguistic and artistic understandings of stand-up comedy. In their paper, Rappaport and Quilty-Dunn present two expectations that audience members may believe, one, that the comedian performs as him or herself and that what a comedian says is true; the comedian is not playing a character. The second expectation then is that the comedian is the author of the comedic material, but that it can be unclear what purpose the comedian had intended his material to be – entirely truthful or 'just' to create laughter? There is indeed a fine line between truth and comedy, Rappaport and Quincy-Dunn

> [r]ecall Tig Notaro opening her set by telling the audience, "I have cancer." This reflected a true and significant event in Notaro's life…. In fact, however, Notaro's statement did not have the effect that such a statement would have had if uttered in conversation: the audience continued to laugh as she repeated the statement several times, presumably taking it as a joke (despite its deadpan delivery), and it took some time before it "sunk in" with the audience that what she was uttering was true. This demonstrates that comedians face significant hurdles when they want to convey a

> serious message (and it is likely that Notaro had a reasonable expectation that the audience would react that way). (485)

This quote concurs with the conclusion from the analyses of the comedian autobiographies: although comedians appear to be telling the truth, the only aspect that can be validated is that most of the comedians are authentic to their persona in their autobiographies, but that they are, ultimately, unreliable authors.

Rappaport and Quincy-Dunn conclude their article by saying that "like actors on the stage, stand-up comedians do not perform genuine speech acts, but rather pretend to do so (or perform pretend ones)" (488) and that there are two sides to stand-up comedy, "stand-up as genuine social commentary, and stand-up as mere joke telling" (488).

On a broader scale, there is, unfortunately, very little academic discussion of the influence of humour on non-fiction writing, if the topic is not about satiric works, which comedian autobiographies are not. Gonzo journalism, a style of journalism that often includes the writer in the story and commonly uses elements of humour also does not really overlap with comedian autobiographies. Yet, as my thesis shows, comedian autobiographies employ humour in a variety of ways which causes a number of effects, such as unreliability, but at the same time authenticity to persona and creation of entertainment.

My research argues that comedian autobiographies are thereby a special sub-genre alongside autobiographical writing. They contain elements of classic autobiographical characteristics but also make use of concepts from other literary genres (for example self-help), and the perceived need to be humoristic influences the literary works additionally. Comedian autobiographies may even have been written by ghost writers and experience an influence from comedians' gag writers, management and publishers (but are still marketed as autobiographies/ memoirs in 2021). As a definition, comedian autobiographies can be of varying length, are usually humorous, which means that the truth may be edited for comedic effect but fits to the comedian's persona, and the texts (ideally) reveal new information about the comedian that has not been shared before on stage. It could be said that because of the just

mentioned possible features, the comedian autobiographies differ substantially from the genre autobiography – so much even, that comedian autobiographies may not be called a sub-genre of creative non-fiction, but rather a hybrid genre between autobiography and performance and it is certainly a very popular hybrid between autobiographical writing and creative non-fiction. It may even be a splinter-genre: comedians autobiographies are linked with autobiographies on a rather minimal level, perhaps originating in it, but also branching out into a different direction, perhaps even evolving into an entirely new genre within the next years as comedian autobiographies are becoming more popular and frequent publications.

I hope that this examination has shown that there are many differences but at the same time also many similarities between the texts and performances written by stand-up comedians. In fact, through my discoveries, it could be argued that it is now even possible to create a manual for stand-up comedians on how to write an autobiography. Sometimes, judging by the parallels between the autobiographies written by the stand-up comedians, it could be assumed that there already is one, however this is not the case (although the comedians may get some advice from their publishers and just generally make use of regular 'how to write an autobiography'-books; see also Bridges 129). And even if it seems like anything goes when comedians write an autobiography, there are some characteristics that seem to be adopted by most comedians that write. So, if a manual for comedians did exist it is likely to include the following 'rules':

- Give the reader new information about your life that you have not shared on stage yet so that the reader gets some value out of the book
- Include jokes in your text or references to your stand-up material as many readers will expect that
- Talk about every aspect of your life, leaving nothing out
- Be authentic to your stand-up persona but also your own 'true self'

- Be aware of the implied reader and the societal/ cultural influence your work might have
- Have some chronological/ linear structure to your text
- Publish the book in the run-up to Christmas to boost sales (see also Chapter 6.2 “Commercialisation”)

These ‘rules’ thereby do not necessarily go against more traditional ‘instructions’ for how to write an autobiography – such guidebooks may not tell the aspiring autobiographer to include humour in their work, but they do not really advise to avoid it either; in fact the combination of humour and autobiography is simply seemingly rarely discussed in academic works so far.

6.2 Commercialisation

Mapping when comedian autobiographies are released in relation to their other outputs, on the other hand, adds to the understanding of the specific sub-genre of these autobiographies and can reveal patterns. Many of the autobiographies featured in this study are advertised as being best sellers. That the books become best sellers is primarily down to the already established popularity of the comedians and their fans buying the books because they like the comedian’s comedy performances. Thus, a comedian autobiography is a commercial enterprise for all concerned – publishers, comedians, readers. As the introduction showed, the publishing industry desires products from celebrities (i.e. authors with recognition factor in other media) and comedian autobiographies are very successful – there is little risk for the comedians or publishers because fans of the comedians are extremely likely to buy their books. To better understand the commercialisation of comedian autobiographies, and their popularity, I created the following table that shows exactly when the autobiographies analysed in this thesis were published in comparison to DVDs of their stand-up comedy performances.

Amstell	**22.Nov. 2010** *do nothing live* DVD	**25.Nov. 2013** *numb* DVD	**21. Sept. 2017** *help* Hardcover	**17. Jan. 2019** *help* Paperback	**20. Aug. 2019** *set free* Netflix Special		
Bridges	**22. Nov. 2010** *The story so far* DVD	**12. Nov. 2012** *The story continues* DVD	**09. Oct. 2014** *We need to talk about… Kevin Bridges* Hardcover	**04. June 2015** *We need to talk about… Kevin Bridges* Paperback	**23. Nov. 2015** *A whole different story* DVD	**07. Dec. 2018** *The brand new tour* DVD	
Connolly	**1981 – 2016** 19 DVD releases in total	**18. Oct. 2018** *Made in Scotland* Hardcover	**16. May 2019** *Made in Scotland* Paperback	**17. Oct. 2019** *Tall Tales and Wee Stories* Hardcover	**17. Sept. 2020** *Tall Tales and Wee Stories* Paperback	**14. Oct. 2021** *Windswept & Interesting* Hardcover	
Hills	**05. Nov. 2012** *Inflatable* DVD	**18. Nov. 2013** *Happyism* DVD	**20. Nov. 2017** *Clown Heart* DVD	**24. July 2018** *Best Foot Forward* Hardcover	**16. May 2019** *Best Foot Forward* Paperback		
McIntyre	**17. Nov. 2008** *Live & Laughing* DVD	**16. Nov. 2009** *Hello Wembley* DVD	**14. Oct. 2010** *Life & Laughing* Hardcover	**31. March 2011** *Life & Laughing* Paperback	**12. Nov. 2012** *Showtime* DVD	**16. Nov. 2015** *Happy & Glorious* DVD	**14. Oct. 2021** *A Funny Life* Hardcover
Millican	**21. Nov. 2011** *Chatterbox Live* DVD	**12. Nov. 2012** *Thoroughly Modern Millican Live* DVD	**17. Nov. 2014** *Home Bird Live* DVD	**21. Nov. 2016** *Outsider Live* DVD	**05. Oct. 2017** *How to be champion* Hardcover	**31. May 2018** *How to be champion* Paperback	**03. Dec. 2018** *Control Enthusiast* DVD

Table 5: Commercialisation

By making this table, I noticed that not only at least two DVDs had been released before any of the books, which means that the comedian was established by the time an autobiography was published/ requested to be written by publishers or the comedians' managers. Connolly had, in fact, released a total of 19 DVDs of his stand-up performances. The table also shows that clearly, most DVDs and books are published in time for Christmas sales and Bridges and Hills even went on a book tour to promote their works. In terms of sales numbers, Millican's autobiography for example, sold 6,865 copies in the first week of publication, which resulted

in her making it to the top spot of the *Sunday Times* bestseller list ("Sarah Millican tops bestseller chart"). In comparison, McIntyre sold more than 142,000 copies of his autobiography in the first six weeks following the release date in October 2010 ("Still #1!") and had made almost £4 million from his autobiography sales by 2013 ("Top selling biographies"). While the works of Bridges, Hills, Millican, McIntyre are all advertised as number one bestsellers on the front covers of their paperback editions, Amstell's autobiographical work does not appear on such a list, which may also be due to his work not meeting the 'requirements' of the emerging sub-genre of comedian autobiographies or possibly his appealing to a more niche audience than other comedians.

In the end, fans of Amstell will buy his book, because they are fans of the comedian and will get some enjoyment out of the new material/ extended stories that Amstell shares, even if the fan may already know many of the stories from performances. Some readers may even appreciate the opportunity to 'relive' a performance through the transcripts. And although Amstell directly clarifies in a note at the beginning of his autobiography that the excerpts are all from performances he did in the past, so the reader is aware of this fact. Yet, all in all, "it's hard to escape the sense that this particular book [by Amstell] doesn't quite know what it wants to be" (Merritt). The key insight here is that a comedian's autobiography can be a hybrid text, combining elements of different genres and writing techniques, and that these books are perhaps caught between commercial imperatives and creative experimentation.

The table also shows an upcoming publication by Billy Connolly. It is titled *Windswept & Interesting* and comes out in October 2021. This publication is intriguing, because it is marketed as "Billy's story in his own words" and "is [Connolly's] first full-length autobiography, [in which] comedy legend and national treasure Billy Connolly reveals the truth behind his windswept and interesting life" ("Windswept & Interesting"). Additionally, it has the subtitle "My Autobiography". Thus, this publication raises a number

of questions: what about Connolly's autobiography *Made in Scotland*? What constitutes a full-length autobiography? Is *Made in Scotland* perhaps not classified as a full-length autobiography, because it also includes interviews that Connolly did with other people? Is *Windswept & Interesting* 'more' of an autobiography because it will apparently include some more information about Connolly's experience in film and television, which is not referred to extensively in *Made in Scotland*? Or does it have something to do with the fact that *Made in Scotland* was written by Billy Connolly with help from Tom Gittins? A potentially satisfying answer could only be given once *Windswept & Interesting* has been released and compared to Connolly's other books. Coincidentally, McIntyre will also publish a new autobiography (*A Funny Life*) on the exact same date as Connolly, in which McIntyre will share "the highs and the lows of his rise to the top and his desperate attempts to stay there" ("Pan Macmillan announces Michael McIntyre's autobiography A Funny Life"). This publication should be interesting to study when it is released as in *Life & Laughing* McIntyre was opposed to publishing anything about his recent successes (see 359). As an update from November 2021 following the publication of both of these books, this became apparent: I understand now how Connolly's book is a full-length autobiography. *Windswept & Interesting* is a continuous text (so no interviews this time) of about 400 pages. However, there appear to be some overlaps in content and references to stand-up performances already mentioned in his previous books. McIntyre's new work continues where he left off in the first autobiography but does not comment per se on why he now did write a new autobiography. The writing style and voice is again very similar to McIntyre's first book. There are no book reviews of these two books on the Chortle website yet.

Another interesting piece of information regarding commercialisation is that the book release of *We need to talk about… Kevin Bridges* was followed by a 22-dates book tour in the United Kingdom and the autobiography became a *Sunday Times* Best Seller ("Kevin Bridges"), Hills did a shorter book tour of 8 dates (see also Table 2 in the Introduction). And

lastly, Hills even acknowledges the commercialisation emphasis when he says "one of the guests [on his TV show *Spicks and Specks*] held up my released-just-in-time-for-Christmas live DVD" (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 298).

Another point here, relates to commercialisation and the combination of different media. All comedians analysed in this study, for example, use film analogies in some way or make references to films in their autobiographies. Mentioning films etc. is usually done for context; because it is part of a humorous anecdote (for example Amstell, *help* 11: "When *Titanic* came out, I went to see it four times"), or because this type of referencing is used as an additional literary device to make their texts more entertaining to read. Thus, some of the comedians also use song lyrics in literature, Hills, for example writing his own song lyrics to an already existing song (*Best Foot Forward* 227f.) and Millican asking the reader to listen to a song in the background while reading as she titled/ separated passages in her chapter according to the song lyrics in that specific song (*How to be Champion* 8ff.). Similarly intermedial is the comedians' use of references to other of their publications and the prompt to the reader to 'google' things that they refer to – be that interviews that the comedians did or explanations to help with the understandings of jokes/ text the comedians are writing about. This 'googling' of contexts thereby is a very modern idea – comedians like Lenny Bruce, who also wrote an autobiography, but several decades ago, would not be able to instruct the reader in such a way, as the internet would not have existed. This aspect of modernity is a key point as to why this current era is so important for the development of the sub-genre of comedian autobiographies. The earliest point anyone could google anything is 1997. The ability for 'everyone' to easily do it requires phones with data, which became doable widely ca. 2010. Therefore comedian autobiographies are frequently tied to modern phenomena and social media (which may make them date quickly).

The intermediality, or multi-modality, and modernity aspect of comedian autobiographies leads to a question about the relationship between live on-stage

performances, DVD recordings of such performances, and their connection with intermediality, especially when considering, that the comedian's tours are, at times, advertised in their autobiographies (for example Bridges and McIntyre) and, when considering how autobiographical stand-up comedy performances can be.

On an abstract level, the autobiographies contain more personal/ private/ intimate information about a comedian than live performances yet the texts (performance and autobiography) will have been edited and are a form of performance/ portraying the comedian in a certain light. There is also no requirement to be funny in the written texts (although it does help and is ultimately likely to sell more) and the comedians can be freer with editing and play with the literary medium. Where autobiographies offer a different/ extended content going beyond live performances, the live performances and DVD recordings will be the same content, because the DVD recording is simply a recorded version of a live performance. However, as Logan Murray writes "The nature or performing is that it is entirely ephemeral … there is no physical artefact left behind. . . . All a DVD can do is record the event. It is not the actual event itself" (xvii). Outside of the DVD being 'one step away' from a live show, a live performance will deviate from the recorded version only occasionally, depending on the comedians' interaction with the audience at a particular show, or the comedian adding a line or new joke that they had not told before/ not told while their show was recorded for a DVD version. Moreover, especially tours and DVDs will be advertised much more than a book, as the comedian is primarily a live performer, with one substantial additional method of making money off that (DVDs) and their autobiographies being a bonus. The relationships between DVDs and live performances, however, do not mean that there is a hierarchy among these forms of comedy in different media – it cannot be said that one medium is superior to another – they simply employ different strategies to create humour and are meant to be enjoyed in different ways. Instead the relationships between the media and points made just now, in this

current paragraph, could be presented as a triangle, every medium being connected to the other media, and united by the central figure presenting (humorous) content – the comedian:

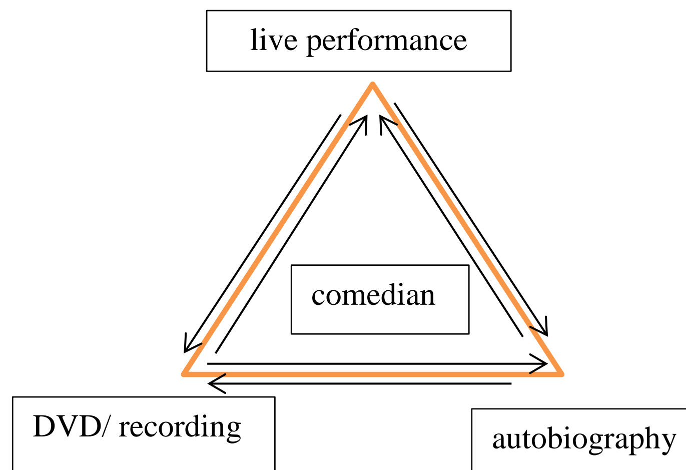

Diagram 6: Media Comparisons

So, in a way, having transcripts as in Amstell's autobiography, makes the text intermedial, as it might prompt the reader to re-watch the stand-up performance that the excerpt relates to, however the intermediality is not as clear/ direct as in other comedian autobiographies.

Chapter 11 of *How to be Champion*, then plays with literary forms as it is written like a love letter. At the end of this chapter, she encourages the reader to look up a video on YouTube, which is one of many intermedial elements in the comedian's text. The video Millican mentions still exists and has more than 10,000 views ("How To With Dr Christian"), but the only comments beneath it say the users are only here because of the book, indicating the influence that Millican has on the reader, with another commenter questioning "Wtf was this" (Lima Begum). This shows that some readers will follow Millican's author instructions.

Finally a note, which could be seen as a future development for comedian autobiographies and how they are marketed. During one of the 'lockdown' periods in the United Kingdom due to COVID-19, Millican started to upload videos to her YouTube

channel, wanting to record herself reading the entire book in short sections (always a couple of pages, or roughly five minutes on average) in each daily video. On July 2nd 2020, Millican released episode number 94 of this ‘visual audio-book’, which is the final episode reaching the end of her autobiography; she even read out the acknowledgements at the end.[9] There are very few noticeable differences between her reading the book out loud and having a video along with it as opposed to just reading the book, the main one being that her characteristic Geordie voice can be heard (see discussion on dialect in Chapter 5.3). The differences between consuming a text via personal silent reading and consuming it as a video performance will be discussed in the next sub-chapter in a comparison between the media of comedian autobiographies, live stand-up performances, and DVD recordings of stand-up comedy shows. Occasionally, in the YouTube videos, Millican makes a ‘clown horn/ honk’ sound to lighten the mood whenever the comedian finds some of the material that she had just read out difficult or depressing – a text has no equivalent version of this sound. Here, Millican publishes her book (even if in a different format), for free. It is difficult to judge, how many people will buy her book in the future, when it is available as this YouTube audio format with no costs, then again, books are meant to stay and there will always be an expected readership for comedian autobiographies, as the next sub-chapter will show.

6.3 Who reads Comedian Autobiographies?

At this point I would have liked to give an overview of the scholarship of reading and spectating. What does it mean to watch a comedy performance? How do people read comedian autobiographies?[10] While I am certainly looking at those topics in this very chapter

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[9] As a side note here, in this very video, Millican reads sitting in front of a bookshelf of what presumably is her home. On the bookshelf, I could identify clearly at least three autobiographies written by the stand-up comedians; Jo Brand’s *Born Lippy*, Frank Skinner’s *On the Road*, and Steve Martin’s *Born Standing Up*. Of course, this does not have to mean that Millican has read these books or even read them before writing her own autobiography.

[10] Reader Response Theory was already featured in chapter 4.1.

among others, it appears to be an under-researched topic. Ian Wilkie, the editor of the *Comedy Studies* journal said that "the audience reception aspect of comedy has been massively under-researched. There is nothing that springs to my mind that directly addresses the solo, remote [versus] communal and live experience of watching comedy. All I can think of is that you may find something in the between-ness" (Wilkie, email). The few academic sources that exist relate to my research only to a very limited extent, which shows once again, the huge gaps of knowledge in the study of humour. In particular, this topic would require immense groundwork, to discuss the matter in more detail, but, as this is only one PhD project already providing a basis for the general understanding of the emerging sub-genre of comedian autobiographies, a study on reading versus spectating humour will have to be done elsewhere. What can be examined, however, is the readership of comedian autobiographies.

Vivian Gornick states that "thirty years ago, people who thought they had a story to tell sat down to write a novel. Today they sit down to write a memoir" (89). The statement sounds somewhat derogatory, but at the same time indicates the popularity of memoirs nowadays. The question is why do comedians write their autobiographies and even more so, who then reads the comedian autobiographies? What is the target audience? Amstell, for example, wrote following his publisher's wishes (Amstell, *help* introduction). At the same time, it feels like Amstell wrote the book more for himself, as a form of reflection or therapy. This style of writing could either be a marketing device or false modesty. As another example, Billy Connolly says that his "demographic seems to go from pre-school to old-age pensioners" (*Made in Scotland* 258).

Generally, the target audience of comedian autobiographies can be understood to be the fans of the comedian that the comedian gained by performing live comedy on stage (and appearances on television). Usually, readers will buy an autobiography because they are interested in getting to know the person's life. With the comedians' autobiographies, readers will buy them especially because they like the comedians' shows and want to know more

about the person, or assume that in a way the book will be just another entertaining performance in a different medium – written down and printed rather than watched or listened to (although audiobooks of some of comedians' autobiographies do exist). Or as the comedian Jason Manford puts it: "comedians' memoirs are popular because 'people are nosey and they like a gossip. I know that's why I read them'" (Youde).

Alternatively, people can use comedian autobiographies also as a form of escapism and entertainment. Readers of autobiographies written by stand-up comedians may expect the books to be equally as humorous as the shows. Are they then disappointed when the book is not as funny as they hope for? And do humorous written works sell well in general? This would need an entire study of research on its own and would likely be very difficult to measure. On this note, it could be said that it is less engaging to read Amstell's book, when there are so many quotes from his shows included, when on top of that, in a book, the reader cannot hear the comedian's actual voice (in terms of intonation, accent, or emphasis), which is, perhaps, what makes the shows more attractive, as it is part of the fun. Generally, however, it is difficult to put one medium in a superior position to the other and ranking them is not productive. Stand-up comedy was perhaps made for live performances – at a very basic level it is a comedian standing in front of an audience and telling jokes – the pure definition of stand-up comedy, yet that does not have to mean that books cannot be equally as entertaining but simply in a different medium and different way/ with different methods/ jokes. There simply is a difference between reading the text in a book form in private or public, or watching a stand-up comedy performance alone versus live, in a venue with a big audience.

The comedians featured in this thesis regularly sell out huge arenas, for example, and stand-up performances are usually only released on DVD if the comedian is very successful and performing in front of large audiences. The following table presents some initial notes I made when I was thinking about this as a reader:

	laughing out loud	pausing	‘rewinding’	distraction
reading alone	rarely	possible	possible	no distraction
reading in public	never	possible	possible	sometimes
watching alone (DVD, online)	often	possible	possible	no distraction
watching with others (a live performance)	often	not possible	not possible	rarely

Table 6: Differences between Reading and Watching

To explain the table: while I was reading the texts on my own, I liked the fact that I could do it anywhere – at home, on the bus, in the office, etc. (that is reading in private versus reading in a public space). I was also able to re-read sentences and even go back a few pages to remember something or I could skip chapters if I wanted. Especially the first two times I read the autobiographies would always be a slower process so that I could understand and enjoy the book completely, and then also analyse the texts (see also the “Approach to Research” Chapter 1.3 for an explanation of my analysis procedure). Later on, while I was writing this thesis, it often became more of a speed-reading process,. In terms of humour, although there were quite a few humorous instances in the books, I rarely laughed out loud but chuckled or grinned silently at most, especially when reading in a public space. The laughter involved when reading was slightly different compared to when I watched the stand-up DVDs of the comedians. Sometimes I would watch the shows in the PGR office and have other postgraduate research students look at me strangely when I would suddenly start laughing out loud (creating an interesting reflection and also a (self-)awareness of outsiders spectating the spectator). Very often, seeing the comedians enrich their material by gestures or movements made the works even more amusing to me. The DVDs also had the advantage of me watching

it with English subtitles for better understanding, adjusting the volume as necessary or rewinding parts. Both the books and the DVDs I could go back to multiple times and pause whenever I needed a pause. When watching a live performance in a theatre or comedy club, this is not possible without missing material – a key distinction and characteristic feature of a live performance that just happens ‘in the moment’. Then again there are fewer distractions and a live show will be over quite quickly. Additionally, although sometimes the laughter of other people in the audience can be disruptive and annoying depending on the situation, the amount of laughter is much greater and often creates a mass/ chain reaction – when someone in the audience laughs, others start too. (Ian Wilkie et al. for example, researched the exchange between comedians and their audiences in terms of laughter as a reaction to jokes and success indicator for comedians.) However, if you missed a joke, you missed it. It is also difficult to take notes on the material during the show as opposed to when watching a DVD recording or reading a book.

Particularly noticeable in all autobiographies studied in this thesis is that the comedians are aware of their intended readership and demographic of the audience, as the comedians often refer to their expected demographic themselves within the text through comments like “[a]nyone under the age of twenty may want to Google the words ‘video store’ at this point” (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 257). Only through comments like the just mentioned example, the comedians (jokingly) ‘include’ readers outside their target audience. In the just given example, Hills acknowledges that younger readers may read his autobiography but although these younger readers may either follow his advice of googling the term he mentioned, others of a similar age may be annoyed/ offended by the comedian’s remark, whereas older readers within his core readership might find it funny. While the target demographic for the autobiographies is otherwise rarely mentioned or discussed in the books, they are usually expected to be the same people that are in an audience of their live stand-up comedy performances. Sharon Lockyer and Lynn Myers (2011) conducted a study

"analysing the *appeal* of contemporary live stand-up comedy for audiences and to reveal their *motivations* for attending live stand-up comedy" (169, emphasis original). Through a survey and interviews, the following results (that are interesting for this thesis) emerged:

> According to 196 responses,
>
> television is the most popular media format through which respondents engage with stand-up comedy (95% of respondents who answered the question), followed equally by stand-up comedy on the internet (49%) and available on DVD (49%). Radio stand-up comedy is less popular being listened to by 46% of respondents, as are newspaper columns/articles (20%) and books (18%) written by stand-up comedians. (Lockyer and Myers 171)

With the increasing number of autobiographies published by popular comedians in more recent years, the percentages for the popularity of books may have increased by now and can be expected to have overtaken newspaper columns/ articles. The general difference between the popularities of the different media seems to be accurate, despite Lockyer and Myers' study having had its limitations in terms of survey participants. Semi-structured interviews revealed:

> [that comedy fans appreciated the] unexpected and unpredictable potential. This related to both the stand-up comedian's actions, the content of their performance and the ways in which the stand-up comedian responds to the dynamics of the specific audience. . . Some respondents expressed a preference for seeing stand-up comedians who go on to be very popular in the early stages of their careers because as they become more popular their performances lose their appeal. (Lockyer and Myers 175)

One respondent even reported that he would try to avoid watching or listening to any material by a stand-up comedian so that the performance would not be spoiled (Lockyer and Myers 176). As seen in my study of autobiographies written by stand-up comedians, with the exception of Amstell's book, the comedians generally re-use very little of their previous on-stage material. Not repeating 'old material' is, therefore something that can attract readers/ comedy fans (through added value).

On the other hand, as soon as the texts get 'technical', the books appeal to a more specialised audience too, such as media professionals, stand-up comedians, and aspiring versions of those professions. Hills in particular uses many comedy terms and also terms used in the TV and radio industry, which only someone else working in one of these professions

might be familiar with such as “MC” (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 23), or “Death by Committee” (Hills, *Best Foot Forward* 72), although ‘outsiders’ might enjoy feeling included. And since all of the stand-up comedians write about their experiences of becoming a stand-up comedian, their autobiographies not only become entertaining works for a regular reader/ fan but also potentially helpful sources of inspiration and information for people wanting to pursue a career in comedy as well. In fact, Bridges himself had been inspired to take up stand-up comedy after reading the comedian Frank Skinner’s autobiography. As Bridges describes in his autobiography, after already being the joker and class clown in his youth, it was only after reading and re-reading Skinner’s autobiography several times, that he wanted to become a professional stand-up comedian himself as he identified massively with Skinner (see Bridges, *We need to talk* 290f.). Now, his autobiography (and autobiographies by other comedians) can, in theory, inspire others to take up stand-up comedy too, while the regular reader/ fan still gets enjoyment of those sections about comedy through the witnessing of the growth of their favourite comedians that they previously, before reading their autobiographies, may not have been aware of. This thought of potentially being an inspiration to others, is a thought that many comedians that write an autobiography seem to have but not all mention it as explicitly as Bridges. Generally, revealing their own history seems to be the expected way of writing an autobiography for a comedian – sharing how they became successful and how their childhood potentially revealed their future career will interest a reader.

A closer look at the autobiographies written by the “Focus Comedians”, shows the following: Among the readership of *Best Foot Forward*, Hills can expect younger readers as well as people interested in becoming a stand-up comedian among his readership, which is likely for any comedian autobiography, although his core readership can be expected to be fans of his stand-up that are of a similar age as Hills (see also the previous quote about the googling of the term ‘video store’).

Amstell occasionally shows awareness of the implied reader, as visible for example on pages 15, 25 of *help* ("And then – and this is the most disgusting and romantic sentence I have for you"), or on page 47 where he influences the reader and asks them "while reading the rest of this chapter, … to imagine two people who were quite often having a lovely time" (*help*). Although these instances of Amstell speaking directly to the reader are rare, whenever he does it, it stands out: the comedian appears to primarily share his stories with himself, ignoring the reader for the most part and instead writing for himself.

When telling the reader about a boxing fight which McIntyre won against a friend in school, he claims he has not "stopped reminding him of my victory for the past twenty-five years. I'm sure he'll be thrilled to learn it's mentioned in my book. I'm sorry, Sam, but the fact is my speed, silky skills and breath-taking power were too much for you. I gave you a boxing lesson. I destroyed you" (*Life & Laughing* 116), thereby addressing one specific person only. More readers will be grabbed by his narrative, through hooks and cliff-hangers (for example McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 191: "But before my eighteenth birthday my life would be changed for ever"), shared experience (for example going to IKEA on page 280), or when the reader can notice from the text alone that something sad is going to happen when his father dies (McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 195ff.). McIntyre may reveal a lot of new information about himself but also understandably does not "want to go into too much detail" (*Life & Laughing* 173) at other times. What is essential to understand, though, is that he can engage the reader, for example by building tension when sharing anecdotes (for example McIntyre, *Life & Laughing* 338f.), and then relieving it (also tension 356, relief 358) and using author intrusions as has been discussed at length in the chapter on literary devices. This 'interaction' with the reader is something he does well and is useful for stand-up performances too.

According to Millican, people will buy the "book because [they] know the basics about [Millican] (glasses, cake, potty mouth) and would like to know [the comedian] more" (*How to be Champion* 4). The comedian's work is additionally primarily aimed at an audience

that is more of her age, as can be seen by the references she makes to occurrences only ‘older’ people will know, or when she writes that “[i]f you don’t know what a mixtape is I have no time for you” (Millican, *How to be Champion* 55). Comments like these also show Millican’s awareness of her market demographic, which she uses as an advantage, somewhat tailoring the work to her target audience and being aware of the implied reader. Other than that, Millican often uses words from her Geordie dialect, or particularly British terms, like the acronym “NVQ” (*How to be Champion* 4) for example, which are terms that non-native speakers of English may have difficulties with. Yet, Millican is happy about everyone that reads her autobiography, almost deluging the reader with thanks and hopes in the afterword (see Millican, *How to be Champion* 296).

However, not every comedian will use author intrusions and address the reader directly, and even fewer will directly mention their target audience. Nonetheless, comedian autobiographies are popular (see Chapter 1) and many fans of comedy and future comedians read comedian autobiographies that incorporate such a big variety of special key characteristics to make them their own genre. Thus, perhaps scholars will soon too, begin to look at this literary publishing phenomenon in more detail.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this thesis was to answer the questions of what the relationship between the content of on-stage performances and autobiographical writing by stand-up comedians is, and to find out what defines the genre of comedian autobiographies. My research shows that when stand-up comedians write books, there usually is a lot of humour involved, but it depends on what each comedian wants to do and feels most comfortable with. A (slight) influence of publishers/ managements and their commercial concerns on the texts is also noticeable. The humour used in the books is sometimes made up of jokes that the comedians tell on stage (for example in excerpts of transcripts/ quotes from performances), but more often the humour is created by content (sharing an amusing anecdote) or by using literary devices or literary jokes that work best in written form on page. However, comedians do not necessarily have to write humorously, some choose to focus more on their life than writing about their comedy career or turn their autobiographies into a self-help book for example. Humour influences the works a lot, naturally making the stories entertaining to read, but, on the other hand, this results in a questioning of authenticity. The comedians always seem to want to stay close to how they appear on stage and stay true to their comedy persona in their written works too. Therefore, it appears that stand-up comedians embellish their stories even when writing their autobiographies, which would mean that authenticity to persona, trumps the accuracy to facts in comedian autobiographies. The many similarities between the comedian autobiographies and differences in comparison to 'regular' creative non-fiction autobiographies, especially in terms of voice, authenticity, visual aspects, and commercialisation indicate that a literary (sub-) genre could be validated for comedian autobiographies.

The findings of this thesis include similarities among comedian autobiographies in terms of the use of humour which shapes the authenticity to suit a comedian's persona. Among all the comedian autobiographies analysed, overlaps between their stand-up performances and written texts can usually be found through transcripts or

similar contents. Just like on stage, each comedian has their own (humorous) voice, and the comedians' texts usually seem to be very creative in terms of literary devices used, narrative structure, play with genres, or visual elements, for example. Additionally, there are many shared experiences between the comedians, especially in regard to the comedy industry. All of these points are what makes the genre of comedian autobiographies distinct and cohesive. No one has studied comedian autobiographies in such great detail before as far as I am aware, and my contribution to knowledge is that I am filling this gap now and developed a critical understanding of stand-up comedians' autobiographies as a publishing phenomenon within English literature (in its broadest sense). Ultimately, studying comedian autobiographies also helps to better understand autobiographical writing as well as the literary genre of creative non-fiction, which is a genre that is currently becoming more and more popular with readers and publishers alike. According to the official creative non-fiction website, "Creative nonfiction has become the most popular genre in the literary and publishing communities. These days the biggest publishers—HarperCollins, Random House, Norton, and others—are seeking creative nonfiction titles more vigorously than literary fiction and poetry" (Gutkind, "What Is Creative Nonfiction?").

As for anyone wondering how my work and the study of comedian autobiographies can develop further, one interesting question is presented by the following: Simon Amstell had comedians' photos on his bedroom wall as inspiration (for example Lenny Bruce; although he himself says he had no idea about who any of the comedians really were). Kevin Bridges wanted to do stand-up comedy after reading comedian Frank Skinner's autobiography. Tracing the lineage historically, can I then cast my discoveries forward into the future to the next generation of stand-up comedians and future autobiographical publications written by stand-up comedians? The introduction already gave an overview of past and current comedian autobiography publications, and while the main part of the thesis showed what a current comedian autobiography can look like, it is

worthwhile to take a closer look at an older comedian autobiography, in this case looking at the American comedian Lenny Bruce's *How to talk dirty and influence people* from 1965. Key features of this work are (entertaining) anecdotes that are written in an enjoyable novel-like writing style and deal with Bruce's relationship, drug addiction, or religion for example. Bruce broke boundaries in comedy by challenging social and political norms as well as the understanding of 'what is comedy'; the comedian was often labelled as the 'sick comic' that offends everyone (Lenny Bruce 97). His autobiography's title is a play on the book *How to win friends and influence people* by Dale Carnegie, published in 1936. In terms of style and additional features of the book, Bruce's work does not have chapter titles, he includes a black and white photo section in the middle of the book with humorous captions, and some of his stand-up comedy performance transcripts and other official documents dealing with Bruce are reprinted within the text (for example Lenny Bruce 92, or the lawsuit 105ff.). In that way, Bruce's autobiography is not very different from more recently published comedian autobiographies, the biggest difference between his work and the work of, for example, McIntyre, is certainly the different intermediality, of Bruce not being able to say 'watch that video' or 'google this' for a better understanding of the text.

Judging by these insights, my prediction for the future then is that in terms of content and voice, the comedian autobiographies of the future will not change much. They are still likely to include childhood photos and (entertaining) stories on how the people became stand-up comedians. These stories will continue to be edited for comedic effect and at the same time comedians will try to stay authentic to their personas in their written texts. It can also be assumed that it is likely that more and more comedians will talk about their experiences with therapy as this topic has been mentioned in many comedian autobiographies already.

One literary element that I expect to change in comedian autobiographies is the use of intermediality and references. I expect that comedians will refer to their own works and other digital publications a lot more often, eventually perhaps making the books even more

interactive by including QR codes that readers will be able to scan with their phones to directly get to the linked/ referred to media files. On the other hand, I can also imagine that more comedians will publish (annotated) transcripts of their performances in book-form, similar to Amstell or Lee, so that people will be able to experience stand-up comedy performances in a different medium, if they perhaps were not able to see the show in person or simply want to relive old memories.

As a further speculation, what can be predicted about the stand-up comedians and their personas themselves? The comedians I analysed closer in this study had personas that ranged from shy (Amstell) to bold (McIntyre), crude (Millican), and uplifting (Hills). The comedians often seemed to reflect on their working class upbringing, so for the future, I expect and hope to see more disabled comedians, queer comedians, people of different ethnic backgrounds (that is minority groups), although the question is if becoming a stand-up comedian is still a job that people seek out (but knowing that there even are comedy study programmes at university existing in the United Kingdom, it seems to be a popular profession). Regarding the future of stand-up comedians, the following has also become apparent in the past year of 2020: during the COVID-19 pandemic, many venues all around the world closed and so stand-up comedians could not perform in front of a live audience anymore. Online shows and drive-in comedy performances exist but do not work for every comedian, especially if they are not that good with technology (see Glynn), bringing a change to the comedy industry. As an example, "[t]he advent of virtual front rows for some online gigs, where 30 or so viewers at home can switch on their own cameras and be heard and seen by the comedians, have been trialled by the likes of Kiri Pritchard-McLean at the fictional pub The Covid Arms, and Jason Manford" (Glynn). Furthermore, comedians can benefit from moving online, "[th]eir success is being escalated under lockdown: not only are we all desperate to laugh right now, but we're also stuck inside, glued to our feeds. COVID-19 has legitimized lo-fi internet comedy: even SNL is doing Zoom sketches now, and big names are

going live on Instagram for charity" (Garron). Matthew McKeague looked at the advantages and disadvantages of performing stand-up comedy online, with the result that "vlogging and stand-up appear to be both viable means to distribute funny content for the foreseeable future. Audiences desire comedic content and are devouring it as much as in the past" with both comedic outlets getting along by employing different styles and attracting different audiences due to each medium's advantages. Or as Garron explains,

> The meteoric rise of social media comedy content, be it tweets, sketches, or front-facing camera videos, presents a new and theoretically utopian model for what an early career in the entertainment industry could look like. In some ways, they mimic open mic nights and sketch clubs: there's immediate audience feedback, it's easy to test shaky material by uploading it onto a feed that will have refreshed itself completely within hours, and if something doesn't work, there's always the delete button. (Garron)

Lastly then, and returning to the (autobiographical) books that comedians write, in 2020, "People have 'rediscovered the pleasure of reading' in lockdown, publisher Bloomsbury has said, after reporting its best half-year profits since 2008. The firm, best known for publishing the Harry Potter books, said profits jumped 60% to £4m from February to August. Online book sales and e-book revenues were both 'significantly higher'." (Marston) This development may encourage more comedians and publishers to release comedian autobiographies, especially also if the comedians cannot perform as well right now as in previous years.

Autoethnographic Afterword

Almost one year and a half after I bought my first few comedian autobiographies for my PhD project in the bookshop, I finally took up enough courage one late evening, to ask a bookshop employee out of sheer curiosity, on why they did not have an 'Autobiography' section and briefly told him my story about struggling to find the books initially. Coincidentally, one of the first things the employee replied was that he was an amateur stand-up comedian himself and was thus interested in autobiographies written by stand-up comedians too. Regarding the categorisation, he said that he believed comedians' autobiographies being under 'Biography' was, because the 'Humour' section is only for funny gifts and joke compilation books and they do not fit in the 'Real Lives' section either, a section which apparently includes books written by people that were made famous through the one life-story they are sharing in their book. The employee appreciated my genre investigation and said concluding that it would not be worth giving the autobiographies written by stand-up comedians their own category in the bookshop, as there would not be enough of them to justify it. Admittedly, none of these were answers that I was expecting and as my thesis shows, there is a large number of existing comedian autobiographies. Nonetheless, the brief conversation I had with the bookshop employee was beneficial for me in that it gave me an (even if unexpected) answer to my question; and what are the chances that the bookshop employee I spoke to was a stand-up comedian, interested in books and comedy… Personally, I am still very much interested in autobiographical writing and could see myself studying this field further, although it is unlikely that I will continue to study anything related to stand-up comedy in the near future. Additionally, I never had and still have no intention at all, to try out stand-up comedy myself, despite now feeling that I do know quite a few 'secrets' into how it all works from reading so many comedian autobiographies and researching the workings of stand-up comedy and beyond. Ultimately, my passion for literature studies is much greater than that of humour

studies, but I have a huge respect and feeling of gratitude for anyone that brings laughter and entertainment into this world. After all,

> “There is no life without humour. It can make the wonderful moments of life truly glorious, and it can make tragic moments bearable” – Rufus Wainwright.

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Appendix: Overview of additional Comedians and their Works

Comedian	John Cleese	Alan Davies	Stewart Lee	Jason Manford	Romesh Ranganathan	Sue Perkins
Photo section	49 + 12 extra	no	no	38 photos	24 photos	12 throughout the book
Funny photo captions	not too funny	not applicable	not applicable	yes	yes	no
Embodiment or “illness” humour	upper class	sexual abuse	upper class	Northern, working class	lazy eye, ethnic origin, body weight	gay
Self-advertising/ referencing	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes
Stand-up excerpts or references to performances	yes	no	the book is a collection of transcripts	no	no	no
Ending at (present) time of writing	yes	2018	yes	yes	yes	travel show 2015
Growth/ transformation noticeable	not really	yes	no	yes	no	no
Structure to the work	chronological	mostly chronological	chronological	chronological	not chronological	chronological
Stand out graphic/ textual feature	density	lists, ‘nothing page’	commentary in footnotes	film references	rich imagery	conversational, dialogues
Stand out type of humour	sketch comedy	observational comedy	observational/ absurd	observational comedy	deadpan/ self-deprecating comedy	observational
Was shy as a child	not mentioned	not mentioned	not mentioned	no	not mentioned	no
Thinks comedy is therapeutic according to the book	no comment	not explicitly mentioned	no comment	no comment	not explicitly mentioned	no comment
Author intrusion used	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Mentions Billy Connolly	no	no	yes	yes	no	no
Has performed at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and mentions it in the book	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Appeared on *Who Do You Think You Are?*	no	no	no	no	no	no

and wrote about it						
Had their own TV show	yes	not mentioned	yes	not mentioned	yes	yes
Went on a book tour to promote their autobiography	no	no	no	no	no	no
Their book appeared on a bestseller list and has that publicised on the book cover	apparently, but not specified which bestseller	no	no	no	no	*Sunday Times* bestseller list