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Texts for Teaching in the EFL Classroom“**

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

Signature

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List of Abbreviations

“CEFR”	“Common European Framework of Reference for Languages”
“EFL”	“English as a Foreign Language”
“ELLS”	“English Language Learners”
“ELP”	“European Language Portfolio”
“ESL”	“English as a Second Language”
“L2”	“Second Language”
“SVP”	“Society of Saint Vincent de Paul”

1. Introduction

Standardised guidelines for foreign language learning and teaching necessitate an alignment of teaching strategies in the EFL context. Generally speaking, a shift from content-based teaching to a way of instruction based on certain outcomes EFL learners have to reach, becomes apparent. The following diploma thesis focuses on teaching features of Irish short stories as well as the suitable outcomes students are supposed to reach throughout the learning process. Short stories by Marita Conlon-McKenna, Clare Keegan, Micheál Ó Conghaile, Patricia Scanlan and William Trevor serve as the basis of this diploma thesis and include themes typical for Ireland. Chapter two of this thesis will argue in favour of using literature in the EFL classroom by pointing out reasons and justifications, but at the same time possible challenges in the context of teaching literature will be addressed. Apart from providing authentic material for foreign language learning, literary texts can serve as a basis for teaching content and working on students' language proficiency. After pointing out the relevance of teaching literature in general, special attention will be drawn to the implementation of short stories in the Austrian language teaching context. In this chapter, practical ideas and strategies will be given as a general introduction to the issue.

Followed by the discussion of the usefulness of literature in the EFL classroom, standardised guidelines will be the main focus of chapter four. The three standardised documents which have a major influence on language teaching in Europe, and Austria in particular, are the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR) and the *European Language Portfolio* (ELP). In this context, the relevant passages of the Austrian curriculum for second language learning will be addressed. In addition to the didactic framework, the cultural background of the five Irish short stories will be thematised in the next chapter. This section was introduced as a practical guideline for teachers, who intend an implementation of one of the short stories in the classroom, in order to supply background information as a preparation for the teaching sessions. The following five chapters will analyse each short story individually, by pointing towards features essential for a suitable interpretation of the literary texts. After a concise biography of the author, each short story will be discussed according to the analysis of the story level as well as the discourse level. Apart from that, possible methods for teaching the short stories will be offered.

The last chapter of this diploma thesis emphasises the issue of student motivation by illustrating factors that might have an impact on the students' engagement in the reading of

the short stories. Those factors include the new standardised school-leaving exam (i.e.: Zentralmatura) in Austria, which requires knowledge about a range of themes to enhance language skills on all four levels, such as listening, speaking, writing as well as reading. Besides, the literary texts can - in alignments with the various outcomes and descriptors of the standardised documents - provide learners with a guideline and allows self-assessment of their skills.

2. Teaching Literature in the EFL Classroom

The constantly changing learning environment necessitates alternatives to traditional literature teaching methods. The use of modern technology, national and international standards as well as the role of the competence model in EFL learning should be considered. For this reason, it seems that appropriate reasons have to be given why literature continues to be relevant in the Austrian EFL classroom.

2.1. Why should one Teach Literature in the EFL Classroom?

EFL teachers have to decide whether or not an implementation of literary texts in the classroom is adequate. The question why teachers make use of literature might arise and often a suitable justification is inevitable. A hundred years ago, literature was mainly used to offer religious guidelines and show an appropriate way of living (Showalter 22). Meanwhile, however, the reasons why instructors make use of literary texts have considerably changed. In fact, the use of literature for EFL teaching in the twenty-first century serves various purposes such as cross-cultural knowledge and understanding as well as language knowledge.

Literary texts provide a useful basis for teaching about foreign cultures and traditions. Rather than giving facts and information to students directly, literature is a medium that describes cultural habits and attitudes in a more subtle manner. While students are encouraged to read, they get to know the story per se, but at the same time cultural aspects are revealed. Consequently, literature gives learners insights into cultural habits and conventions.

Another reason why the use of literature is of great importance in English language teaching is the aspect of the authenticity of language. Khatib et al. point out that "[i]n reading literary texts, because students have also to cope with language intended for native speakers, they become familiar with many different linguistic forms, communicative functions and meanings" (13). Students are, in fact, encouraged to read texts not addressed to English language learners directly. As a consequence, literary texts are less artificial than texts specially compiled for learners and are thus "language samples of real life /real life like settings" (Khatib et al.13). The focus is not on the use of language in the first place, but on its level of authenticity where learners get to know literary texts written for a native English speaking audience (Pardede 14). In the majority of English classes students have to work with books that contain grammar exercises where no real-life connection can be drawn (Cruz 2).

Thus, literary texts can possibly be examples of language use that raise students' motivation to work on this matter in the first place.

Nevertheless, texts such as short stories and novels are frequently criticised because they are works of fiction and because of that they are at least partly artificial. Pardede stresses that "literary works undoubtedly enable students to understand the language better by providing the students with real world experiences, relationships between society and people where the target language is spoken, even if they are fictions" (17). The fact that short stories are fictional does not imply the impossibility of demonstrating authentic ways of life. Even though this might be a problematic aspect, students are confronted with authentic texts and realistic reading situations that are not specifically designed for them as learners. Therefore, short stories and other literary texts could serve as an ideal supplementary material for traditional school books.

Apart from that, literature gives language learners the opportunity to analyse "syntax and discourse functions of sentences [...] which develop and enrich their own writing skills" (Khatib et al. 13). Consequently, students might try to imitate the structures they read and improve their own writing. It has to be mentioned, however, that teachers should make students aware of complex structures in literary texts that could result in misunderstandings.

Teachers, and English language teachers in particular, face the challenge of motivating students in the classroom. As long as learners are not intrinsically motivated, it is the teacher's task to care for a suitable reason that motivates students. Emotions and feelings are an ideal way of engaging learners in the subject matter because of the "personal involvement it fosters in the reader" (Khatib et al. 13). Through literary texts students might find it easier to relate to the problems and themes discussed. Once they approve of the literature read in class, they are highly interested in it and get involved (Khatib et al. 13). It could also be argued that providing literature in class leads to "personal growth" (Pardede 16) of the students. In some cases, the themes and topics that occur in literary texts inspire the learners personally. To be more precise, students develop on a linguistic as well as on an emotional level. Showalter even goes so far as to say that "all of us who teach literature believe that it is important not only in education but in life" (24).

2.2. Challenges of Using Literature in the EFL Classroom

Finding a text suited for both the language levels of the students and the theme that the teacher wants to discuss together with the class seems to be a balance act. Therefore, it can be argued that using literature in the EFL classroom is problematic. Khatib stresses that "[i]n this respect teachers should be wary about such factors as the learners' language proficiency, age, gender, and background knowledge so that children or young adults are exposed to certain types of literary texts in comparison to the adult learners" (204). As a consequence, it is highly important to know the students' prior knowledge and needs (204). The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages could serve as a guideline, when taking into account the learner's prior knowledge and language level.

Probably one of the reasons why the teaching of literature is sometimes criticised by some is the fact that it is very personal (Showalter 3). When teachers develop interpretations of texts together with the students, it shows attitudes and processes. Instructors might be aware of this aspect and therefore, they should be prepared for possible discussions in this context. As Showalter specifies, "teaching is like an externalisation of our personality and psyche. When it works, we feel that we have succeeded; when it doesn't work, we feel that we have failed" (3). Indeed, teaching is a highly emotional occupation and for this reason the teacher-student relationship should be considered when planning the lessons.

Considerable differences between the learners' culture and the culture the literary text focuses on, generally make the reading challenging. Comparing different cultures might facilitate reading and reflecting about the text. Alternatively, versions that are adapted to younger readers make the entire process of teaching and learning literature substantially easier (qtd. in Khatib). It has to be considered, however, that simplified versions of the selected short stories are neither available nor practical in the first place. Whereas the majority of students at a B2 level might not have problems when reading the short stories, this might be the case with poems (Khatib: 203).

Besides, versions of the English language occurring in literary texts are often not comparable to the English used in everyday life. Savvidou points out that language "deviates from the conventions and rules which govern standard, non-literary discourse" (par. 5). This could be a counterproductive aspect for students and teachers, so it has to be a criterion when choosing a text.

3. Teaching Short Stories in the EFL Classroom

Once teachers have made the decision to use literature for the purpose of teaching, they have to choose appropriate kinds of texts that can be treated with in class. Considering the various topics of literary texts, the Austrian curriculum- (a detailed description will be given in the following chapter) - gives teachers a high degree of freedom to choose. It seems to be straightforward to find texts that suit both the students' and the teachers' interests, but due to the limited time frame it needs to be decided whether the texts should be read in class or given as a home-assignment. As a consequence, short fiction provides a basis for successful teaching of literature because it can be dealt with in a short period of time. In the following, definitions of the term short fiction are given and further advantages of short fiction in EFL teaching are referred to.

3.1. Short Story: A Definition

The literary term of a short story can be defined as a "brief fictional prose narrative that is shorter than a novel and that usually deals with only a few characters."¹ This is the case with the short stories chosen for this diploma thesis and was one of the criteria for the selection. Additionally, "[t]he short story is usually concerned with a single effect conveyed in only one or a few significant episodes or scenes. The form encourages economy of setting, concise narrative, and the omission of a complex plot."² To put it more simply, the number of various elements has to be reduced due to the length of the stories. It can be argued, however, that this does not have a negative effect on the quality of the themes that are covered in short stories.

3.2. Why Short Stories?

Depending on the teacher's expectations and demands, short stories can be a "powerful educational resource to illustrate information literacy competency and to connect learning to information literacy standards" (Brier et al. 383). In other words, facts and figures are illustrated with the help of short stories that are informative, but at the same time might contain entertaining aspects.

Some of the most essential reasons why short fiction is used more frequently than longer pieces of text are the factors of motivation, memory and the length of time that it takes to read

¹ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/541698/short-story> February 4 2014, 14:31.

² <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/541698/short-story> February 4 2014, 14:31.

a short story. The aspect of motivation is a crucial part for both students and teachers in the teaching profession and should be considered. In the second place, it is easier for the students to relate the information provided with the short stories and thus, it ideally lasts for a longer period of time. Therefore, short stories contribute to remembering the subject matter. Above all, one of the most significant justifications to use short stories rather than any other form of literature is the time it takes to read them. Short stories might entail the same amount of themes that can be found in novels, however, shorter texts are easier to implement in traditional EFL classes due to the time issue.

Apart from that, learners need purposeful and meaningful activities in the EFL classroom in order to get involved. Brier et al. stress that "[o]ne of the most important tasks [...] is helping students find meaning somewhere between the assignments and the assessments. It is well known that many students have lost the desire to learn for the sake of learning" (384). In this context, it should be noted that "[s]tories respond to the universal need for meaning" (Brier et al. 384) and therefore, it also satisfies the students' demands for having a purpose of reading the texts in the first place. Some of the intentions EFL learners have when reading texts is to improve their language skills on all levels. Pardede emphasises that "[a]mong literary genres, short stories seem to be the most suitable choice for this due to its potential to help students enhance the four skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing" (14). Most importantly, this is the case "because of the motivational benefit embedded in the stories" (14).

Brier et al. note that "a good short story is easy to remember. Indeed, a good story can last a lifetime" (384). In this regard, factual information is easier to encode if it is associated with personal information. Texts that are particularly suited for pupils in secondary education might support learners in remembering facts. Accordingly, students might find it more appealing to study with the help of short stories that offer this possibility. Whereas "arcane bits of knowledge and skills [are] easily forgotten, stories can be recalled long after the course" (Brier et al. 385).

Teachers seem to be constantly concerned about the curriculum and various kinds of standards that put an enormous amount of pressure on the people involved. It is the teacher's task to contemplate whether or not he/she wants to dedicate time to the teaching of literature. Hence, short stories "are brief enough to complete a reading assignment in class or in a single night" (Scales 26). Students can therefore read the texts at home or at school, but both alternatives do not require a lot of effort and time. Even if the pupils had to read the stories at

home, it would be a totally acceptable kind of homework that pupils do not have to spend a vast amount of time on. Besides, "they center around a limited number of characters, whose actions reveal their motivations. And short stories often have a narrow time frame and focus on a single incident" (Scales 26). All these aspects facilitate the entire process of discussing literary themes in class while at the same time focussing on cultural, linguistic or personal topics.

3.3. Practical Ideas and Didactic Potential of Teaching Short Stories

Chambers et al. point out that "teachers must engage in activities with the intention of bringing about learning and which signal what is to be learned, and teach in ways that are intelligible to and within the capacities of the learners" (122). To be more precise, the learners' language level definitely has to be considered. Besides, the activities should not only enhance students' possibilities to learn, but they should raise the students' motivation to participate in the learning process in the first place (Chambers et al. 122). To some extent it can be argued that the focus of the teaching of short stories is the "transferring [of] knowledge from the teacher to the student" (Showalter 28). Therefore, teachers have to be careful when deciding which activities should supplement the reading of the short stories. Hence, it is necessary that the activities give students the opportunity to gain factual information, but at the same time develop their personal and cultural understanding.

Before choosing specific activities that can be used in class, a short story has to be selected. When choosing a short story for a particular class, numerous criteria have to be considered. As a matter of fact, prior knowledge and levels of language have to be considered. Pardede stresses "that the vocabulary and sentence structure of the short-story to be studied must be suitable to the level of the students" (18). After a suitable text has been chosen, the question arises in what way the teacher wants to present the short stories to the learners. The kind of short story that teachers decide for, is equally important as the method used to transfer the information. Traditionally, different techniques which are divided into pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities are applied to provide a successful implementation of texts in the EFL classroom.

3.3.1. Pre-reading Activities

Traditionally, pre-reading activities are used for "activating background knowledge and understanding what the text is mainly about" (Ozek et al. 7). Whereas the central aspect of pre-reading activities has been on language knowledge, cultural and social characteristics should be addressed as well (Ajideh 6). Traditionally, leading questions could precede a typical reading session to activate schematic knowledge. Tricia Hedge argues that "the materials surrounding the text will activate prior knowledge of some kind in the mind of the reader" (190). It is therefore necessary to find teaching material that serves this purpose. Equally important is to give students a realistic motivation for reading texts, to use visuals, as well as guessing the content of the story with help from the title (Hedge 210).

3.3.2. While-reading Activities and Reading Strategies

After the pre-reading activities helped to activate the students' prior knowledge, the short story can be read. At this stage, however, the question arises how the learners should approach the text. It might not be encouraging enough to ask students to read the literary text on their own and then answer questions.

One of the guidelines in the Austrian Curriculum suggests that students should build their social competence and interact with fellow students collaboratively.³As a consequence, teachers could "[b]egin the reading by reading aloud the first paragraph or section. Then ask an accomplished student reader to read the next paragraph" (McCarthy 9). If students and teachers take turns in reading the short story, teachers can serve as role models for correct reading on the one hand, but on the other hand the reading activity involves a social aspect. After a few paragraphs have been read by a student or the teacher, "the main idea of those paragraphs" (McCarthy 9) can be outlined. In order to improve communicative skills, this activity can be carried out in pair work. Alternatively, the short stories can be read by the students silently first, followed by collaborative reading. Concerning the development of reading competences, two techniques have to be considered in particular. First, skimming is defined as "reading quickly through a whole text in order to get a sense of the whole" (Montgomery et al. 218). This technique is not only useful in an educational environment, but is necessary in everyday situations. Second, the technique of scanning should be presented to learners by working on their skill of "reading quickly while looking for particular things in the

³ http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/11854/lp_ahs_os_lebende_fs.pdf February 4 2014, 18:23.

text" (Montgomery et al. 218). Depending on the focus that the teacher wants to set, an appropriate reading technique highly influences the quality in which while-reading activities are dealt with.

One of the concerns that learners of English might have when they are confronted with texts which are new to them is that they have to read a text with unknown words. As a teacher it is essential to make students aware of the fact that they do not have to know all of the words in the first place. The main purpose of while-reading activities is "to encourage learners to be active as they read" (Hedge 210). After all, the learners' motivation to read the short story plays a central role which could be increased by appropriate while-reading activities. Nevertheless, activities in the classroom might help the learner to develop certain ways to "define unfamiliar words in the story by taking clues from the text" (Scales 28). In a next step, students are encouraged to find the meaning of the words in the dictionary. Alternatively, they could also choose suitable synonyms (Scales 28). Tricia Hedge suggests activities such as to "ask students to tick a list of expectations or find answers to their own expectations; [...] give them questions to stop and think about; or provide a chart for them to fill in with points of information" (210).

3.3.3. Post-reading Activities

After the stage of reading the text and working on while-reading activities, post-reading activities ensure that students "make use of what they have read in a meaningful way" (Hedge 211). Moreover, activities that are integrated after the reading of the short story are intended to take the student's opinion into account or to enlarge upon various language features (McCarthy 6). Besides, they can be used to examine specific cultural aspects in depth - in the case of this thesis such issues are e.g. unwanted pregnancy and divorce in Ireland. For instance, "dramatic monologues"⁴ are ideal post-reading activities to characterise the protagonists of the stories and define their inner processes. Alternatives are activities like "debate, role-play, reading of contrasting texts, or focusing on its language" (Hedge 211).

As modern technology is a vital part of the students' lives, it might be a good idea to make use of it in the classroom. Chambers et al. emphasise that "[c]ommunications technologies offer increased opportunity for discussion among students and between them and their teachers" (157). Blog entries, web quests and e-learning platforms are just a few examples of possible

⁴ <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/82> February 24 2014, 09:18.

post-reading methods. Obviously, "[t]hese technologies also enable collaborative work among groups of students" (Chambers et al. 157). If the time frame allows it, it would be desirable to "[d]evelop a website that provides an overview of the novel, its characters, and key events" (Rzadkiewicz par. 14).

Though, special attention has to be given to the use of these methods in the classroom. Even in the twenty-first century teachers have to assure themselves that every student has internet access and then give a clearly understandable introduction on how to work with those modern learning techniques.

4. Standardised Guidelines

Official guidelines and frameworks have become highly relevant in the Austrian EFL environment and its implementation in the classroom is fostered. For obvious reasons the development of the following lesson plans based on short stories, is grounded in these principles. The guidelines followed in this diploma thesis are those of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, the European Language Portfolio and the Austrian Curriculum.

4.1. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)

The Common European Framework for Languages (CEFR) can support teachers in at least two aspects. On the one hand, it broadly describes what language levels students should achieve while learning a language and what aims they are supposed to achieve. On the other hand, the levels identify in detail which skills are needed to be acknowledged as a proficient speaker of the English language.

Once the teacher has decided to use short stories to teach cultural information and to teach reading these levels are relevant insofar as they serve as a justification for his/her choice. As a matter of fact, these levels were "designed to provide a transparent [...] basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses and curriculum guidelines, the design of teaching and learning materials, and the assessment of foreign language proficiency."⁵ Especially when the teacher has no further guidelines and chooses the short story by himself/herself, it is vital to specify aims that are helpful to both learners and instructors (Council of Europe 5).

Indeed, "the CEFR was designed to assist the development of L2 curricula, the design and implementation of L2 teaching programs, and the assessment of L2 learning outcomes" (Little 648). Being aware of the levels, teachers might adapt their curriculum and their teaching material accordingly by having a guideline that they can adhere to. Consequently, it is in this particular case that the language level of the short stories can be evaluated and teaching material can be prepared accordingly.

Concerning the specific classification, the CEFR focuses on four skills and "describes foreign language proficiency at six levels: A1 and A2, B1 and B2, C1 and C2. It also defines three

⁵ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/cadre1_en.asp February 4 2014, 19:22.

‘plus’ levels (A2+, B1+, B2+)”.⁶ It can be assumed that the texts are going to be read together with a seventh or eighth form at Austrian grammar schools or at fourth and fifth forms at Austrian higher-level vocational colleges. Therefore, the levels that are most relevant for teaching one of the five short stories are B1, B1+ and B2 respectively. Cesnik et al. explain that level B2 has to be reached for the first modern foreign language when students pass their leaving exams (24).

Two of the descriptors for the "overall reading comprehension" (Council of Europe 69) skill exemplify the requirements for level B1 and B2:

B1: "Can read straightforward factual texts on subjects related to his/her field and interest with a satisfactory level of comprehension" (Council of Europe 69).

B2: "Can read with a large degree of independence, adapting style and speed of reading to different texts and purposes, and using appropriate reference sources selectively. Has a broad active reading vocabulary, but may experience some difficulty with low frequency idioms" (Council of Europe 69).

In other words, learners of English on a B2 level are supposed to be more independent readers than learners on a B1 level. Apart from that, level B1 level requires that students are familiar with the theme of the text. A suitable preparation in terms of topics and vocabulary would be an ideal way of preparing students for texts that they are going to read.

In the majority of cases, teaching reading is combined with other skills such as speaking, listening or writing when pre-, while- and post-reading activities are included. For this reason, the descriptors for those skills are mentioned.

Firstly, the level of performance that is necessary for listening skills on levels B1 and B2 are described as follows:

B 1: "Can understand straightforward factual information about common everyday or job related topics [...]. Can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure etc., including short narratives" (Council of Europe 66).

B 2: "Can understand standard spoken language, live or broadcast, on both familiar and unfamiliar topics [...]. Can understand the main ideas of propositionally and linguistically complex speech on both concrete and abstract topics delivered in a standard dialect" (Council of Europe 66).

The B1 descriptor above addresses short texts directly by stating that learners should be able to understand information on such issues. It is particularly relevant for the use of short stories,

⁶ http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/cadre1_en.asp February 4 2014, 19:22.

where listening comprehensions might serve as activities before or after the reading of the literary texts.

Secondly, speaking skills on the levels suitable for the target learners involve:

B1: "Can reasonably fluently sustain a straightforward description of one of a variety of subjects within his/her field of interest, presenting it as a linear sequence of points" (Council of Europe 58).

B2: "Can give clear, systematically developed descriptions and presentations, with appropriate highlighting of significant points, and relevant supporting detail. Can give clear, detailed descriptions and presentations on a wide range of subjects related to his/her field of interest, expanding and supporting ideas with subsidiary points and relevant examples" (Council of Europe 58).

Concerning oral fluency and knowledge of themes and topics, these descriptors reveal the importance of flexibility in oral production. These skills could be necessary when it comes to speaking about the subjects covered in short stories.

In general, while- and post-reading activities include writing tasks whose purpose it is to comment on aspects occurring in the literary texts:

B1: "Can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence" (Council of Europe 61).

B2: "Can write clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest, synthesising and evaluating information and arguments from a number of sources" (Council of Europe 61).

Using these descriptors in the EFL classroom as guidelines might help teachers to select appropriate short stories and activities, but at the same time they give students the possibility to evaluate their own performances and to improve their performance when dealing with reading texts as well as listening, speaking and writing activities. Although, the CEFR is of great importance in EFL teaching and learning, it is even more effective in combination with the European Language Portfolio where learners should reflect upon their language performance on their own (Little 2007: 649). Thus, both sources should be implemented in the EFL classroom to raise consciousness of the learners' progress in reading.

4.2. European Language Portfolio (ELP)

The European Language Portfolio was developed to provide supplementary material for the use in the EFL classroom where both the CEFR and the ELP are integrated. Similar to the

CEFR, the ELP was designed according to various aims that learners should reach when learning a second language. The CEFR and the ELP allow students to assess and evaluate their own performances, whereas the ELP is composed of three elements that make it more learner-friendly (Little 2012: 275).

Little describes the European Language Portfolio by stating that “[t]he *language passport* summarises the owner’s linguistic identity and his or her experience of learning and using L2s” (2012: 275). It serves as an element where students can reflect upon their general awareness of the languages they use. Apart from that, “[t]he language biography accompanies the ongoing progress of learning and using L2s” (2012: 276). This is the part that is strongly connected to the descriptors of the CEFR and learners are encouraged to assess their own performances. Besides, “[t]he language biography also supports reflection on learning styles, strategies and intercultural experience” (2012: 276). Concerning cultural differences and similarities, the ELP can promote an awareness of the links that exist between the culture associated with L1 and L2 respectively. This can be illustrated by the five short stories that were chosen for this diploma thesis. Students might get an insight into the cultural background of Irish family issues and they should develop a differentiated understanding of the facts that are taught through the stories. It is the use of the reflections in the European Language Portfolio, however, that makes it necessary to reflect upon the information. The discussion of these aspects in class might not be sufficient enough to cover them in depth. It can be assumed that a reflection by the students themselves leads to a more successful outcome. In the third place, “[t]he dossier usually has an open form” (2012: 276). It can be used to keep the texts produced by the students, or for the purpose of reflection. Highly important is, however, the development of learner autonomy with the help of the portfolios (2012: 276). With regard to these aspects, using the CEFR and the ELP for the teaching of reading in particular could ease the way students learn.

It is necessary to consider the aspect of practicality when teachers use language portfolios in class. Once students understand the idea behind these guidelines, it is an easy task to implement them. Apart from that, mentioning the relevant descriptor for each lesson might help students in evaluating themselves. In the particular case of teaching short stories, teachers should mention the descriptors that should be trained with this kind of activity. It might be possible to raise both the students’ awareness and motivation of language learning if he/she has a goal that he/she can adhere to.

Above all, the aspect of workload and practicality has to be addressed. Before the ELP can be used in connection with the teaching of short stories, it is the teacher's responsibility to introduce this method accordingly. The portfolio is intended to be used for the students' entire language identity where the skills of reading, listening, speaking and writing are involved. Implementing the ELP merely for one skill might not be efficient.

4.3. Austrian Curriculum

Apart from the CEFR and the ELP, the Austrian curriculum plays a major role for the teaching and learning of a language. These standardised guidelines shape the subject matter eligible for teaching fundamentally. Whereas the CEFR and the ELP define clear descriptors for the language performance, but do not give further didactic aims that have to be reached, the curriculum for English as a second language offers a more detailed description.

On the one hand, the Austrian curriculum focuses on didactic guidelines where the importance of cultural information is stressed:

Durch interkulturelle Themenstellungen ist die Sensibilisierung der Schülerinnen und Schüler für die Sprachenvielfalt Europas und der Welt zu verstärken, Aufgeschlossenheit gegenüber Nachbarsprachen – bzw. gegenüber Sprachen von autochthonen Minderheiten und Arbeitsmigrantinnen und -migranten des eigenen Landes- zu fördern und insgesamt das Verständnis für andere Kulturen und Lebensweisen zu vertiefen. Die vorurteilsfreie Beleuchtung kultureller Stereotypen und Klischees, die bewusste Wahrnehmung von Gemeinsamkeiten und Verschiedenheiten sowie die kritische Auseinandersetzung mit eigenen Erfahrungen bzw. mit österreichischen Gegebenheiten sind dabei anzustreben.⁷

Students have to be aware of the variety of cultures and languages that exist in Europe and around the globe. Additionally, students should learn to accept and respect linguistic minorities by examining similarities and differences between the cultures. This can be achieved through authentic teaching material and a variety of text types.⁸ For this reason, the use of Irish short stories can be justified because of the cultural information it provides. The Irish way of living should be an integral part of EFL teaching and learning and by discussing this subject matter students gain cultural competence.

⁷ http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/11854/lp_ahs_os_lebende_fs.pdf February 4 2014, 20.51.

⁸ http://www.bmukk.gv.at/medienpool/11854/lp_ahs_os_lebende_fs.pdf February 4 2014, 20.51.

5. Characteristics of Irish Family Life

Currently, the question of abortion in Ireland is widely debated and thus, it seems to considerably affect Irish social life.⁹ In the context of this problem, adoption and divorce influences peoples' decisions concerning unwanted pregnancy and mainly its legal implications are addressed in this thesis. Additionally, Irish women are frequently forced because of their personal and social environment to emigrate to tackle the stigma of having aborted their child or giving it up for adoption. Consequently, those decisions have an impact on Irish family life in general. Similarly, gender stereotypes influence family dynamics and influence the child-parent relationship within the family. Most importantly, the power of the value of family life should be in the centre of attention and should, in the context of EFL teaching, illustrate to students how the problems mentioned could be put into perspective.

5.1. Adoption as a Consequence of Unwanted Pregnancies

Adoption might be results of unwanted pregnancies, when women decide not to personally take care of their child. Most importantly, it is interesting to note that "the three main reasons given to explain why the pregnancy was unwanted were: being too young, having school or college commitments or plans, and the pregnancy not being planned" (McBridge, Morgan, and McGee 142). Under these circumstances, "the term 'crisis pregnancy' was coined officially in 2001 to identify those pregnancies that are unintended and unplanned and that represent a personal trauma for the woman or couple involved" (89). In order to avoid consequential damages, several actions can be undertaken to achieve a situation that is acceptable for the people involved. Instead of keeping the child, they might decide to give their child up for adoption.

The issue of adoption is a common consequence of unwanted pregnancy in Ireland. In particular, "over 43,500 domestic adoptions have taken place in Ireland since 1952 (when the Irish Adoption Board started to keep records of each adoption)" (84). It seems that the majority of people affected by unintended pregnancy chooses adoption as a suitable alternative for them. The Public Citizens Information Board of Ireland defines adoption as "the process whereby a child becomes a member of a new family. It creates a permanent, legal

⁹ <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/abortion-legislation-comes-into-effect-today-1.1641432>
February 5 2014, 10:12.

relationship between the adoptive parents and the child".¹⁰ Adoption is a valuable opportunity for children to get integrated into a family and finally be part of it.

However, it should be noted what the difficulties of adopted children are, they are faced with. In Ireland, laws have to be adapted according to "the very significant changes that have taken place in Irish society" (Shannon 16). To be more precise, "[a] particular concern for many adopted adults is the lack of access to background medical information with regard to both themselves and their own children" (16). Due to complex juridical guidelines, it is not possible to have access to the information an adopted person might need in order to be fully informed.

5.2. Current Discussion about Abortion Law in Ireland

A great number of women, however, decides to abort their unborn child, even though it is illegal in Ireland and not possible for many pregnant women to get outside Ireland. Before that, "[b]etween 1861 and 1992, abortion was entirely illegal in the State" (McBride, Morgen, and McGee 129). As a consequence, numerous Irish women get an abortion in other countries, such as the UK (85). While abortion is conducted in other European countries - it is illegal in Ireland - the procedure that follows an abortion is made in the patients' home country (85f). Obviously, the only reason why women have to travel to foreign countries to receive the medical treatment they wish to have, is the legal prohibition of abortions in Ireland. Other medical needs can be satisfied in Ireland without violating the law. Although Irish law has not considerably changed and abortion is still illegal- the only exception being when the life of the mother is at risk, "[t]he proportion of all pregnancies experienced by women that ended in an abortion increased from 2% in [...] 2003 to 4% in [...] 2010" (85). However, having an abortion has an impact on the patients' emotional well-being and because of that some of the women prefer "counselling or advice" (107).

Considering the numbers of women who wish to abort their child, it has to be mentioned that there is no general agreement on legalising abortions in Ireland. Above all, feminists take a stand for introducing abortion laws mainly because they consider it a "women's right to 'choose' whether and when to become mothers" (Smyth 22). However, the issue is highly debated and no abortion is allowed, "only where there is a real and substantial risk to the mother's *life* [sic] may an abortion be performed on Irish soil" (Spreng 16), i.e. if a pregnancy

¹⁰http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth_family_relationships/adoption_and_fostering/adopting_a_child.htm
1 November 18 2013, 10:53.

“is a threat to the life of the mother”¹¹ (e.g. hormone poisoning). This regulation is summarised in “The Protection of Life During Pregnancy Act”¹². However, “[a]bortion will still not be allowed when a woman has been raped or when the fetus has serious deformities”.¹³

Aside from the alternatives women and men choose, the issue of sexual education is quite complex in Catholic Ireland. McBride report that “[i]n all age groups, the majority of respondents were educated about sex and relationships in school only” (McBride, Morgan, and McGee 113). Therefore, it seems that parents play a minor role in sexual education. White stresses that “the Catholic nature of Irish society became a defining element of Irish national identity” (47). Nevertheless, he also emphasises that “[i]f the Church has lost prestige in Irish society, it has also lost its ability to have the faithful conform to its teachings regarding sexual morality” (White 57).

5.3. Termination of Marriage

Irish family life, and marriage in particular, has changed with the legalisation of divorce in Ireland. It has to be stressed that “[t]he Irish Constitution, as enacted in 1937, emphasised the immensely important function of the family, and in particular the marital family, in Irish society” (Crowley 227). Thus, marriage played a vital role in Irish social life and shaped peoples' lives immensely. At the same time, the Irish Constitution included the way in which the state ought to protect the institution of marriage (228). However, family life and the attitude towards it has altered in the last decades. Hence, people have to adapt to changing conditions and ways of life because of the legalisation of divorce. Divorce and separation have become an integral part of Irish family life, but at the same time have caused intense political and social disturbances. In Ireland, marriages can officially be terminated by a separation agreement, a judicial separation or a divorce.¹⁴

First of all, separation agreements can be arranged “[i]f a married couple or civil partners can agree the terms on which they will live separately”.¹⁵ Separated couples make the decision to live apart from each other, possibly in separated households without getting divorced.

¹¹ <http://rt.com/news/ireland-abortion-law-force-060/> February 23 2014, 21:45.

¹² <http://rt.com/news/ireland-abortion-law-force-060/> February 23 2014, 21:45.

¹³ <http://rt.com/news/ireland-abortion-law-force-060/> February 23 2014, 21:45.

¹⁴ http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth_family_relationships/separation_and_divorce/legal_options_following_marital_breakdown.html November 18 2013, 10:57.

¹⁵ http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth_family_relationships/separation_and_divorce/separation_agreement.html November 18 2013, 10:58.

Whereas the first possibility represents a case where both husband and wife come to a certain agreement concerning their separation, it is the juridical separation that sorts out cases that are different. In other words, "[w]hen a couple cannot agree the terms by which they will live separately, an application to the courts for a decree of judicial separation can be made by either party".¹⁶ This option allows the married couple to live apart even though they do not agree on basic terms such as "custody and access to children, the payment of maintenance and lump sums, [or] the transfer of property".¹⁷

In comparison to other European countries, it was not possible in Ireland to get divorced before 1996/7, even after years of separation. However, "[i]n February 1997, more than 20 years after most other western countries, Ireland finally legalized divorce" (Burley and Regan 202). This implementation was achieved by a referendum which was in favour of introducing divorce legislation (202). The results of the referendum approved the idea of legal divorces in Ireland, but at the same time numerous conditions and requirements have to be met, before a couple can be officially divorced. Though, certain criteria have to be met before an actual divorce can be permitted in the first place. Consequently, "the parties must have been living separate lives for a number of years before an application for a divorce is made".¹⁸ Although divorce is now possible in Ireland, this procedure makes it difficult for couples to get one.

Married couples who did not live in the same household had already existed long before it was legally possible and so, "[t]he absence of divorce in Ireland did not mean [...] that marriages did not break down" (Burley and Regan 203). Indeed, a majority of Irish couples had been living separated without having the chance to have a divorce. Of course, it changed the Irish social life dramatically and a numerous Irish considered divorce as "a threat to the Irish lifestyle and, more importantly, the Irish identity" (203). Thus, more autonomy of decision was thought to have a negative influence on the Irish sense of national identity.

Indeed, "divorce legalization was followed by a sharp increase in marital breakdown rates (including both separations and newly allowed divorces)" (Bargain et al. 1). Remarkably enough, the legalisation of divorce resulted in a high demand for legal separations and concerns proved to be true. Burley and Regan report that people considered divorce as an

¹⁶http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth_family_relationships/separation_and_divorce/judicial_separation.html November 18 2013, 11:00.

¹⁷http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth_family_relationships/separation_and_divorce/judicial_separation.html November 18 2013, 11:02.

¹⁸http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/birth_family_relationships/separation_and_divorce/divorce_decrees.html November 18 2013, 11:06.

inappropriate problem-solving approach and feared that couples would not follow Catholic values and beliefs anymore (211).

5.4. Emigration

In Ireland, the issue of emigration has long been an integral part of Irish identity and continues to characterise the Irish way of life. Especially, from "1846-1855 during the Famine and in its immediate aftermath, about two and a half million people left Ireland" (Ward 132). Apparently, economic reasons forced people to move country in the hope of a better life abroad. In the light of this information of emigration in the 19th century, it is clear that "migration has always been an important phenomenon in the history of mankind, the number of migrants has never been as large as in this century" (Schmitz 23). The improved means of transport facilitate migration and thus people are more flexible. Most importantly, America is and was one of the main destinations of Irish emigrants who have a "political, social and cultural impact" (Almeida 12) on the country. As already stated above, one of the reasons that leads to emigration is the financial situation of the people involved. As Schmitz puts it "the main motives underlying migration in those times were mostly of an economic and political nature as well as the search for a better and safer place to live" (23). Obviously, this has not considerably changed because it can be assumed that people move wishing to have a life that is better than the life they used to have. In the past, "[e]migrants from Ireland differed from those from other european [sic] countries in that they tended to emigrate as single, unattached men and women. They were young, in their teens and early twenties, unskilled [...], predominantly Catholics" (Ward 132). It can be concluded that mostly young people without any obligations tend to move country more easily. Almeida points out that [y]oung women, migrating alone and at a very age at the end of the nineteenth century, found work in the homes of middle-class families, keeping house and minding children (12).

Referring to emigration because of abortion or unintended pregnancy, one target audience, namely women "play an essential role in the context of emigration since "they constituted at least half of all those leaving Ireland in the latter part of the nineteenth century and in subsequent years" (Ward 152). This still seems to be the case due to a large number of women emigrating because of the social stigma resulting from abortion, as opposed to their roles of pure and subservient women (Ward 152). This aspect is highly relevant for the historical background of the following Irish short stories, which also address this issue.

5.5. Gender Stereotypes within Families

In the context of a family, various stereotypes exist that constitute and shape the dynamics of the family as a whole. These stereotypes are also based on the aspect of gender, which can be describes as “the state of being male or female (typically used with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones)”.¹⁹ Especially, in domestic environments, family members are confronted with the consequences of gender and the resulting gender stereotypes which can have a negative impact on family life. Indeed, “[i]mages of ourselves and others are largely given form by gender stereotypes which provide a baseline for cultural distinctions between men and women” (Coltrane and Adams 325). As a consequence, gender stereotypes might not only be considered negatively, but also in a positive way to help both men and women to find a place in society they are comfortable with. It has to be stressed that both parents and children have to face gender stereotypes, which can be expressed “both implicitly and explicitly” (Endendijk et al. 578). To be more precise, even if parents and children are aware of the stereotypes that go along with their gender, they do not seem to escape them due to behaviour and attitudes they do not have a considerable influence on. Mostly, gender stereotypes develop a highly extreme version of the roles of women and men, and this social bias is not easy to overcome.

In the past, these roles and corresponding functions which emerged, resulted in remarkable differences between men and women. Whereas, “[m]en are generally thought of as independent, objective, active, competitive, self-confident, and ambitious, [...] women are seen as dependent, subjective, passive, not competitive, and lacking self-confidence and ambition” (qtd. in Coltrane and Adams 325). Hence, it can be concluded that these perceptions shape the interactions between parents and reflect on their children. Endendijk et al. point out that “[w]hen mothers showed stronger stereotypes, their daughters also showed stronger gender stereotypes” (585). Referring to observational learning, children take their parents as models and adapt their behaviour and morale according to their parents’. In both cases, this process is highly controversial because change and improvement and better conditions for individuals are hardly possible. O'Connor argues that, on the one hand, the position of women has considerably been transformed, but on the other hand, no change is noticeable (1).

¹⁹ <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/gender?q=gender> November 18 2013, 11:14.

The latter can be emphasised by the fact that "[t]he majority of Irish married women, particularly those in their forties and older, are in an economically vulnerable position as compared with married women in other parts of Western Europe" (O'Connor 4). This might be the result of their positions in the working environment. For the most part, "[e]mployers unintentionally contribute to gender differentiation by assuming that fathers want to work overtime or that mothers want to work part-time" (Coltrane and Adams 328). As illustrated, gender stereotypes affect employers' decisions, and thus make the situation more complex for men, women and their families. Because the majority seems to be used to men working full-time and women working part-time, it is questionable how a division of responsibilities could be feasible. In contrast to that, O'Connor asserts that "the dramatic increase in the participation of married women, particularly young married women, in paid employment is one of the most striking changes to have occurred in Irish society" (188). One of the reasons why this is the case might be the changing economic situation for Irish families, which deteriorated sharply and might force women to contribute to the financial situation of their families. However, it might not merely be economic reasons, but the women's education and changing independence connected with it.

Gender stereotypes have a vital impact on how women are perceived in the working world. Such clichés "presuppose their [women's] positive experience of responsibility for child care, and the 'naturalness' of subsuming their identities in families and/or in other caring relationships" (O'Connor 5). As can be expected, men might not feel responsible for these tasks even if they intended to, and women feel the obligation to adhere to these social guidelines. Coltrane and Adams highlight that "with women assumed to be naturally predisposed to tend children and care for homes, and men assumed to be ideally suited for jobs and other public pursuits" (327) a relatively one-sided perspective emerges.

One aspect that has to be addressed in the context of gender stereotypes is the issue on how long children tend to stay at their parents' home. In brief, "children of highly educated mothers, as well as farmer's [sic] daughters, were particularly likely to leave the parental home" (qtd. in O'Connor 175). The motivation behind this fact might be multicausal and cannot be generalised due to individual factors that vary from family to family.

5.6. Family Formation in Ireland

Family formation has experienced a significant change in the past 30 years by shifting from traditional big families to smaller formations with fewer family members. Correspondingly, "two generations ago, family sizes covered the whole range from one child up to eight or more children, with clustering around modal values of four to six children" (Lunn, Fahey, and Hannan 1). At the present day, however, a larger number of children (i.e. three and more) does not seem to be common anymore. Not only the number of children has changed, but "also the household consisting of unmarried adult siblings, both of which had been common in Ireland for much of the twentieth century" (2).

Whereas less adult children who are not married yet, live together with their nuclear family, the amount of single persons has risen. In other words, "[t]he relatively high levels of singlehood in Ireland compared to most of the rest of Europe shown in the previous section is nothing new" (13). On the whole, it is known that "Irish people have a long history of either marrying late or not marrying at all" (13). Similar to Ireland, the extended period of time that people decide to stay single is noticeable in Europe as well. Though, this is only true of adults at a relatively young age, and not for adults older than forty years (12). Concerning younger people, in particular "[a]mong 25-29 year-old-women, [...] Ireland had the highest levels of singlehood" (12). Having these facts in mind, the question for an appropriate explanation of longer singlehood arises. To begin with, "[a] large majority believe that it is more acceptable to be single and on your own now than it used to be. They feel that people are staying single longer because they are 'more choosy' about relationships" (Fine-Davis 127). To put it more simply, people develop a higher self-confidence and tend to justify their relationship status in terms of having higher standards when choosing a partner. On the contrary, there are still single persons in Ireland who think "that others do not accept singleness, at least not indefinitely, indicating that there is still strong social pressure towards being in couples" (127). In fact, "[t]his pressure impinges particularly on women, especially those in their late 30s in a way that is different for them than it is for men in the same age group" (127). Women are expected to marry first, have children and adapt to the role model that society sets.

Concerning the issue of unmarried women in secular life, it is clear that they do not (unlike nuns) find acceptance and respect in Irish society, which can be exemplified by the situation of unmarried women in the past. The social status of unmarried women, and unmarried mothers specifically, becomes apparent when reflecting upon the consequences unmarried, pregnant women had to cope with in the past. As a matter of fact, "a number of charitable

institutions other than the state-run county homes assisted unmarried, expectant mothers. Most homes began as refuges or asylums for 'fallen women' or prostitutes" (Luddy 801). Thus, the way this situation was handled indicates the lack of prestige that single women faced.

Apart from that, the numbers of marriages has declined as well due to the "the weakening influence of religion, [which] has meant that it is now more socially acceptable to live with one's partner without marriage" (Fine-Davis 126). Couples live together a longer period of time before they decide to get married, or they do not get married at all. Lunn stress that "[t]he social significance of the delay in entry into marriage that has occurred in most developed countries in recent years is greatly modified by the rise of the alternative form of couple formation represented by cohabitation" (Lunn, Fahey, and Hannan 15). In comparison to persons who live in cohabitation with a partner, there are mainly young adults who live together with their parents or other relatives in order to support them. McNerney and Gillmor report that there are "concerns about the future of caring because of the needs of the number of older single people living alone" (50). Less money is available for professional home help and children have to support their family members. In particular, the "care of the elderly and disabled was [and continues to be] a burden borne mainly by women" (50). As a consequence, adult children have to adapt their lives accordingly and might happen to postpone their own family formation plans.

On the whole, the relationship between parents and their children is vital for the entire family and its formation. Nixon stresses the "significant contribution that mothers' and fathers' parenting styles and the quality of relationships between children and their parents make" (Nixon 37) to the children's future life. Therefore, "relationships characterised by negative interactions give rise to more negative developmental outcomes" (Nixon 30). It seems that parents and children play an essential role in the dynamics of a family and both rely on each other.

5.7. Homosexuality

Until recently, Ireland and its attitude towards sexuality and homosexuality in particular has been a highly controversial one. O'Higgins-Norman claims that "[a]lthough it is a stereotype in itself, it can be said that Ireland as a society has traditionally had an uncomfortable relationship with sex and sexuality" (381). Matters in connection with sexuality were

generally avoided, but "when issues of a sexual nature were aired in public, this most likely occurred within the context of a condemnatory sermon or the confines of the confessional" (O'Higgins-Norman 382). In other words, there was no positive approach to sexuality at that time, and, it was regarded as sometime negative that threatens human life. The Irish Catholic Church considerably influenced this mindset which made it challenging to develop a healthy position. However, not only homosexuality, but also sexuality per se was regarded as morally reprehensible.

O'Higgins-Norman stresses that

At the heart of this was a view of sexuality that celebrated celibacy and virginity above all else, and consequently, it could be argued, there was a view that those who engaged in sexual activity [...] were to be trained to control and limit these *sinful* [sic] impulses. (382)

That is to say that, sexuality was not considered as an aspect of human life, but as a natural force that interfered with a desirable devout way of life. Therefore, "children were to be protected from anything that might arouse in them a premature curiosity about sexual matters and so sex was not talked about in front of them and sex education was put off for as long as possible" (O'Higgins- Norman 382).

As can be expected, the Irish Catholic Church and the state worked together and had the same aims considering sexuality and homosexuality in mind (Ryan 142). Hence, "[b]oth Irish Church and state argued that the criminalisation of homosexuality served public health, Irish morality, and the institution of marriage, and homosexuality remained illegal in Ireland until as recently as the 1990s" (142). With the criminalisation of homosexuality a reduction and suppression of homosexuality should be achieved and traditional relationships should be fostered. As a matter of fact, it happened that "books were banned by Irish censorship laws for depicting homosexual relationships" (141). For this reason, it can be argued that "homosexuals felt alienated in Irish society" (142) and discriminated in Irish society.

A possible explanation for the lack of respect for homosexuals are various societal norms of sexuality. Accordingly, "[t]he question then arises as to whether society creates this understanding that heterosexuality is the norm" (O'Higgins- Norman 386). People are aware of those standards that dominate human life and try to comply with these conditions to live an acceptable life. So far, it has not been pointed out how these norms can be characterised. It is clear that "males were expected to act in a *manly* [sic] matter that involved pursuing females for physically intimate relationships and achieving on the sports and in academic spheres"

(386). In the same way, this was true of women who had to adhere to a typical female attitude involving marrying a male person and becoming a mother. Homosexuals do not adapt to these stereotypical principles and thus are discriminated against. In numerous cases people fear that "someone who is perceived to be gay or lesbian might contaminate them, [and] that they may be turned into a homosexual" (386). In relation to the discrimination and the support of homosexuals it needs to be stated that there are huge discrepancies "between those raised in urban versus rural environments" (Morrison, Speakman, and Ryan 398) concerning the way they approve of homosexual relationships (398). Conditions were challenging for homosexuals and still continue to be less than ideal. However, several improvements towards a more liberal and tolerant Irish society have been made.

Indeed, this has changed and the situation for homosexuals seems to have improved. In fact, "[i]t is true that this discomfiture has to a large extent been lifted in recent decades and that Irish society is more accepting and open in relation to matters of a sexual nature as evidenced by the decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1993" (O'Higgins-Norman 382). From the present-day circumstances, it is hard to imagine how the fact that someone is homosexual could be considered criminal. Nevertheless, during "the last 20 years, the political support of gays and lesbians in Ireland has increased at an impressive rate" (Conrad 125). In particular, the "[European] Court has also worked on ensuring rights for homosexuals in Ireland, which had previously incorporated discriminatory provisions relating to gay and lesbian people into its laws" (Swan 92). Indeed, "[t]hese legal changes denote significant progress in Ireland's treatment of gay men and lesbian women" (Morrison, Speakman, and Ryan 388) and provides the basis for future measures to be taken.

5.8. Domestic Poverty

Whereas the economic status of some Irish families improves, a high number of people in Ireland are victims of poverty. The issue of poverty seems to be subjective to some extent, however, it can be defined in the following way:

People are living in poverty if their income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so inadequate as to preclude them from having a standard of living which is regarded as acceptable by Irish society. (qtd. in Nolan, *Monitoring Poverty Trends* 1)

According to this definition, people are poor when their living conditions do not allow them to live a basic life that can be compared to the majority of the population. In the majority of cases, poverty is defined in terms of income, but beside poverty due to a person's economic

condition, people might suffer from poverty because of other problems in terms of "education, nutrition or health" (Madden 24). A balance between all these aspects is part of a satisfied human life and shapes it. Therefore, it might not be representative to focus merely on one criterion, such as the economic status of a person to come to a definition of poverty (24). It could be "misleading as it will ignore individuals who are not income poor, even though they may be poor in another dimension" (24).

First, one of the most essential parts addressed is a person's earnings, and in relation to this aspect, the employment of a person. Even though, employment obviously does not protect people against poverty, "[t]he introduction of the minimum wage in April 2000 also appears to have been important" (Nolan, *Inequality And Poverty* 19). This measure is supposed to act preventively and at least for the working population it might ensure reasonable living conditions. Apart from the minimum wage, another vital issue is "[t]he evolution of income support rates for the unemployed, pensioners and others relying on social protection" (Nolan, *Inequality And Poverty* 27). Here, it can be seen that welfare nets are required for various age groups that depend on this support system. Though, Nolan stresses that "[t]hose in households where the reference person is unemployed still face a relatively high risk of falling below the income thresholds" (*Monitoring Poverty Trends* viii). He then goes on to say that "[w]omen face a higher risk of falling below those lines than men" (Nolan, *Monitoring Poverty Trends* viii).

Central to the lives of all families are their homes which generally represent a huge burden for numerous families. The immediate consequence for people regarded as poor is the inability to finance their homes with their own resources. The mere alternative is taking out a loan, which again strains the people's budget, but at the same time reduces pressure. With this in mind, it is clear that the "increase in house prices has occurred simultaneously with a substantial increase in the level of private sector credit" (Fitzpatrick and McQuinn 82). Healy and Clinch point out that one of the biggest challenges for Irish households in winter is heating their homes (207). People face the impossibility to heat their houses "when a household does not have the adequate financial resources" (Healy and Clinch 207). Due to more substantial needs, families reduce their expenses in a variety of ways. Hence, it is not surprising that "[d]espite [...] relatively mild winters, Ireland and the UK have the highest rates at seasonal mortality in northern Europe" (207). In these cases, basic requirements cannot be met and death is one of its consequences. In general, it is evident that "[e]xpenditure on housing could clearly have major implications for a household's living standards and whether it experiences

poverty" (Fahey, Nolan, and Maitre 55). Another kind of poverty that can occur in the context of domestic poverty is food poverty (Molcho et al. 364). After all, there is no significant relation between food poverty and social class of a person (369). In fact, other aspects such as "matters of material circumstance, psychological support, work-life balance of parents, [and] family organisation" (369) seem to be one of the main reasons for food poverty in Ireland. Equally important as economy and nutrition is education as an indicator of poverty, but at the same time it is a measure to counter poverty. Tilak considers "education as an important instrument of reduction of poverty" (191) because of the "relationship between education and earnings" (192). To put it more simply, a higher level of education improves the chances of drawing a salary, and thus reduces the risk of poverty.

Those living conditions seem to be symptomatic of the general financial situation in Ireland. Lynn even goes so far as to describing the Irish economy as a "[a] collapsing property market, slowing consumer spending, rising unemployment and an economy that is fast deflating" (par.1). Even though it cannot be generalised, it nevertheless presents lives of a plethora of Irish that have to find their own way to cope with their situation. However, remains of one of "the most dynamic economy in Europe, with growth rates that far outstripped any of its rivals" (par. 2) does not seem to characterise the Irish economy anymore. Indeed, "[s]ince 2008, Ireland has experienced a severe financial crisis characterised by a systemic banking crisis and a significant economic adjustment" (Woods and O'Connell 98). Irish families also perceive this financial decline and are forced to adapt their lives accordingly. In particular, employment ensures not only the financial survival of the family, but contributes to their general well-being. But due to the financial crisis, "Ireland experienced its first significant increase in unemployment in 15 years".²⁰

²⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/ireland/key-eu-policy-areas/economy/irelands-economic-crisis/index_en.htm February 24 2014, 09:36.

6. Marita Conlon-McKenna's Short Story "*Flesh and Blood*"

6.1. Marita Conlon-McKenna- Concise Biography

Marita Conlon-McKenna is an Irish children's and women writer. Her first book for young readers is "'*Under the Hawthorn Tree*' [which] is set during The Great Irish Famine".²¹ Conlon-McKenna decided to base her book on this aspect of Irish history, after "the discovery of a famine grave with the skeletons of three children buried under a hawthorn tree".²² "*Under the Hawthorn Tree*" was highly successful and translated into several languages. Moreover, a film version of the book has been produced.²³ Further, Conlon-McKenna has written other books for children like "'*Safe Harbour*,' '*In Deep Dark Wood*' and '*Love Lucie*'".²⁴

Apart from writing books for children, Conlon-McKenna "also writes women's fiction and her novels regularly top the best seller list and have been widely translated".²⁵ The short story "*Flesh and Blood*" is part of the short story collection *Irish Girls are Back in Town*, in which writers such as Marita Conlon-McKenna and Cecelia Ahern focus on specific features of Irish women and their lives. The first novel for adults that Conlon-McKenna wrote was "'*The Magdalen*' [which] was hugely successful when it was published in 1999. The book which explores the lives of the Magdalen Women is one that still touches readers and raises many issues".²⁶ Two other adult novels by Conlon-McKenna are "*Promised Land*" and "*Miracle Woman*" (Ahern et al. 278). Concerning the author's private life it can be mentioned that Marita Conlon-McKenna was "[b]orn in Dublin in 1956 and [...] went to school at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, Mount Anville, later working in the family business, the bank, and a travel agency".²⁷ The author is mother of four adult children and lives with her husband in Dublin.²⁸

6.2. Analysis of the Story Level

In the context of teaching, the analysis of the short stories plays an essential part. Therefore, a detailed analysis and interpretation by the teacher has to precede this stage. Central to the

²¹ <http://maritaconlonmckenna.com/about/> November 18 2013, 11:40.

²² <http://maritaconlonmckenna.com/about/> November 18 2013, 11:43.

²³ <http://www.obrien.ie/marita-conlonmckenna> November 18 2013, 11:48.

²⁴ <http://maritaconlonmckenna.com/about/> November 18 2013, 11:50.

²⁵ <http://maritaconlonmckenna.com/about/> November 18 2013, 11:51.

²⁶ <http://maritaconlonmckenna.com/about/> November 18 2013, 11:53.

²⁷ <http://www.obrien.ie/marita-conlonmckenna> November 18 2013, 11:56.

²⁸ <http://maritaconlonmckenna.com/about/> November 18 2013, 11:57.

analysis of the story level is the plot, settings and background, characters and characterization, as well as the themes and motifs. The main theme in this particular short story is adoption in the context of Ireland.

6.2.1. Plot

The main protagonist "Christine [...] is searching for the daughter she gave up for adoption"²⁹ many years ago. At the beginning of the story, however, Christine arrives back in Dublin, after she has spent several years in the US. Despite her family offering her to stay with them, Christine decides to stay at her favourite hotel where she arranges a meeting with her siblings. Obviously, she is delighted to see her three brothers Brendan and Liam and her sister Mary, who all have got their family members with them. At the dinner, which the family has together, Christine admits that "it has been hard" (Ahern et al. 285) to live alone. The next day, the main character and her sister go and visit their father who obviously lives in a nursing home. Even though her father Tom Kavanagh does not react to his daughters' questions, Christine decides to talk to him.

'I'm Christine, your daughter. You remember! When I told you I was going to have a child, you threw me out. Told me to get out of your sight and that you never wanted to see me again! Do you remember, Daddy? 'Cause I do. I remember what a shite father you were, who wouldn't even stand by his own flesh and blood'. (Ahern et al. 293)

She continues and tells him about her past in the US, where she "married a millionaire" (293) and makes her way to the hotel. Christine desperately wants to trace back the past by visiting her former boyfriend Aidan Flynn, who is the father of their unwanted daughter. Therefore, Aidan has to face reality when Christine visits him in the pub he is the owner of. The reader gets to know in the course of the story that Aidan wanted his former girlfriend to abort the child and to "get rid of it" (Ahern et al. 299).

After her visit in the pub, Christine takes a taxi to a wealthy area in Dublin where she intends to visit her old friend Catherine Donahue. Her friend, however, is not at home, but it is her daughter Rachel who opens the door. The young woman asks her to come into the house, so that they can continue the conversation even though her "mother's not here" (Ahern et al. 302). In the house, the reason why Christine went there is evident:

There were photos around the kitchen [...]. Photos of her daughter, smiling, happy, something perhaps she had not expected. Christine stared at them intently. She had to

²⁹ <http://www.curledup.com/irishgir.htm> November 18 2013, 12:01.

tell her. The beautiful young woman sitting across the table from her was entitled to know who she really was, who her real mother was. (304)

Indeed, the two women get on well with each other, and for one moment the reader of the short story could expect Christine to tell Rachel about her past, when she says "Rachel, I need to talk to you, please sit down" (305). Nevertheless, she is not able to cope with this situation and leaves the house in a rush. The short story ends with Christine thinking about her sister Mary who "would listen to her about her daughter, and about Larry, who had not died like she insinuated but had just run off with a twenty-eight year-old tramp, a PA who was five months pregnant." (307)

6.2.2. Settings and Background

The main two settings are the Republic of Ireland and the United States of America, both representing different ideologies. Concerning Ireland, the only city that is precisely mentioned is Dublin, however, specific locations and its suburbs are referred to as well. With reference to the US, the text merely mentions that Christine lived in San Francisco while she was married to Larry.

Compared to other texts included in the short story collection *Irish Girls Are Back In Town*, the town that is central to Conlon-McKenna's work is Dublin. The first scene depicts Christine in a taxi shortly after she has arrived in her hometown and the reader can trace her way from the airport to the room at the luxurious Shelbourne Hotel.

To begin with, the place that is most essential for the main character is Dublin, where Christine returns after the huge changes in her old life and it is Dublin that is the place of reunion when Christine visits her family. However, Christine associates a number of negative episodes with this city, thus it is not an easy task for her to go back to this place. The character's attitude towards Dublin frequently lets her remember her feelings in the past when her own father rejected her. Here, "she was alone, back home, back in the city she'd grown up in. Dear old Dublin, there hadn't been much dear about it when she'd left nineteen years ago with her tail between her legs" (Ahern et al. 280). Indeed, Dublin is the place of the dark and negative side of Christine's life, where she is directly confronted with the consequences of the decisions she had to make in the past.

After the family meeting at the hotel, Christine has to face confrontations at three different locations, which all symbolise emotional conflicts in her life. The first conflict takes place at

the nursery home, where she visits her father, then she continues to her ex-boyfriend's pub, and at last she visits her only daughter in a Dublin suburb "on the south side of Dublin, in an expensive area" (301).

Apparently, the nursery home Christine's father lives in is outside of Dublin, "about four miles out of the city, situated in a converted old Edwardian house" (289). Despite the fact that most of Tom's children live in Dublin, the reason for his stay at the nursery home is debatable. However, this might represent the general situation of older people particularly in Ireland. Regarding Irish elderly people in general, the census of 2011 revealed that "[n]inety-four per cent of the usually resident elderly population were in private households at the time of the census with the remainder [...] in communal establishments" (Central Statistics Office 27). The latter is true of Tom who is forced to spend the rest of his life in a residence for older people.

Even though he is the father of four children, none of them takes up responsibility to care for him properly, but it is Christine who cannot forgive what her father has done to her. In fact, she considers him to be "a miserable old bastard" (Ahern et al. 295) and does not feel sympathy for him. The character's behaviour in the short story represents a common phenomenon in the treatment of older people. It is clear that the older people get, the more they have to rely on their family members' support (qtd. in Naughton et al. 14). It has been reported that this dependence frequently leads to "neglect and psychological or physical abuse" (qtd. in Naughton et al. 14). Whereas Christine's behaviour mainly results from the negative experiences she had with her father in the past, it can be assumed that Mary, Brendan and Liam were slightly more accepted than their sister, but still do not care for Tom in a suitable way. Apart from what he has done to his children, Tom receives abuse like a high number of other elderly people in Ireland.

After meeting her father at the nursery home, she decides to talk to Aidan in the pub which is described as a typical Irish pub:

The pub stood right at the end of the block and had been painted yellow creamy buttermilk colour, the window and door frames picked out in black, the huge Guinness sign still hanging on the side, loopy signwriting declaring the name Flynn's Fine Establishment. [...] Over in the corner a large screen TV flickered, Sky news. (Ahern et al. 296)

Apart from these descriptions of the building, it is further mentioned that Aidan "gave orders to the young one [waitress] to collect the empty glasses and ashtrays off the tables" (Ahern et al. 297). Because of this sentence it can be assumed that smoking is still allowed at Aidan's bar. In the context of teaching, the general smoking ban in Ireland might be addressed here and this information can easily be implemented in the lesson. In fact, "on 29 March 2004 the Republic of Ireland introduced a comprehensive smoke-free law, covering all indoor workplaces, including bars and restaurants" (Allwright et al. 1). Considering the fact that "Flesh and Blood" was published in 2004, the permission of smoking at the character's public house is not remarkable. After the ban of smoking had been introduced in Ireland, it "has led to a clear reduction in self reported exposure to second-hand smoke" (1). To be more precise, this total ban of smoking resulted in improved health conditions for smokers and non-smokers.

Moreover, Christine takes the taxi to a Dublin suburb to get to know her only daughter Rachel. On the way to her, "[t]hey passed Foxrock golf club and a tennis club and a classy cluster of shops which included a bistro" (Ahern et al. 301). The Foxrock Golf Club, being located at Torquay Road in Foxrock,³⁰ which is a suburb of Dublin, "is one of the longest established golf clubs in Ireland".³¹ By listing places such as the golf club and high standard restaurants, the quality of the area Rachel lives in is emphasised.

Whereas Dublin is a location signifying poverty and depression in Conlon-McKenna's text, the US is associated with wealth and the chance for a new beginning. When Christine gives Rachel free for adoption, she emigrates to America where she "[m]ade a new life [...] and in time met a good man and learned to enjoy life" (Ahern et al. 293). Christine's life in the US addresses the theme of the American Dream which finally comes true for her sometimes. Hochschild argues that "achieving the American dream consists in becoming better off than some comparison point, whether one's childhood, people in the old country, [...] anything or anyone that one measures oneself against" (16). Comparably, Christine decides to live in the US to work hard, build up a new life, marry a millionaire and therefore, she is more successful than her family in Ireland could ever be. Even though, America is not just a place of success, but of failure and collapse (Hochschild 15). As the protagonist is eventually left by her husband for a younger woman, loses her fortune, and in fact, her big American Dream, the experience of failure becomes part of the protagonist's life.

³⁰ <http://www.foxrockgolfclub.com/system/index.php> November 18 2013, 12:40.

³¹ <http://www.foxrockgolfclub.com/system/index.php> November 18 2013, 12:40.

6.2.3. Characters and Characterisation

At the very beginning of the short story, the main character Christine is mainly described directly when she is in the hotel room and looks into the mirror. She obviously considers herself to be good-looking even though she is "going on thirty-eight" (Ahern et al. 280) and had "a little bit of collagen discreetly done, along with her tinted lashes and ten thousand dollars worth of dental work" (280). Due to "dedication and daily Pilates and a personal trainer once a week" (281) Christine is good-looking and has an outward appearance that she is proud of.

Indirectly, Christine's behaviour and attitudes reflect her personality and inner life. Her outward appearance, wealth and reputation seem to be of high significance for Christine. This becomes apparent when "[s]he carefully put[s] on her make-up before taking the expensive cream suit from the wardrobe" (Ahern et al. 280). Apart from that she mentions the jewellery which Larry, her ex-husband, has given her when they still lived together. Moreover, Christine and her family arrange to meet at the hotel to have dinner. Certainly, it is this situation that shows the main character's impatience and tension when it becomes clear that "[s]he hated tardiness" (281). This tendency does not exclude circumstances where her own brothers and sisters are involved, however, Christine has a clear idea of how this evening should be. Even her family is not entitled to change her plans. In the course of the story, the reader learns about Christine's marriage to an American millionaire, but in spite of their close relationship they do not have children. Larry, her ex-husband, "had been emphatic about not having more children. He'd raised two families and had no intention of starting a third" (284). The reason why this is the case is not easy to accept for Christine and she "stifled a pang of envy as she chatted to her sister's children. Two genuine nice kids. Mary was lucky" (284). On that matter, it is surprising that despite her wealth and great past in the US she envies her sister Mary.

At the dinner, her family address the issue of her ex-husband's death and asks her how she copes with this stroke of fate. Then, "Christine tried to control herself. She didn't want to break down and cry here with everyone looking at her" (285). That is to say that she obviously does not grieve about Larry's alleged "death", but about the fact she lost him because of another, woman. For Christine, who is proud of her outward appearance, Larry leaving her because he felt in love "with a twenty-eight-year-old tramp, a PA who was five months pregnant" (307).

On the whole, Christine has the strong desire to keep up appearances, but every now and then she experiences moments when she shows her weaker side. These moments are commonly shared with her sister Mary, who seems to be the only person the main protagonist can rely on. Christine seems to have a close relationship to her sister Mary. When they both see each other after years of being separated, Christine cannot help thinking of "the plump motherly figure" (282) her sister has become. In this context, the reader has to rely on the main character's description of Mary's appearance. It is not clear whether Christine is older than her sister, however, she mentions that "[o]nly three years separated them, but they seemed a generation apart" (282). Besides, Mary is a warm-hearted and friendly person who apparently loves her sister. In comparison to their two brothers Brendan and Liam, it is Mary who is not thinking about the bill of the drinks or having dinner. The only one that she cares for on this day is her sister Christine who she has not seen for years. This becomes clear when she says "[i]t's so lovely to see you again. [...] We've all really missed you" (284). Additionally, Mary's feelings and worries about her sister are obvious when she addresses the issue of Larry's "death". In this situation she imagines how she would cope with her sister's problems, thus, her "plump face filled with concern" (285). Here, Mary imagines to live without her husband Tony Leonard which makes her realise that she "couldn't survive without him" (285) even though he used to be a "northside Romeo with greasy black hair who had promised her the sun, the moon and the stars when she'd let him go the whole way with her" (291). Mary and Tony are the parents of two children, namely Orla and Eoin who also join the family dinner. Concerning Mary, one more aspect has to be addressed at this stage. Of all the family members Mary is the person who at least tries to keep her family together, including her emigrated sister and their father.

In this short story Tony Leonard is mainly characterised through his excessive use of alcohol at the meeting and his behaviour at the dinner table. It is not once that he asks Christine about her feelings or involves himself in the conversation with the entire family. As a matter of fact, the only drinks he has in the hotel are pints of Guinness and Christine stresses that he "was about to order a third when [...] it was time for dinner" (285). Undoubtedly, Christine's attitude towards her brother-in-law is a negative one, possibly caused by the way he treats her sister.

Christine's two brothers, Brendan and Liam, can be characterised similarly to Tony, though they naturally have a much closer relationship to the protagonist than Tony. The way Christine's brothers act in the story, mirrors in an obvious manner their attitude towards their

sister's visit and their personality in general. First and foremost, the aspect that is most important is the reaction to the free dinner Christine's family gets when they meet at the hotel. Here Brendan says to his family "auntie Christine is treating us" (286) and he is "obviously determined to go the full hog as he eyed pheasant and venison and lobster on the menu" (286).

Brendan is married to Sheila, a "thin mousy-looking woman" (282), who is the mother of their four children Lisa, Brendan, Karen and Jamie. "Karen at fourteen had a wide face with perfect features and long skinny legs that seemed to go on for every" (283). "[H]er brother Jamie had a great look of his grandfather" (283).

Liam is married to Mairead Collins, a woman he met "when he was fifteen years old and by the look of it they were still cracked about each other" (283). Mairead is described as being a caring person who has got "perfectly cut blonde hair" (283). Liam and his wife have two sons, namely Colm and "[h]is younger brother [who] had been left in care of a babysitter" (283f).

For the interpretation of Christine's father, merely negative information, which is mainly based on the events in Christine's childhood and youth, is given by her. By his behaviour in the past it can be assumed that he is a cold-hearted and conservative father without any understanding for his children or his wife. While his wife "had spent thirty years of her life trying to keep the peace, to create a normal family" (290), Tom was occupied with struggling "to reign control over his daughters and sons" (290). Nonetheless, the worst thing that he might have done in his entire life is to repudiate his own daughter, his own flesh and blood. When Christine and Mary visit their father at the nursery home, it seems to be the first time that Tom has to face the truth and party realises what he has done. In this scene, he shows feelings such as regret or sadness, in particular when his daughters leave the nursery home. Although, the nurse says to him "Ah, Tommy, don't cry 'cause your daughters are gone" (295), it is more likely that he realises the consequences of his cruelty.

Apart from the fact that Rachel does not know about the identity of her biological mother, and talking to Christine as if she was a stranger to her - which she in fact is - Rachel seems to be an open-minded and warm-hearted person. Without having any kind of information on the person she faces, she invites her into the house to chat with her because "[i]t'd be nice to have a bit of company" (302). This young woman seems to be successful in her studies, while at the same time having a good relationship to her adoptive parents.

6.2.4. Themes and Motifs

In the story, Christine is the character whose life is filled with worries about her future. In particular, this becomes evident at the end when she is in the taxi, reflecting upon the alternative options she has got now. She considers two possibilities, namely to "fly straight back to San Francisco or stay in Dublin, make a clean breast of it, tell Mary and Bren and Liam the truth" (Ahern et al. 307). Undoubtedly, it is the case that "worry is always present in life. Indeed, it appears to be a basic factor, even the very essence of existence" (Daemmrich and Daemmrich 255). Worry is Christine's constant companion which is evident in every stage of her life. As a consequence, "[w]orry may almost imperceptibly color [sic] the representation" of Christine and her decisions (255). Apart from her sister Mary, who feels empathy with Christine, the extent to which her other family members seem to worry is comparatively low.

Part of the protagonist's worry is loneliness and the feeling of being deserted. It is quite paradoxical, how Christine finds herself in the context of a traditional family, but nevertheless is alone. Obviously, she "realized [sic] that somehow she had let them all become strangers" (Ahern et al. 288). Especially, after the termination of her marriage with Larry, loneliness is as present as it was at the time when she got pregnant with Rachel. Christine does not get used to this new situation easily, and "[s]he hated sleeping alone. She still missed Larry's snoring and warm breath" (288). Daemmrich and Daemmrich point out that "[l]oneliness within marriage and the family is closely associated with the themes of deception and disillusionment" (171). Considering the family in the short story, it is not just Christine who gets disappointed. Tom, Christine's father, wants her to act according to his expectations, but cannot accept his daughter's seemingly "immoral" way of life. To be more precise, it is at the nursery home when the reader gets to know the estranged relationship between Tom and Christine. Besides, Christine might have married "for social and economic reasons rather than genuine love" (171), which is not a sound basis for a fulfilled marriage.

The most prominent aspects in Conlon-McKenna's story are the themes of family life and the relationship between parents and children (Seigneuret, *L-Z* 948). In particular, family members and family dynamics within the group are the reasons for the characters' worries and problems. It is obvious that "parents and children are bound to see life differently, and literature treats of the ways tensions are resolved or become hardened into generational conflict" (Seigneuret, *L-Z* 948). Above all, it can be concluded that Christine and her father

have to face these clashes between the generations. Whereas Christine expects Tom to accept her pregnancy and support her, Tom wants his daughter to live a life according to his plans. With this difference in opinions Conlon-McKenna presents a common phenomenon. Evidently, "the family as a problem, as a sphere of conflicting loyalties, expresses much about the modern world" (Seigneuret, *A-J* 505).

6.2.4.1. Characteristics of Irish Family Life: The Issues of Adoption and Abortion in "*Flesh and Blood*"

The issue of unwanted extra-marital pregnancy is problematic in a number of nations and cultures around the globe. The reason why this aspect was chosen for the context of Irish family life is the controversy about the alternatives that Irish women and men have, which are especially criticised in this country and noticeable in Conlon-McKenna's text. Apart from that, the feelings and public debate associated with these issues might provoke diverse opinions on the aspects of both abortion and adoption.

Certainly, in this specific situation Christine had theoretically two alternatives, either aborting her child- which would be illegal in Ireland - or more realistically giving Rachel free for adoption. In fact, keeping the child has never been an option for her due to the social and moral environment she lives in. Being young and unmarried, without any perspectives, she decides to have "[a] fresh start, that's what she needed" (Ahern et al. 292). This decision was mainly influenced by Aidan, who refused to accept his child and gave Christine no other possibility than to choose a life without her child. Even though Aidan wants Christine to abort the baby, he never states precisely what he wants her to do. The only thing the reader knows is that he gives her money "to get rid of it" (299). Apparently, the reader implicitly is aware of the consequences, however, the issue of abortion definitely is a taboo topic in Ireland that cannot even be addressed in the given situation. In the short story, the main protagonist Christine makes the decision that adoption is the only acceptable alternative for herself and the baby after she finds out about her pregnancy. In the text, the theme of adoption is not only relevant for Aidan and Tom, but for their daughter Rachel, who is not aware of her real domestic background.

Abortion as a literary theme is an essential part of teaching literature because it gives students the opportunity to enhance "their attitudes and to help them develop a sense of empathy and tolerance toward others" (Banker par.11). Here, students most likely find it easy to identify

with Christine's problems and what alternatives she is thinking of. Indeed, both women and men tend to be highly worried before aborting their child (Bradshaw and Slade 932). Even though, Christine decides against abortion, she might have experiences of similar feelings.

Christine, however, does not just decide to live without her child, but she emigrates to the United States, after being thrown out by her father. This behaviour mirrors how numerous young women in Ireland cope with the consequences of extramarital pregnancy. Her father does not wish to see her again, so Christine decides to "go away to America" (Ahern et al. 293).

6.3. Analysis of the Discourse Level

Useful for the teaching in the EFL classroom is the analysis of the short story on the discourse level by focussing on features of the narrative technique as well as the language.

6.3.1. Narrative Technique

From the beginning of the narrative text, the characters' thoughts and feelings are revealed to the reader. In phrases like "[n]othing's changed, thought Christine" (Ahern et al. 279), or "Mary Leonard shifted uncomfortably [...] She wished her brother would keep his big trap shut" (286). An omniscient third person narrator describes the events from the various perspectives, though, it is clear that Christine's point of view is more prominent. The narrator has "consciousness of all [...] characters [...] and a commanding view of all past, present and future developments" (Nünning and Nünning 191). Indeed, the narrator has "access to the internal processes" (124) of the majority of protagonists. But Christine is clearly the 'focalizer'.

Further, it is important to note the several narrative devices that are applied in short story. The scene at the nursery home, where Christine visits her father, depicts a situation relating her past, hence it is a 'flashback':

The man who shouted and screamed and bullied and for most of their childhood years made their life a hell. [...] But nothing could disguise the raised voices and the shouting as Tom Kavanagh tried to reign control over his daughters and sons. [...] Then Aidan Flynn had come into her life. [...] Finding out she was pregnant, Aidan had taken the news of impending fatherhood badly. (Ahern et al. 290ff)

This "[f]lashback describes some past events related to the present" (Bae and Young 157), but at the same time functioning as "a character's recall of his or her own past events" (158). To

put it differently, Christine uses the meeting with her father to think of the events in the past, which ultimately were the beginning of one of her most complex conflicts in life. Up to this point, the main protagonist's past is not known to the reader, but with the flashback the sequence of events becomes clear. At the end of the short story, Christine balances the advantages and disadvantages of the alternatives she has for her own future. As a consequence, the reader can infer what will happen in her future life:

There was really nothing to go back for except to haggle with lawyers and try to sort out legal details. She could either fly straight back to San Francisco or stay in Dublin, make a clean breast of it, tell Mary and Bren and Liam the truth. The black wipers on the taxi were going back and forth, back and forth, as Christine closed her eyes. (Ahern et al. 307)

With this foreshadowing, which is supposed to indicate "information about an [...] event that occurs later according to the [...] chronology of the [...] story" (Nünning and Nünning 188), the reader faces two possibilities about the ending of the story. Having considered the future prospects, the aspect of the open ending should be addressed since the story "does not offer final solutions" (191).

The title of the story "*Flesh and Blood*" apparently refers to the relationship between Tom and Christine as well Rachel and Christine in particular. Meaning "a near relative or one's close family" ("Flesh and Blood"), this expression emphasises the strong natural bond that parents and children to have. In this story, however, moral strictures provoke conflicts and rejections by the father. When Christine visits her father she accuses him of not "stand[ing] by his own flesh and blood" (Ahern et al. 293).

6.3.2. Language

Whereas the main part of the story is written in a relatively conversational English and neutral register, the protagonists' use of language is characterised by informal expressions and jargon. In particular, this becomes manifest in the nursery home because the tension between Tom and Christine is apparent. Words that are mentioned here are, for example, "fucking" (Ahern et al. 291), "shite father" (293) as well as "miserable old bastard" (295). This is not to say that swearing is particularly characteristic for Irish English, however, Ghassempur reports that there is "evidence of how swearing and profanity seem to be strongly rooted in Irish English" (40). Nevertheless, it has to be considered that the protagonists experience intense emotions

when being confronted with each other, and thus, the degree of swearing does not merely depend on the cultural or linguistic background.

6.4. Practical Implementation of the Short Story in the EFL Classroom

Concerning cross-cultural learning, this short story provides an ideal basis for teaching activities on this subject matter. Apart from the aims of official national and international guidelines, "work on culture learning and teaching has been [...] interested in attitudinal issues relating to learners' development of tolerance and understanding of other cultures as well as in the degree to which the study of other cultures enhances cultural self-awareness" (Lantolf 28).

As one of the central themes in the story is the issue of adoption and unavailability of abortion in Ireland, various perspectives might be addressed relevant for these topics. To put it in other words, the students' personal attitudes could be compared to, in this case, moral and legal guidelines in Ireland. Relating to pre-, while- and post-reading activities, information on the cultural background of the short story should be given before reading the text. After the reading stage learners could compare official Irish guidelines to the ones occurring in the text by finding similarities and differences.

Being aware of cultural differences does not only involve the mere reproduction of these aspects in the teaching context, but also to talk about it efficiently. For this reason, "[t]o communicate internationally inevitably involves communicating interculturally as well, which probably leads [...] to encounter factors of cultural differences" (Cakir 154). In the EFL classroom this skill could be developed with suitable speaking activities, where authentic situations should be offered to the students. Again, one of the biggest challenges is to give students a reason to communicate and demonstrate why a particular short story and its themes are relevant in the first place. To be more precise, "one of the most demotivating factors for learners is when they have to learn something that they cannot see the point of because it has no seeming relevance whatsoever to their lives" (Dörnyei 63).

Role-play as a teaching technique might enhance the students' commitment to the task and gives them a communicative purpose. A practical idea for the implementation of the short story could be a role-play between the characters Christine and Tom. As the relationship between them both is quite hostile it gives students enough room to create an effective speaking situation. Alternatively, in order to work on the students' creativity, each pair of students could imagine the scene when Christine told her father about the pregnancy. The

learners' performance could then be presented in front of the class, or, learners could be encouraged to create a video of the dialogue between Christine and her father.

In the context of a post-reading activity the literary theory of the text can be covered in class because Conlon-McKenna's short story provides an ideal example for describing literary terms. As an illustration, one of the tasks is to find out the scenes where the narrative devices of flashbacks and a flashforwards are used. This could be done after the students have informed themselves on the internet about these terms and provided short definitions for their colleagues. This activity involves students actively in the process, makes the teaching situation less teacher-centred and fosters learner autonomy, by at the same time enhancing students' literary knowledge.

7. Clare Keegan's short story "*Men and Women*"

7.1. Clare Keegan - Concise Biography

The author of "*Men and Women*" "is considered one of Ireland's most promising new writers" (D'Hoker 190). She "was born in Wexford in 1968. She has written two collections of stories: *Antarctica* (1999) and *Walk the Blue Fields* (2007)" (Enright 430). Concerning her earlier works, "*Antarctica*, was completed in 1998. It announced her as an exceptionally gifted and versatile writer of contemporary fiction and was awarded the Rooney Prize for Literature."³² Her later work, "*Walk the Blue Fields* [emphasis added], was published to enormous critical acclaim in 2007 and won her the 2008 Edge Hill Prize for Short Stories."³³ Insofar as the setting of most of her short stories is the countryside, it is interesting to note that Keegan "lives in rural Ireland" (Enright 431).

7.2. Analysis of the Story Level

7.2.1. Plot

Set in rural Ireland, "*Men and Women*" tells the story of a young girl and her family - her parents and her brother Seamus - and the challenges they face due to gender stereotypes and hierarchy within the family.

The narrator starts with describing her daily routine with her father, and the duties she has to fulfil on the farm. In particular, she says that "he needs me to open gates. [...] I get out, open the gates, my father free-wheels the Volkswagen through, I close the gates behind him and hop back into the passenger seat" (Enright 388). As it is Christmas time, the girl tells of the preparations together with her mother and the work they have to do, while her brother and her father do not get involved. A few days later, "[t]here is a New Years' Eve party and all the family are attending. The narrator noticing that her father is dancing with other women, but never with his wife at the dance. Neither has the narrator ever seen her father kiss her mother."³⁴ For the protagonists, the party ends with a dispute about the mother's behaviour during the raffle. On their way home from the ballroom, the father makes fun of his wife and treats her disrespectfully when he asks her to open the gates of their farm:

³² <http://www.faber.co.uk/catalog/author/claire-keegan> December 31 2013, 15:46.

³³ <http://www.faber.co.uk/catalog/author/claire-keegan> December 31 2013, 15:46.

³⁴ <http://sittingbee.com/men-and-women-claire-keegan/> January 1 2014, 23:53.

When they get back home, the father stops the car outside the front gate and waits for the mother to get out and open the gates. She refuses and then he asks the narrator and Seamus but they don't reply. Eventually he gets out himself and as he is opening the gate, his hat falls off and he bends down and fumbles for it on the ground [...].³⁵

Eventually, because the car is "rolling, sliding backwards" (Enright 398), the mother manages to rescue her children. She reaches "the driver's seat of the car and driving through the gates, leaving the father to look on in shock. His wife has learned to drive from the television programs she has watched on the rented television."³⁶

7.2.2. Settings and Background

In terms of the time the text is set, it can be concluded that the story takes place in winter. The young girl mentions her procedures around Christmas time (Enright 390) and the weather conditions a few days after Christmas (391).

It is not specifically stated, however, where the family lives, but with the information provided in the story it can be assumed that the story takes place in rural Ireland. In particular, the way to the family's home is described as follows: "To reach out house you must drive up a long lane through a wood, open two sets of gates and close them behind you so the sheep won't escape to the road" (Enright 388). Another justification for the assumption that the story is set in Ireland - beside the fact that the author is Irish - is the brother's name Seamus in the short story. Seamus, defined as the Irish version of the given name James³⁷, is most probably found in the Irish context. In addition to that, on New Year's Eve, when the family spends the night out, they have amongst other kind of food "cheese-and-onion Tayto" (Enright 393), which is a company primarily found in Ireland. More precisely, "[t]he Tayto company began making their cheese-and onion- flavored [sic] crisps in 1954, and the word *Tayto* [sic] has been synonymous with crisps in Ireland ever since. [...] Irish immigrants still yearn for a packet of Tayto crisps when they are away from home" (Kraig and Sen 196).

Part of Irish rural life seems to be farming, and particularly animal trading - in the context of this short story it is animal marts. The main protagonist and her father frequently attend those marts to enlarge the number of sheep and cattle they have at home. As no further occupation is mentioned, it can be assumed that the entire family depends on the farm. Even though

³⁵ <http://sittingbee.com/men-and-women-claire-keegan/> January 1 2014, 23:59.

³⁶ <http://sittingbee.com/men-and-women-claire-keegan/> January 1 2014, 23:59.

³⁷ <http://www.babynamesofireland.com/irish-boy-names> January 2 2014, 16:44.

farming plays an essential role in Ireland, “[t]he economic and social landscape of farming is undergoing transformation, in which the viability of farming as an occupation and as a lifestyle in modern Ireland is being reduced” (Laoire 94f). Consequently, fewer and fewer Irish decide to rely on farming as the only income. Apart from that, farm work does not only define the economic status of a person, but the social perception of the same.

Laoire stresses that

[...] at the same time, family farming carries with it certain responsibilities and retains a very strong socio-cultural meaning and importance, bound up closely with masculine identities. These competing pressures are in tension with one another and are lived out though the lives of farmers and their families. (95)

However, in “Men and Women” the father’s masculinity is emphasised by the way he closely looks at the animals when he “goes to the mart and examines sheep in the pens, feeling their backbones, looking into their mouths” (Enright 388).

A possible evidence for the approximate year the story is set in is the fact that the young girl’s brother studies for the Intermediate Certificate (389). Today, students have to sit the “Junior Certificate (which had replaced the Intermediate Certificate)” (Redmond and Heanue 48). Insofar as “the new Junior Certificate examination in 1992” (Hyland and Milne 308) was held, the short story must be set before 1992.

In “*Men and Women*”, “[e]xcept for a rough woman up behind the hill who drives a tractor and a Protestant woman in the town, no woman [...] drives” (Enright 390). In the last decades, however, “[t]he growth in private transport had lessened the effect of distance for most people” (McNerney and Gillmor 46). The female protagonist does not have this opportunity and thus, is totally dependent on her husband, which makes it even harder for her to disagree with her husband. McNerney and Gillmore report a study where “all women aged 35-44 were able to drive” (46). Apparently, for women these conditions have changed and the majority of women drive cars in order to “participate in the economic and social lives of their communities” (46).

The party on New Year's Eve took place in a dance-hall near the family's home. The “Spellman Hall stands in the middle of the car park, an arch of bare, multi-coloured bulbs surrounding a crooked ‘Merry Christmas’ sign above the door” (Enright 393). It might be possible that Keegan refers to a fictional hall, or the one in Kildavin, Ireland. The “Spellman

Hall Kildavin was built and opened in 1956. The hall is named after Cardinal Francis Spellman of New York whose ancestral grandmother, Ellen Keogh hailed from this region."³⁸

7.2.3. Characters and Characterisation

The main protagonist in *"Men and Women"* is a young girl who lives together with her family on a farm in rural Ireland. She describes herself as "the girl of a thousand uses" (Enright 389) within the family, as she has to fulfil numerous duties her father imposes on her.

While at times, this young person appears like an adult, her daily routine reveals that despite the responsibility she takes up in the family, she still is a child. She tells that at "[e]venings I get my school-bag and do homework on the kitchen table while Ma watches the television we hire for winter" (390). Whereas her true age is not mentioned in the text, it can be roughly estimated. The protagonist's brother is preparing for the Intermediate Certificate (389), now the equivalent to the Junior Certificate, which "students normally sit [...] at the age of 14 or 15, after 3 years of post-primary education."³⁹ Apparently, the girl is younger than her brother, but old enough to describe her reality in the way she does in the text. Her naïve and innocent perspective becomes manifest throughout the story, and is emphasised by her worries about Santa Claus and the fact that she considers herself the only person who gets presents from him (Enright 390). She says that every year, "[o]n Christmas Eve I put up signs. I cut up a cardboard box and in red marker I write THIS WAY SANTA [sic] and arrows, pointing the way. I am always afraid he will get lost or not bother coming because the gates are too much trouble" (390). In addition to her innocent nature, the relationship to her mother determines and considerably influences her life.

The girl definitely admires her mother and wishes her father would behave the same way as other husbands she perceives in her environment:

I think she is beautiful with her pearls around her throat and her red skirt flaring out when she swings round. I wish my father would get out, that the snow would be falling on him, not on my mother in her good clothes. I've seen other fathers holding their wives' coats, holding doors open, asking if they'd like anything at the shop, bringing home bars of chocolate and ripe pears even when they say no. (Enright 392)

³⁸ <http://www.clonegalkildavin.ie/pages/spellman.htm> January 4 2013, 10:02.

³⁹ http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/state_examinations/junior_certificate_programme.html January 3 2013, 11:39.

Her mother seems to be the person in the family whom she relies on, as the girl only mentions positive aspects, or feelings of empathy for her. Their strong bond is illustrated by the daily routines they share together: "Nobody's up except Mammy and me. We are the early birds. We make tea, eat toast and chocolate fingers for breakfast" (391). There are only a few occasions that describe the girl spending time with her brother, apart from the day when she was "playing darts with Seamus" (391), but even this situation results in a competitive row. Her frustration is revealed when she compares her life to her brother's and she stresses that she is "fed up being treated like a child" (392). In the ballroom, however, she feels that "[f]or the first time in my life I have some power. I can butt in and take over, rescue and be rescued" (394). To put it simply, she experiences that there is an alternative to obeying her father, namely to resist and thus, support her mother.

Contrary to the positive attitude towards her mother, it is the girl's father who causes difficulties within the domestic structure. While the father, whose name is not mentioned either, seems to be a highly emotional person in terms of negative feelings, he appears to be an emotionally cold person concerning positive feelings for his wife and his daughter. His daughter stresses this assumption when she mentions that "[m]y parents do not kiss. In all my life, back as far as I remember, I have never seen them touch" (394). However, people he has no responsibility for receive more devotion and affection than his own family members. Every time he and his daughter are on their way home from the animal market, he stops in order to have a break-at least this is what he tells his daughter. In addition to that, the "father dances with the women from the roads" (393). In particular, Sarah Combs is in the centre of attention and they both try not to avoid other people noticing their love affair. As these scenes suggest his extramarital affairs, they reveal his disloyal and dishonest character. Apart from that, he does not attach too much importance to his outward appearance as he "does not do himself up" (392). In fact, his daughter comments on his neglect of personal hygiene (392), which represents - together with his ruthless behaviour - a relatively one-sided portrayal of masculinity. Nevertheless, his personal weakness due to his "artificial hips" (388) is illustrated by the dependence on his daughter. Vital for the story is that the father "has trouble with the laces, as he finds it hard to stoop" (392), which determines the ending of the text and finally allows the empowerment of the female characters.

By tolerating her living conditions, the girl's mother has given up all hope of change and her helpless character affects her own and her children's lives. Instead of taking responsibility for her own life, she endures her husband's affairs and negligent behaviour towards his family.

Therefore, she seems to be a pragmatic and practical person up to the moment when she decides to set an example for her revolt against her husband. Regarding her outward appearance, she “is tall and thin, but the skin on her hands is hard” (392). Because of her behaviour throughout the story, she mostly is a calm and retiring woman, frequently showing her frustration and sorrowfulness. These feelings are explained by the daughter as “something sad about Mammy tonight; it is all around her like when a cow dies and the truck comes to take it away” (Enright 394). Her only distraction from reality is “the programme where a man teaches a woman how to drive a car. How to change gears, [and] to let the clutch out” (390).

Seamus, the brother, is a minor figure in the text, but he is the reason why his sister feels treated unjustly. While she has to work and help on the farm her “brother sits in the sitting room beside the fire and pretends he’s studying” (389). On the one hand, he is an egoistic person as he does not support his sister, on the other hand however, he helps his mother and his sister when he does not obey his father’s command to open the gate. Even if he does not take any action actively, he still realises the problems in his family. Regardless of this situation, the father seems to be the person the boy relates most closely, and they both tend to form a union, similar to the mother-daughter relationship. At Christmas their status in the family is demonstrated when “Seamus and Da come down and investigate the parcels under the tree” (Enright 391). Whereas mother and daughter make preparations for Christmas, the male protagonists examine the results.

At the very beginning of the text, Bridie, the family's acquaintance, is introduced to the reader. The father and the daughter visit her “for a feed on the way home” (388) from the market “because Bridie kills her own stock and there’s always meat” (388f). The narrator notes that “Bridie lives in a smoky little house without a husband, but she has sons who drive tractors around the fields. They’re small, deeply unattractive men [...]. Bridie wears red lipstick and face powder, but her hands are like a man’s hands” (389).

Another central person in the short story is Sarah Combs, the father's mistress. Due to the scenes in the text she seems to be a highly confident person who is aware of the appeal she has with men. Her rude and inconsiderate manner is emphasised by the naturalness of her dance with the father, and the resignation of the mother.

7.2.4. Themes and Motifs

One of the central themes in the short story is the relationship between the girl and her mother. As they are women, they find themselves in the same position and struggle with the hierarchy in their domestic structure. In general, "[t]he often fraught relations between mothers and daughters have received much attention in second-wave feminism, both in psychoanalytic theory and literary studies" (D'Hoker 192). However, in the case of *"Men and Women"* there is a strong bond between mother and daughter and in the end they both reach a breakthrough. In Keegan's texts, "[t]he young girls [...] retain, and even strengthen, their relationship with their mother in their negotiations with a gendered universe and patriarchal society" (196). To revolt against their father and husband, the women stick together and refuse to obey. Nevertheless, "[t]he relationship between mother and daughter in Keegan's stories is characterized not so much by union or identity as by mutual solidarity and respect" (198). When the father asks the mother to leave the car to open the gate this sympathy for each other is shown clearly. The narrator describes that the father "is waiting for Mammy to get out and open the gates. Mammy doesn't move. [...] Something tells me I should not move. [...] There's not a budge out of any of us" (Enright 397). When the daughter realises her mother resisting the father's order, she decides to act in the same way.

In terms of the hierarchical structure in the story,

[t]he daughters in these stories do not see the mothers as omnipotent objects, to be feared or loved, possessed or rejected, but rather as subjects in their own right. In 'Men and Women,' for instance, the young girl – unlike her brother – comes to recognize her mother's feelings on the New Year's Party. (D'Hoker 198)

When the mother goes to collect the prize she "is standing there in her elegant clothes and it's all wrong. She doesn't belong up there" (Enright 396). The girl appears to know exactly what is going on in her mother's mind, which in turn indicates the strong bond between them.

Apart from that, "the household duties shared by mother, or foster mother, and daughter are evoked both as rituals being passed on from generation to generation and as moments of mother-daughter bonding" (197f). The protagonist's mother teaches her daughter what she probably got to know herself when she was a young person. On the whole, "being part of a line of mothers and daughters, is a central element in most of Keegan's daughter stories" (D'Hoker 197).

Moreover, the short story illustrates the “theme of female empowerment.”⁴⁰ Both the mother and the daughter intend to change the way they are treated by the male family members. Apparently, this is achieved by the “small acts of resistance or rebellion on the part of the mother empower the daughter in her attempts to carve out her own role in society, a role which thus promises to be different from that of the mother” (D’Hoker 196). Without the help of her mother the girl probably would have never had the courage to revolt, thus, the mother paves the way for her daughter’s emancipation. Apart from that “the daughter is [...] empowered by her mother's rebellion after the New Year's village dance where she has been treated with even more than the usual contempt by her philandering husband” (196). For this reason, it can be assumed that the girl will face a different future due to the change of her attitude. Despite the fact that it is “a small act of resistance, the symbolism of this passage highlights its epiphanic potential for the daughter whose perspective on life has fundamentally changed” (197).

Equally important in this context is the issue of marriage and the problems this union causes in the short story. For one thing, “twentieth-century marriage is expected to provide, simultaneously, romantic love, companionship, and the practical framework within which individual happiness and success can be pursued and children reared” (Seigneuret *L-Z* 825). Despite the economic benefit this relationship has for the married couple as well as the children, it does not entail any of these aspects. The father and mother in the story both seem to rather tolerate each other rather than share a deeply harmonious life together. This relationship symbolises “twentieth-century marriage [...] improvising its own rules and priorities as it goes along” (825). In effect, the father - being on top end of the domestic hierarchy - creates his own rules and responsibilities for his family members.

The story also confirms the view that “[t]he role of children in the marriage relationship [...] often provides another source of conflict” (826). The rivalry between the two children, especially the girl's jealousy of her elder brother, determines the entire conflict in the text. That is to say, jealousy constitutes the children's lives and “sets sibling against sibling” (Seigneuret *A-J* 675). According to the daughter's opinion, her feelings are justified as she considers herself as an obedient person who fulfils her duties, whereas her brother is free from every responsibility. Indeed, the young girl thinks that she has valid “reasons for believing that [s]he has a legitimate [...] claim” (677).

⁴⁰ <http://sittingbee.com/men-and-women-claire-keegan/> January 1 2013, 20:51.

After a dispute with Seamus, the girl states:

I wish I was big. I wish I could sit beside the fire and be called up to dinner and draw triangles, lick the nibs of special pencils, sit behind the wheel of a car and have someone open gates that I could drive through. Vrum! Vrum! I'd give her the holly, make a bumper-sticker that would read: CAUTION; SHEEP ON BOARD [sic]. (Enright 392)

In view of this scene, the daughter criticises both her father and her brother, and imagines how her life would be different if she had the power to change it according to her wishes.

7.2.4.1. Features of Irishness: Gender Stereotypes within a Family

In the story, the father and the mother both are aware of their social roles they more or less have to fulfil in order to share a common life. Gender difference and the power the male protagonists gain through it, appears to be the basis of the difficulties within the family.

Goodman defines this concept as

[..] ways of seeing and representing people and situations based on sex difference. 'Gender' is a social or cultural category, influenced by stereotypes about 'female' and 'male' behaviour that exist in our attitudes and beliefs. Such beliefs are often said to be 'culturally produced' or 'constructed'. (vii)

The short story portrays the consequences of living under these circumstances and - to some extent - being a victim of the influence of gender which is shown "in sexual stereotypes and in power relations between individuals" (Goodman viii). It seems to be the case that "the adult world of these stories is strictly divided along gender lines: women work within the house; men conduct their affairs outside; men drive cars; women don't; sons are allowed to study; girls have to help" (D'Hoker 195). The daughter knows about the duties she has in the family and what is expected of her. She also experiences differences between female and male family members.

At the very beginning of the story, the girl mentions that

[her] brother sits in the sitting room beside the fire and pretends he's studying. He will do the Inter-cert next year. My brother is going to be somebody, so he doesn't open the gates or clean up shite or carry buckets. All he does it read and write and draw triangles with special pencils Da buys him for mechanical drawing. He is the brains in the family. (Enright 389)

Apparently, in the short story, "the division is a hierarchical and lopsided one" (D'Hoker 195). Whereas Seamus is allowed to study, the girl has no other alternative than meeting the requirements her parents, especially her father, set her. From the quote above it cannot only

be inferred that there is a hierarchical structure within the family, but "the narrator of this story gradually comes to learn, [that] the privileges of manhood do not just entail being served, but also being entitled to sleep around, to boss and belittle women - in fact treating them no better than the farm animals" (195). Even though the female family members start their revolt against the male authority together, the mother fosters the stereotypical social roles. To be more precise, "it is primarily Keegan's mothers who act as guardians of these gender divisions: they teach the girls the chores around the house, collude in serving the men" (196). Although, the mother does not seem to come to terms with her traditional life in the first place, she is a victim of her own social role.

In the end of the story, both mother and daughter break the rules and "[f]or the first time, the mother refuses to get out [...] When the father gets out of the car at last, the mother takes the wheel herself (only the daughter knows that she has secretly been watching driving programs on television)" (196). Again, this emphasises the strong division between rules for women and men in the short story- the mother watching TV without her husband knowing and hiding her skills from him.

7.3. Analysis of the Discourse Level

In the following section, features of the narrative technique will be addressed, whereas there is a focus on the first person narrative. Apart from that, the language used in the short story will be considered.

7.3.1. Narrative Technique

"*Men and Women*" as well as other short stories by Keegan, they "stand out from the rest of Keegan's work not only in terms of setting and plot but also because of their peculiar narrative situation" (D'Hoker 191). The first person narrator in the story describes the characters' lives, while focusing on the daughter as the main protagonist. The text is "narrated in the first person by a young girl, thus offering a daughter's perspective" (191) on the situation. Insofar as the story is told by a child, a "slightly naive narrator" (195) can be discerned and has a considerable effect on the story as a whole. The girl explains the situation as she perceives it herself, being somehow unaware of the seriousness of her parents' estrangement. Then again, she describes her father's and mother's actions in great detail, while revealing their social roles. In this short story, as well as in other texts by Clare Keegan, "the narrators are quite

young children, observing and describing a grown-up reality that they do not always fully understand” (201). At the same time it seems that the young person definitely is aware of the situation and problems which determine her life. In fact, “[b]y using these “naive narrators,” Keegan effectively engages the reader’s cooperation in decoding these descriptions and supplying the necessary interpretation and evaluation” (D’Hoker 201).

In the course of the story, the girl experiences certain aspects of sudden realisation. While at the beginning, she is an obedient child who believes in Santa, the girl realises at the end of the story that reality is different to what she perceived first. She mentions: “I think of Santa Claus using the same wrapping paper as us, and suddenly I understand. There is only one obvious explanation” (Enright 397). At this moment of epiphany, meaning “a sudden spiritual manifestation” (qtd. in Fargnoli and Gillespie 66), the girl suddenly becomes aware of the mystery of Santa Claus. In fact, the scene is representative of the entire change and empowerment of the female characters and the disempowerment of the male characters.

7.3.2. Language

The title of the story, “*Men and Women*”, indicates the division found in the family, but at the same time hints at the hierarchical structure between the male and female family members. In the title men precede women, similar to the relationship between the father and the mother in the short story.

In terms of colloquial language or slang expressions, words such as “shite” (Enright 389) are used in the short story. In fact, it “is the spelling used to reflect the Irish English pronunciation of the English nouns *shit* [sic]” (Walshe 148). This information is particularly relevant for the interpretation of this short story as it provides an indication for Ireland as the setting of the short story. Besides, apart from its common use, “[t]he term is very often used as an exclamation” (148). In addition to that, non-standard variations are mentioned in the course of the short story, which in turn indicate the informal environment. In the ballroom, the daughter brings up “[...] the young *fella* [emphasis added] who hushes the cattle around the ring in the mart butts in and rescues me” (Enright 393). In fact, *fella* [emphasis added] is the “non-standard spelling of FELLOW [sic], used in representing speech in various dialects.”⁴¹

⁴¹ <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/fella> January 2 2014, 18:16.

When his family members refuse to obey his order, the father's disrespectful behaviour is illustrated in the text. Expressions such as "Have you got a pain?" (Enright 397) used in order to communicate with a family member cannot be considered appropriate for an adult. However, this question signals the rage the male protagonist feels in this situation. In *"Men and Women"* the characters make use of swear words, which indicates their emotional state and relationship towards each other. It seems that the daughter is expected to respect her elder brother, but she shows her contempt with the language she uses when talking to him. When the young girl is asked to inform her brother about the dinner, she shouts "Come and get it, you lazy fucker" (Enright 390). As she has to obey in every other aspect of her life, language is the only way which allows her to revolt. Most importantly, however, blaspheming expressions, such as "By Jeeesus!" (397), are part of the short story. As a matter of fact, "the B.B.C. noted that according to a survey carried out in 2005, the majority of young British children thought that 'Jesus' was a swearword rather than a person" (Hughes 265).

7.4. Practical Implementation of the Story in the EFL Classroom

In particular, it is the length of the short story *"Men and Women"* which makes the text suitable for the use in the EFL classroom. In the light of language teaching, a well-conceived teaching procedure is needed in order to achieve a successful outcome. An appropriate preparation for the text should precede the reading of the short story. Central to the short story are gender roles and their impact on the characters in the text. Therefore, "[s]tudents complete the provided worksheet [...] on traditional gendered jobs and occupations."⁴² EFL learners are encouraged to consider various jobs which are traditionally done by women and men, respectively. After this stage, "[t]hey then discuss the traditional perception of men's and women's jobs either in small groups [...]. What characterises a 'man's job' and what identifies a 'woman's job'?"⁴³

As a general reflection on the jobs the students came up with, they should then answer the questions provided:

1. What is the nature of jobs carried out usually by men
2. What is the nature of jobs usually carried out by women?

When discussing this, consider the following aspects: pay, job security, status, activities involved."⁴⁴

⁴² <http://www.ark.ac.uk/schools/resources/GenderandFamilyRoles.pdf> January 5 2013, 23:53.

⁴³ <http://www.ark.ac.uk/schools/resources/GenderandFamilyRoles.pdf> January 5 2013, 23:53.

⁴⁴ <http://www.ark.ac.uk/schools/resources/GenderandFamilyRoles.pdf> January 6 2013, 00:02.

Having considered these aspects, learners might easily recognise the gender roles in the short story they will read and might already start reflecting on them while reading. Once the students have read the text and most probably are aware of the gender roles illustrated with the help of the short story "*Men and Women*" the conditions for both men and women in the text can be compared to the actual situation in the 21st century. Here, EFL learners can make use of their own experiences in their home country and foreign countries they have visited so far.

In the last phase of the post-reading stage, "[t]he session is completed by a summary discussion about male and female roles in society and how this has changed over time. What led to the changes? Were there particular activists? Do we now have gender equality in Western societies?"⁴⁵ Ideally, these questions should first be discussed in pairs in order to give students the opportunity to brainstorm the topic, whereas a class discussion serves as an exchange of answers. If the time resources allow it, the teacher could implement the short film version of "*Men and Women*" in order to further work on the issue of gender roles and national stereotypes.

7.4. 1. Short film "*Men and Women*" as a Post-reading Strategy

The film version of "*Men and Women*" "was adapted by Paul O'Reilly, an award-winning writer who has been shortlisted for the William Trevor Prize and published in the Irish Times."⁴⁶ Even though there are some differences between the short story and the short film version, the main focus is equally set, namely the "realisation that neither Santa nor relations between her parents are what they seem."⁴⁷ The film's "cast includes [...] Michael Harding (Best Actor, Dublin Fringe Festival) and Catriona Ní Mhurchu (Best Supporting Actress nominee at Irish Theatre awards 2012) as parents Dan and Moll."⁴⁸

In the post-reading stage, the short film will serve as the basis to analyse the short story in detail, while pointing out differences between the text and the film version. The film material needed for the teaching procedure is particularly suitable for the EFL classroom as it takes roughly two minutes and can easily be implemented during a 50-minute English lesson. That is to say "that there are not only full-length feature films to be used for teaching but also shorter and medium formats, which due to their compactness, are often easier to exploit in

⁴⁵ <http://www.ark.ac.uk/schools/resources/GenderandFamilyRoles.pdf> January 5 2013, 23:58.

⁴⁶ <http://fundit.ie/project/men-and-women---a-short-film> January 5 2013, 11:40.

⁴⁷ <http://fundit.ie/project/men-and-women---a-short-film> January 5 2013, 11:40.

⁴⁸ <http://fundit.ie/project/men-and-women---a-short-film> January 5 2013, 11:40.

class" (Thaler, *Teaching English With Films* 21). The use of short films and clips in the EFL classroom provides the opportunity "for practicing creative skills. Individually, in pairs or small groups, learners may present their personal perspectives on a film. Creativity needs to be confined to the written mode, but can include spoken, manual, scenic, acoustic, visual, and, of course, audio-visual forms" (Thaler, *Teaching English With Films* 47).

As a comparison of the short film and the written version reveals some differences and similarities, this resource of information lends itself as an ideal discussion in the EFL classroom. The teacher, however, should not merely aim at a comparison of the two genres, but the cinematic techniques should be touched upon. Ideally, students are encouraged to work independently from the teacher, an approach that enhances student involvement in the lesson. Therefore, a webquest might be applied here to give students further details on the issue instead of offering a traditional teaching sequence.

Erben, Ban and Castañeda define the webquest as

[...] a tool used to focus learners' attention on particular content and promote their inquiry through the World Wide Web. These activities can be carried out individually or in small groups, depending on the organization [sic] of the task. As the link to content information is provided by the creator of the activity, it permits students to access the content they need to complete the task without spending a lot of time searching. (138)

Most importantly, the main purpose of webquests is "to answer questions about a specific topic" (138). For this reason, the teacher has to give suitable instructions, most probably on a printed worksheet, "on a webpage, in a PowerPoint, in a Word document, or even using one of many free and available online webquest makers" (138). Regarding the contents of the webquest, aspects of setting, plot, characters and symbolism can be compared to the short story read in class. Apart from that, aspects specifically related to the film genre can be analysed and interpreted. In view of the individualisation in the classroom it has to be addressed here that "[t]he benefit is that, if you want the class to do the same type of webquest, but you want to direct ELLs to different websites because of their language level, all you need to do is change the web addresses within the webquest" (138).

With this in mind, it should be stressed that due to the fact that the short film only depicts the most relevant scenes of the story, the analysis of it is restricted to those, and thus, it allows students to work more efficiently than with a full-length film. Under those circumstances, learners can focus on central ideas in the film, followed by a comparison and necessary

research on the internet to answer the questions provided. As already mentioned above, the webquest can be carried out in pairs in order to raise students' motivation and foster peer support.

8. Micheál Ó Conghaile's Short Story "*Father*"

Central to this section is Ó Conghaile's short story "*Father*", particularly discussing the theme of homosexuality as well as a suitable implementation in the EFL classroom which allows addressing both a thematic analysis and formal aspects of literature.

8.1. Micheál Ó Conghaile- Concise Biography

The author of the short story "*Father*" was "[b]orn in 1962, [as] a native of the Connemara Gaeltacht" (Breathnach and Ó. Conaola 11). Ó Conghaile "[h]as written several books, including a social history of Connemara and the Aran Islands [...]" (11). More precisely, "[h]e published his first collection of short stories, *Mac an tSagairt* (The priest's son), in 1986, and during the same year he was rewarded an MA by University College Galway [...]" (Koch 1372). Furthermore, "[h]is second collection of stories, *An Fear a Phléase* (The man who exploded), was published in 1997" (1372). Most importantly, Ó Conghaile "[h]as won many national literary awards, [...] including the Butler Literary Award in 1997. He also won the Hennessy Award for Literature in 1997 and was nominated New Irish Writer of the Year" (Breathnach and Ó. Conaola 11). Apart from his role as a writer, he has a publishing company which was founded in 1985.⁴⁹

8.2. Analysis of the Story Level

In the following section, the most essential aspects of the plot will be discussed, as well as features of settings and background which are supposed to illustrate the Irish influence of the story. Besides, the characters will be analysed, followed by the discussion of the themes and motifs occurring in the text.

8.2.1. Plot

"*Father*" tells the story of a twenty-two-year-old man, facing the difficulties after disclosing his sexual orientation as a homosexual. Due to this situation, his relationship to his father is put to the test and finally it is indicated that it stands the challenges.

The story begins with the father's reaction to the young man's confession. Reflecting upon this emotional response, the protagonist reveals his past and in particular, his mother's death.

⁴⁹ <http://www.irishwriters-online.com/o-conghaile-micheal/> January 21 2014, 20:54.

During the conversation between the son and the father, the reader gets to know events of the past, such as the fact that the son quite frequently spends his time in Dublin in order to meet his gay acquaintances. After the father has shown his concern about his son's decision, also asking questions about his health, he seems to be relieved and intends to leave the house. Though, before this is actually done, the ending of the story emphasises the father's acceptance: "Will you stand by the braddy [...] cow for me?" he asked, 'while I'm milking ... she's always had a sore teat ...'" (Ó Conghaile 684).

8.2.2. Settings and Background

The setting of the short story is a matter of conjecture, but it can be assumed that the story is set in rural Ireland. When the father and the son talk about the social environment knowing about the protagonist's sexual orientation, he claims that he " [...] can't hide anything ... especially in a remote place like this" (Ó Conghaile 682). In contrast to the countryside, Dublin is mentioned as a place of anonymity that makes it easier for him to live according to his personality. The portrayal of this city, however, is a rather negative one describing Dublin as being "[...] quare and dangerous [...]" (680). Whereas the father views Dublin as a place that threatens his son, he is the one who goes there because the place threatening his personality is rural Ireland. In the end, this representation is partly balanced due to the father's support.

Moreover, as it is described in other short stories chosen for this diploma thesis, the aspect of religion is also central to "*Father*". Especially for the father - belonging to an earlier generation - faith plays an essential role, which is represented in his language as well. (Further information on the features of his language will be given in the course of this chapter.)

After the son's confession, the father intends to leave the house, but he

[...] paused at the door the way he always did on his way out and dunked his finger in the holy-water font hung up on the door-jamb. It was an old wooden font with the Sacred Heart on it my mother brought back from a pilgrimage to Knock the time the Pope was over. I could see him trying to bless himself, not even sure if it was the finger or thumb he'd dipped in the holy water he was using. (Ó Conghaile 684)

The father's religious beliefs might also have an impact on his perception of homosexuality and his extremely emotional response. In rural Ireland, it can be assumed that religion has an even greater influence on the people's reactions than in a city.

Concerning cultural traditions in Ireland, the school ball is addressed by the main character who chooses to attend it together with a girl due to the pressure that lies on him. He says: “‘I asked her in the first place because I had to take somebody to the school formal. Everyone was taking some girl or other. I couldn’t go alone [...]’” (Ó Conghaile 679f). Being aware of the fact that numerous teenagers attend an event like that, it is an even more challenging situation for a homosexual person to stick to social standards and behave in a way other people expect, namely to go there with a woman his age rather than a young man. Generally speaking, “[m]ost secondary school students in Ireland attend a Debutante Ball on the completion of their final year in school. Debs balls can occur as early as mid July whilst others can be as late as Christmas.”⁵⁰ Again, the importance of traditions is emphasised and the protagonist is the one who rebels against it.

8.2.3. Characters and Characterisation

Both the son and the father are unnamed in the short story, and until the very end their names are not revealed. The only names occurring in the text are those of Mark, Keith and Philip, who all experience quite problematic coming out stories.

The son, as the main protagonist in the story, is mainly characterised indirectly through his behaviour and thoughts during the conversation with his father. At the very beginning of the story he mentions the crying of his father and notes that his “Mum died nine months ago in the accident” (Ó Conghaile 676). Concerning other family members, “my sisters” (676) as well as his father’s “brothers and my mother’s brothers- my uncles- made all the arrangements” (676). Even though his sisters have moved to London, they seem to have a close relationship to their brother and emphasise that they will support him in case he needs their help (682). After the mother’s death, the protagonist decided “that it was best I stay with Dad since I was the youngest- the only one still at home all year round” (676). More precisely, during the talk the father doubts whether his son can be sure of his choice, being only “twenty-two” (679).

Throughout the entire short story, nervousness and a feeling of emotional confusion predominate, which reflect on the protagonist’s personality. It seems that up to the age of twenty-two, he tried to hide his sexual orientation and thus, he might have developed strategies to avoid the revelation of his attitude that is part of his personality. Here, this

⁵⁰ <http://www.schooldays.ie/articles/debs> January 29 2014, 19:12.

confession does not just indicate his sexual coming out, but rather the question whether his true personality will be accepted or not. Due to the fact that he “was the youngest, the only son” (682) it might be even harder for his traditional father to change his opinion. It appears to be that the only way the son can finally respect himself is to know about his father’s respect.

The title of the story refers to the father of the homosexual young man, who has to cope with a situation he is not prepared for. Being informed on his son’s homosexual orientation is an experience he can hardly handle, which is displayed by his emotional response and his son thinking that he has “never seen [...] [his] da crying before” (676). That is to say, he seems to be a conservative person who values traditions and beliefs from past generations, and thus, wants his son to live a similar life. In the context of values, the issue of religion should be stressed and aspects of the father’s religious beliefs are revealed. Not only through the interjection “God save us [...]” (677), which more is an expression of his shock, but his routine shown at the end of the story when he “dunked his finger in the holy-water font hung up on the door-jamb” (684). On a surface level, the combination of religion and his attitude towards homosexuality make the impression of a relatively traditionally thinking person, but in the end his willingness to accept alternative ways of living indicates his openness.

Although the main character’s sisters are only mentioned in passing in the text, they are described as open-minded persons who know about their brother’s homosexuality and keep it a secret from their father. In contrast to the son, they do not live in their home-country, but live independently from their family in London. Moreover, they seem to represent their brother’s biggest source of emotional support.

8.2.4. Themes and Motifs

In the course of the story, Philip, one of the protagonist’s friends, commits suicide because his family repudiates him. In general, “[s]uicide recurs both as a theme structuring works and as a motif supporting other themes or characterizing [sic] figures” (Daemmrigh and Daemmrigh 236). In “*Father*”, this topic is integrated to emphasise the consequences that the social environment has caused, but at the same time it lets assume Philip’s fragile emotional state at this given situation. In contrast to the protagonist’s father, who in the end might stand by his son and his decision, Philip’s parents react rather severely and emotionally coldly. For his parents this situation results in unforeseeable consequences and lead to their son’s death.

In the context of acceptance and respect for each other's life choices, the issue of tolerance should be addressed. In "*Father*" the parents react differently, thus they all have various points of view on the topic as well as coping strategies to handle the situation. Quite frequently, "parents rarely realize [sic] that children are gay until they are fully grown" (Boswell 15), or their children's behaviour foreshadows their sexual orientation. In this case, parents do not seem to admit it until their children come out.

In fact, "[t]he history of public reactions to homosexuality is [...] in some measure a history of social tolerance generally" (Boswell 16). Tolerance not only implies to have the ability to accept alternative ways of life, but to show respect towards them. Certainly, "the reactions of those hostile to them [homosexuals] thus illustrate intolerance" (Boswell 15). In the given short story, Mark's father, Keith's father and Philip's pupils as well as his parents personalise intolerant behaviour of society. Tolerance is merely depicted by the father's statements at the very end of the story and the kind of relief he creates with it. Because of that "gay people have been all but totally dependent on popular attitudes toward them for freedom, a sense of identity, and in many cases survival" (Boswell 15). As it is the case with the main character, homosexuals are subject to the attitude of their social environment. Despite suicide and tolerance, the aspect of prejudice can be associated with the way of dealing with homosexuality. As mentioned above, the father in the short story is concerned about his son's health, referring to the possibility of having AIDS.

Generally, "the theme of prejudice has been a central motif throughout the history of Western literature" (Samuels 9). In this particular text, prejudices about homosexuals include unjustified assumptions which lead to homophobia of the minor characters' social environment. However, homophobia is not just a result of personal attitudes, but a long history of negative experience and fear. Samuels points out that "[t]his means that when particular people or literary characters express their homophobia, they are manifesting an ideology of oppression that has deep structural and cultural roots" (Samuels 15). Even though it does not appear to be an easy task for him, the father can be considered as the person who finally does not adhere to this negative attitude.

8.2.4.1. Features of Irishness: Homosexuality

Apparently, the issue of homosexuality is central to the short story, and influences the entire development of the father's attitude and reaction. It can be argued that the father's way of

coping with the news partly continues to be representative for 21st century Ireland. However, the “impact of the gay rights movement and acceptance of gays in mainstream society, gay studies and gay literature are emerging as respected fields” (Werlock 329). Obviously, the changing attitude of society resulted in a development of Irish literature.

Nevertheless, “[d]efining gay literature is sometimes difficult, given the frequent vague and subtle references to gay characters or THEMES [sic] found in works” (329). In the case of “*Father*”, the revelation of the theme is a more evident one, even though the text does not mention specific words directly referring to homosexuality. During the conversation between the father and the son, neither of them dares to refer to the son’s sexual orientation:

‘Are you telling me you’re ...’ ‘Yes,’ I said, half - consciously interrupting him with the same reticence, unsure he was going to finish his sentence this time, or not. (Ó Conghaile 677)

Here, the question arises whether or not the son even wants his father to actually say that he is gay, and the tension in the situation is clearly expressed. Therefore, it can be argued that the thematisation of the issue of homosexuality continues to be a taboo topic, especially in the context of the father-son relationship.

Furthermore, the focus of the story is the main protagonist’s feelings, particularly his fears and doubts. Apparently, it took him a long time to find a way to talk to his father, and he concealed this information for a considerable amount of time. Therefore, the focus lies on the emotional rather than on the sexual aspect. Indeed, “[n]ot all gay literature deals specifically with sex; most focuses on emotion” (Werlock 329). Although, the same is true for this short story, the father obviously is concerned about his son’s health:

“‘And what about your health?’ he managed to say, nervously. ‘Is your health Ok?’ ‘Oh, I’m fine, just fine,’ I replied quick as I could, more than glad to be able to give such a clear answer. I started tapping my fingers. Then it struck me just what he was asking.” (Ó Conghaile 681)

Just after the question, the son answers, only realising after a few moments what the intention of the question was in the first place. Because of that, the father associates homosexuality with the possibility of having AIDS. Naturally, it is not only the father who draws this conclusion, but in general, gay literature is often related to literature discussing the theme of AIDS. In the light of this reaction, it is not surprising that “[t]he first AIDS fiction, by and large, was gay fiction. This changed, but not very quickly or very drastically” (Pearl 3).

Moreover, “[...] most AIDS fiction produced in the 1980s was written by gay men about gay men. There was almost no literature produced by other afflicted groups, like intravenous drug users and women” (Pearl 3). The reasons why this used to be the case are diverse, but it is interesting to note that AIDS is one of the first things the father asks during the conversation. Naturally, as a parent he wants his son to live a healthy life, and does not know how to cope with his son’s confession. As mentioned above, the father is a victim of prejudices which finally influence his thoughts.

Additionally, “[w]hile coming out stories are in some significant ways about the triumph of a gay identity over the disapproval of family, society, and friends, they are still very much about the yearning for a sacrifice of those entities” (Pearl 9). Despite the son knowing that he has to inform his father on his sexual orientation, he seems to need his father’s acceptance in order to live a life according to his attitude. On the one hand, his coming out might contribute to gaining revelation because he reveals his secret, but on the other hand, it seems that the son is waiting for his father’s approval and understanding for his decision. Therefore, “[t]he coming out story, the most popular and common gay literature before the time of AIDS, was about loss at the same time that it was about liberation” (Pearl 9). The son finds a way to rebel against the norms that society sets and thus, he increases his freedom. This degree of freedom that homosexuals gain, is diminished by the attitude of their social environment. The peoples’ reactions and attitude towards the issue of homosexuality become evident when the protagonist mentions his friends’ coming out experiences.

At the end of the short story, the son thinks of

[t]he ones that were kicked out by their families when they found out. Mark whose father called him a dirty bastard and told him not to come near the house gain as long as he lived; Keith whose da gave him a bad beating when he discovered he’d a lover, and who kept him locked up at home for a month even though he was near twenty; Philip, [...], who’d no option but to leave his teaching job after one of his worst pupils saw him leaving a particular Sunday-night venue and the news spread by lunch-time the following Monday. (Ó Conghaile 683)

The liberation, the homosexuals in the story are supposed to get, does by no means always result in the degree of freedom they wish to have. Apparently, the negative consequences they have to face are harder to cope with than any kind of freedom could compensate. One of the main protagonist’s friends cannot live with his family’s reaction and obviously committed suicide. His family “find[s] his body laid out on the bed in their room, empty pillboxes on his

chest, [...] a short crumpled note telling then that his only wish was to die where he was born, that he loved them, and was sorry he hurt them but saw no other way” (Ó Conghaile 683).

In the short story, the portrayal of homosexuality and the way it is perceived by the people, that could be considered to be the character’s attachment figures, is quite a negative one at the beginning. Though, the ending of the story let the reader assume the father’s acceptance of his son’s sexual orientation and the support he will provide. Even though, it might be far-fetched to theorise about the symbolism of the ending, it could be assumed that when the father asks his son to “stand by the braddy [...] cow” (684), it might imply that he himself will stand by his son.

8.3. Analysis of the Discourse Level

The following section will draw special attention to both the narrative technique and the language applied in the short story. Regarding the narrative technique, the dialogue between the father and the son will be discussed particularly.

8.3.1. Narrative Technique

As “*Father*” tells the story of a young man revealing his sexual orientation, the text can be analysed in terms of the features of the “coming out story” (Pearl 9). The son’s confession basically depends on the approval of his father, and refers to the last phase of his coming out story.

Generally speaking, “[...] the coming out story presents a very historically, politically and culturally specific conceptualization [sic] of same-sex desire” (Saxey 117). It depicts the character’s life at a turning point in life, whose process will affect the way he deals with his identity, or more specifically, “[...] the coming out story offers a path for the protagonist- a series of steps and stages that ends with the recognition and announcement of identity” (117). For Ó Conghaile’s short story, the story does not merely end with the son’s concession, but, as already mentioned, with the father’s approval. Though, before the son realises, he doubts whether or not his father will still accept him. Saxey points out that “[m]any of the steps of the standard coming out story require money and mobility or rely on a certain family background or social setting” (118). Even though the protagonist is aware of the rumours circulating about him, the only information he seems to worry about is his father’s opinion, which determines the entire coming out story. As it can be seen in “*Father*”, “[t]exts place

differing degrees of emphasis on the various steps, depending on how they conceptualize [sic] gay identity and oppression” (Saxey 118).

Coming out stories frequently involve emigration or migration within the country, and in this context “[...] leaving the family is a vital step towards liberation” (118). Therefore, “[t]he protagonist leaving his [...] hometown – often for a city- has come to seem a logical, satisfying conclusion to a coming out story” (Saxey 118). The main character spends his time in Dublin (Ó Conghaile 680), which partly is described as a kind of freedom in the story, but at the same time the returning home symbolises the final emancipation. Thus, the coming out story closes with a happy ending due to both the father’s and the son’s acceptance of the situation.

This kind of foreshadowing in the last paragraph of the short story does not exactly state the father’s agreement, nevertheless, the reader might suppose that the son will continue having a balanced relationship with his father. Even though it is not explicitly mentioned, a happy ending is foreshadowed in the last sentence.

8.3.2. Language

As mentioned above, the title implies the major focus of the short story, in particular the father and the changes in his life he has to process as well as the son’s challenges. In this case, the “*Father*” determines with his attitude the future life of the son, and the way he can finally realise his identity. Whereas at the beginning of the story, the father is the one who creates the main source of sorrow for the son, he is the one who inspires his son with confidence in the end.

The use of interjections by the father after the son’s confession suggest “[t]he terrible shock to his system” (Ó Conghaile 676). The expression ““God save us [...]”” (677) indicates the father’s worries about his son and the fear that his concerns come true. In fact, “interjections with god all potentially signalling negative emotionality” (Bednarek 88), this definitely is the case in this context. The father is not used to being confronted with the issue of homosexuality or even to having a conversation about it. More precisely, the interjection reveals the father’s emotional state, whereas these “[n]egative emotions are important and point to conflict” (88).

8.4. Practical Implementation of the Story in the EFL Classroom

It can be assumed that the issue of homosexuality implies a considerable number of misunderstandings and prejudices that might influence the reader's perception of the text. The same is true of teenagers who discuss the short story together in the EFL classroom. In order to arrive at an understanding of the subject matter that is based on facts rather than on personal opinions, an adequate preparation is necessary before reading the text. To come up with an appropriate preparation of the students, the teacher might ask general questions about the topic that is central to the short story. Ajideh stresses that "[q]uestioning can be regarded as another type of top-down processing activity" (Ajideh 9). However, "[q]uestions may be generated by the teacher or by the students and should be done before the reading, rather than after the reading" (Ajideh 9). Apart from preparing students for the subject matter, it shows students how to approach the text in terms of reading strategies that learners need to successfully reach the competences of the CEFR.

After "the topic is presented, students are asked to work in groups and write a list in two columns. The first column lists things about the topic that they are sure of, and the second lists things that they are not sure of or don't know" (Williams in Ajideh 9). Most importantly, the purpose of this activity is not to impose a certain opinion or point of view on the pupils, but rather it should encourage students to reflect upon the information they have on the issue of homosexuality and it should motivate them to differentiate between knowledge of facts and prejudices. The aim of this activity is to make students aware of this difference, and probably support them in not only reading this text critically, but also reflect in everyday situations. In terms of the improvement of their reading skills, learners should activate any kind of knowledge that will support their logical way of thinking when reading the text. In the post-reading stage, the readers could identify the prejudices in the text, followed by a comparison of their own assumptions with the ones in the short story. With the help of this post-reading phase, students are engaged in the subject matter and are asked to structure the ideas in the text as well as their own ideas.

In addition to that, the post-reading stage provides the opportunity to combine the reading skill with enhancing the students' writing competences. As opposed to conventional summaries, learners might be asked to "[c]hange the climax"⁵¹. They "[c]hoose of part of the story that reached a climax. If something different had happened then, how would it have

⁵¹<http://education.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/smallurban/soar/documents/Reading%20Extension%20Activities.pdf> January 29 2014, 23:01.

been affected the outcome?’’⁵² Apart from being creative and showing alternative ways of thinking, learners have to see things from a different perspective and have to analyse the motivation behind these thoughts. If the teacher intends to focus more on a writing task which offers an authentic purpose- especially for adhering to the guidelines in the CEFR- and instead of fostering creative thinking, students could do research on the internet before writing an article on the issue of homosexuality and prejudices. By doing this, students gain real-life information and may write an article that includes relevant information on the issue. On the whole, with reading this short story EFL learners should get the opportunity to gain an insight into the subject matter, as well as working on their language skills in order to reach standardised guidelines.

⁵²<http://education.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/smallurban/soar/documents/Reading%20Extension%20Activities.pdf> January 29 2014, 23:01.

9. Patricia Scanlan's Short Story "*Façades*"

9.1. Patricia Scanlan- Concise Biography

Scanlan is the author of another short story that will be discussed in the context of Irish family life. "*Façades*" is, like "*Flesh And Blood*", part of the short story collection "*Irish Girls Are Back In Town*". Apart from short fiction, Patricia Scanlan „is the author of many bestselling novels, including *Two For Joy*, *Francesca's Party*, *Mirror, Mirror*, *City Woman*, *Promises, Promises*, *City Girl*, *City Lives* and *Finishing Touches*" (Ahern et al. 92). Scanlan had previously worked at a library in Dublin, where she was born, before she became a writer.⁵³ After numerous literary texts she has written so far, "in Ireland alone Patricia has to date sold over one million copies of her books [...]. All have gone straight to the number-one spot on the Irish bestseller lists. Her last four books have also been on the *Sunday Times* Top Ten".⁵⁴

9.2. Analysis of the Story Level

9.2.1. Plot

The story starts with a phone call between Kathy Reynolds and her friend Mary Clancy from Dubai. As it is the time before Christmas, Mary calls her friend in order to arrange a meeting for "the day after Stephen's day" (Ahern et al. 93). After this call, Kathy is full with concern about her future life due to the financial situation she and her family are in. Thus, she does not "want Mary Clancy coming to her house when she had no oil for the central heating" (Ahern et al. 95). Through these thoughts, the reader gets to know that "[h]er husband Bill had been out of a job for the last fourteen months and there was no sign of anything on the horizon" (Ahern et al. 94).

Because of their financial condition, it is hard for Kathy and her husband Bill to organise Christmas presents for their family members. Kathy knows that their current situation does not allow them to spend money, however, Bill planned to "borrow a couple of hundred Euro from the credit union to splash out on Christmas" (Ahern et al. 108). The couple disputed about what they could possibly do to solve their problems until Kathy insults Bill heavily and he storms "out of the front door, slamming it hard behind him" (Ahern et al. 109). Now Kathy finds herself on her own in the house, with the children being at her sister-in-law's, and her husband being anywhere she does not know. So, she decides it is "the ideal time to sort out

⁵³ http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/7117.Patricia_Scanlan November 27 2013, 18:26.

⁵⁴ <http://www.harlequin.com/author.html?authorid=1062> November 27 2013, 18:26.

the Christmas present situation” (Ahern et al. 110) and prepares presents for her family members she has received herself a year ago to finally have an acceptable Christmas festival with her family. On the day after Stephen's Day, Kathy's friend Mari from Dubai visits her, which puts Kathy under pressure. In order to avoid her friend noticing her miserable situation that she and her family are in, Kathy decorates the house and makes sure that it does not show any sign of poverty. After having a long conversation with Mari, Kathy finds out that her presumably perfect life is less flawless than she has thought before. This motivates her to tell Mari the truth about their private financial situation. Because of that, Kathy realises the value of her life, which is her family and friends.

9.2.2. Background and Setting

In the course of the story, the “Society of St. Vincent de Paul” is mentioned which “is a direct service non-profit organization [sic] whose work primarily involves person-to-person contact with people who have a variety of needs”.⁵⁵ SVP is a hugely important charitable organization which a plethora of Irish depend on, in short it is an integral part of Irish society and supports lower social classes in a variety of ways. This society is referred to in the context of the family's financial situation, whereas the main protagonist does not intend to accept its help. Indeed, SVP aims at providing “as a short-term safety net for those who fall outside the care of the Welfare State or need emergency financial support”.⁵⁶ To be more precise, SVP offers assistance in case individuals cannot be supported by the state anymore. Most importantly, the “Society of St. Vincent de Paul” does not merely provide help, but it wants “to rectify the causes of poverty which perpetuate the problems”.⁵⁷ Thus, it can be concluded that the SVP works on help for self-help of the people involved. As “*Façades*” is set in Dublin, it is interesting to note that “[t]he Dublin Region of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul is the largest region of the Society in Ireland”.⁵⁸ In general, charitable organisations highly depend on financial contributions to offer suitable support. In the past, however, “[t]he country's wealth has grown considerably and there are greater numbers of wealthy individuals who have donor potential” (McGee and Donoghue 368). Consequently, the “Society of St. Vincent de Paul” does not merely involve lower social classes or individuals who need aid of any kind, but those people who can contribute to providing this help. As SVP is omnipresent in

⁵⁵ <http://www.svp.ie/About-Us.aspx> December 1 2013, 17:35.

⁵⁶ <http://www.svp.ie/About-Us.aspx> December 1 2013, 17:58.

⁵⁷ <http://www.svp.ie/About-Us.aspx> December 1 2013, 18:07.

⁵⁸ <http://www.svp.ie/contact-us/dublin.aspx> December 1 2013, 18:16.

Irish society, special attention can be drawn to this aspect in the context of teaching "*Façades*" in the EFL classroom.

The main protagonist of the short story seems to avoid the thought of poverty, especially concerning the possibility that even middle-class families could be involved. Relating to this development in Ireland, the period of the Celtic Tiger is addressed and it is mentioned that this time is definitely over for Irish individuals (Ahern et al. 96). Devine takes into consideration that "Irish society has undergone substantial change in the past thirty years, typified by membership of the European Union, a rapidly changing social and economic structure, urbanisation and competition within a global economy" (49). This positive trend of the Irish economy, known as the Celtic Tiger, has influenced people's lives considerably, however, it can be assumed that only a small number of the Irish have benefited from it. A shift from "the Irish economic 'miracle' which prevailed between 1993 and 2007, and its spectacular collapse since 2008" (Kitchin et al. 1320) is noticeable and affects living conditions in Ireland. In fact, it can be stated that "[t]he effects of the international financial crisis, while practically ubiquitous, have been felt more strongly and deeply in Ireland than in many developed countries" (1303).

Places mentioned in the text are Sandymount, Dubai, London and Malta, whereas the centre of the protagonists' life is Sandymount, which "developed in response to the growing popularity of this seaside location and improved commuter links to the expanding city of Dublin" (Heritage Council 12). The main characters in the short story are described as a middle-class family, who is a victim of the time when the economic situation in Ireland changed for the worse. Interestingly, however, Sandymount "came to prominence as a seaside resort in the 1820s as Dublin grew and prosperous visitors sought clean air, wide views and a relaxed holiday atmosphere away from the city" (Heritage Council 6). Hence, this place appears to be a wealthy area, where the reader would not suspect families struggling with their financial situation. On a more general level, concerning the teaching of the short story, this aspect provides an ideal opportunity to discuss the issue of hidden poverty and what impact it has on dealing with poverty in the first place.

At the very beginning of the story Kathy's friend Mari Clancy is introduced to the reader and in contrast to Kathy's modest life in Ireland, Mari leads a prosperous life in Dubai. Indeed, the United Arab Emirates represent wealth and a luxurious way of life: Most interestingly, "[t]he United Arab Emirates (UAE), an Arabian Gulf State, has a population of 3.1 million, of

whom only a small minority are citizens of the country, the remainder being expatriate workers and their families" (Carter et al. 75). Consequently, the same is true of Mari who lived in Ireland before she moved to Dubai, and whose husband is a "wealthy consultant [...] in the Emirates" (Ahern et al. 93). The United Arab Emirates tend to represent themselves as a highly affluent country with landmarks such as "the Burj Al Arab, with its sky-high helipad, for example, or the Atlantis Hotel on the phantasmagorical palm-shaped island, Palm Jumeirah, which has some rooms facing an 11-million-litre aquarium packed with exotic fish" (Dubai 3). Bearing in mind these facts, similarities can be drawn to the representation of the UAE in the short story.

Apart from Sandymount and Dubai, London is brought up when Kathy realises that she and her family cannot afford their "trips to London where Kathy's sister lived" (Ahern et al. 96). Indeed, it is a fact that "the Irish have been migrating to Britain in varying numbers of centuries" (Ryan 6) and Kathy's sister seems to be one of the migrants whose emigration to London is accompanied by a much better situation compared to Kathy's life in Ireland.

9.2.3. Characters and Characterisation

The focus of the short story is the character Kathy Reynolds, who once was "a clerical officer" (Ahern et al. 106) before she got married to Bill, her husband. Apparently, she stays at home after having her children, which in turn disqualifies her for the job market. Kathy is a realistic person who is aware of the challenging situation she is in and she asks herself whether there is any chance for her to find a job, knowing that she is "an ex-clerical officer with rusty secretarial skills who wasn't very computer literate"(107). This fact is problematic for her during the entire short story, because she feels that there is no realistic possibility for her to work. Although she is a thoughtful person, her friends do not realise the mood she is in. Kathy seems to be a quite independent person who wants to solve problems on her own and does not want her pride to be wounded.

Regarding her family life, Kathy is mother of three children, namely of "Jessica, being the youngest" (113), and "Matthew and Rachel, her elder daughter" (101). More than once, the reader gets to know how Kathy spends time together with her family, and her children in particular. Hence, she appears to be a family-friendly and caring mother and wife. Kathy is married to Bill, who is currently out of work even though he is "a trained professional [...] with years of work experience" (97). Bill used to be "a human resource manager for a staff of

five hundred employees” (97), just before “the multinational computer company that he worked for was closing” (95). Besides this direct information on Bill, he can be described as a loyal husband. Especially, this is noticeable when he tells Kathy that she is the ideal wife and he appreciates her (112), although, they have had a conflict beforehand.

One of the protagonist’s sisters is Ella, who is “a community welfare officer and knew a lot about unemployment” (97), which is especially helpful for Kathy and her family. Whereas Ella lives relatively close to Kathy, her other sister moved to London (96). A relatively close relationship between Kathy’s family and their relatives can be assumed, as they are frequently mentioned in a positive way and the adults take turns in minding each other’s children (112).

Central to the short story is Mari Clancy’s visit from Dubai, because she puts her friend under pressure by announcing her arrival in her home country. Her last visit in Ireland was two years ago (118), when her friend’s family did not have any existential fear. Mari and Kathy got to know each other when they were teenagers (118), and “[t]hey’d gone to secondary school together and worked in the civil service before Mari had fallen in love with a young doctor” (118). Apparently, Kathy is looking forward to her friend’s visit, but in her difficult financial situation, she cannot help but feel a bit of jealousy. In the course of the story, it seems that Kathy is a down-to-earth person, who tries not to be influenced by other peoples’ belongings. Besides, through her behaviour and attitudes, Kathy is represented as a sensitive person on the one hand, but on the other hand she is determined and has a clear conception of the people she wants to spend time with and those she prefers to avoid. In particular, their neighbour Owen influences Kathy’s mood considerably, even though, “Kathy did not normally make snap judgments about people, but she knew very soon after she met him that he was someone she couldn’t stand” (100).

Her neighbour is represented as a person who is

a broker, who had begun to make good money. On the way up he reveled in his yuppie lifestyle. He and his wife, Carol, and their two children Jason and Emma, had moved into the house next door mid-summer, and had proceeded to make themselves utterly unpopular with their neighbours. (Ahern et al. 100)

Of all the members of the Reynolds family, Kathy seems to be the one who is most affected by the pressure that the Pierce family puts on her with their wealthy lifestyle. To put it more simply, “Owen Pierce was the most big-headed, boastful, superior individual Kathy had ever had the fortune to encounter” (100), what makes her situation even worse. One of the

neighbours who supports her is “Irene, her other next-door neighbor [sic]” (104). The way the characters are represented is influenced by Kathy’s perception of them because the reader sees them through her eyes. On the whole, there is a distinction between the characters appreciated by the protagonist and those she rejects.

9.2.4. Themes and Motifs

Central to the short story is the issue of envy which results in avoiding those people who are the cause of this feeling. A drastic change of circumstances forces Kathy and her family to cope with a lifestyle they are not used to. Although, they cannot continue living the same standard they have had before, they try to make the best out of the situation. However, when the family’s friends and neighbours obviously have more possibilities than Kathy’s, the feeling of envy becomes apparent. Envy “is not concerned with keeping something that is understood to be one’s own, but rather with the desirability of someone else’s good” (Seigneuret *A-J* 676). Being aware of the fact that Mari is well-off with her life in Dubai, it is challenging for Kathy to face this situation and she compares her friends to her neighbour Owen, who are both richer than her family.

She had by all accounts a glittering lifestyle out in the Emirates. A life full of parties and shopping and exotic travel. Her husband, Brett, had become a very successful consultant and now they were very affluent. Brett and Owen would get on well, Kathy reflected, grinning. In fact it would be hilarious to listen to the pair of them trying to outdo each other. (Ahern et al. 118)

Even though, Kathy is aware of the fact of how lucky she is to have her family, it can be noticed that she cannot help envying her friends’ lives. On a more general level, “cases of envy suggest that [...] the desired good is much less relevant than the mere fact that someone else [...] possesses a good” (Seigneuret *A-J* 676). Without Mari or Owen, Kathy would not think of a luxurious life in Dubai (Ahern et al. 93) or “the biggest satellite dish, the biggest barbecue pit, [...] [or] the flashiest car” (100). To be more precise, “one may be envious of a good never before desired until observing it in someone else’s possession” (Seigneuret *A-J* 676). Another theme occurring in the short story is the issue of family and family life that is a vital part of the protagonists’ lives and represents their only constant factor in life. The ending of the short story displays how grateful Bill and Kathy are to be together, even though they struggle with life.

In addition to the themes and motifs mentioned above, Kathy feels ashamed because of her inability to have the standard of living she wishes to have. From Bills' behaviour, it can be concluded that his unemployment causes feelings of shame. In fact, it seems to be the case that they "feel in some profound way inferior to others-they perceive themselves as deeply flawed and defective or as bad individuals or as failures" (Bouson 5). For this reason, Kathy and Bill try to hide their problems, whereas in particular they try hard to conceal their situation from their children.

9.2.4.1. Features of Irishness: Poverty and Social Class

Most importantly, the most central theme in the short story is the issue of poverty and the way in which the characters cope with the changes in their lives. Therefore, money is an essential theme in the short story and determines all the actions that are taken by the characters. On the one hand, the Reynolds hardly get by with what they have and are forced to tackle their problems due to unemployment, and on the other hand Mari, Brett and Owen are in an ideal financial condition. For this reason, both the themes of poverty and wealth are an integral part of the short story.

In fact, the issues of "poverty, hunger, and inequities in the distribution of wealth" (Seigneuret *L-Z* 869) have been themes frequently used in literature. The family's financial problems influence their way of living and its social interaction. In the short story, this becomes evident when a friend announces her visit in advance and Kathy thinks that "to crown it all, she'd had the call from Mari to say she would be back in town for Christmas. More expense" (Ahern et al. 94). Regardless of the changing social life, the protagonists' positive attitude seems to diminish as their "money got tighter their savings dwindled and their standard of living noticeably diminished. Kathy increasingly felt like burying her head in the sand like the proverbial ostrich" (Ahern et al. 95).

In the context of poverty and wealth, social class plays a central role in the story and stresses Kathy and her family. Indeed, it seems that "[c]lass greatly affects the way individuals, families, and communities prioritize [sic] particular ways of living."⁵⁹ While her acquaintances lead luxurious lives, the main characters struggle with keeping their standard of living. To be more precise, "[a]long with these differing class levels and their respective access to wealth and earning power come capabilities and deprivations closely associated with

⁵⁹ <http://literacle.com/literary-social-class/> December 28 2013, 11:16.

such rankings. Literature that deals with social class often comments on these capabilities and deprivations."⁶⁰ By comparing their own family with their neighbours' life, Kathy's children are aware of the fact that their living standard is quite different from their own, but at the same time they do not realise the seriousness of their situation.

9.3. Analysis of the Discourse Level

9.3.1. Narrative Technique

The point of view applied in this short story is a third person limited point of view. Kathy is the focalizer of the short story and the reader experiences the whole situation through her eyes. Griffith explains that “narrators of the *third-person limited point of view* [sic] refer to characters as ‘he’ and ‘she,’ and still have more knowledge of the fictional world than we do of our worlds” (45). The reader merely gets to know Kathy’s thoughts and feelings, without knowing anything about her husband, her children or her friends, even though their feelings might be implied by their behaviour.

The perspective used can be illustrated by the scene of the short story when Kathy tries to justify why she does not want to meet her friend Mary:

She didn’t want Mari Clancy coming to her house when she had no oil for the central heating. Kathy didn’t want her to know that she’d sold her Fiesta and Bill’s Volvo was in the garage because they hadn’t got the money to tax and insure it. (Ahern et al. 95)

Apart from that, dialogues between the characters are another technique used to forward information. Dialogues as a “mode of presentation” (Stanzel 153) in fiction can be defined as “[s]poken exchanges between or among characters in a dramatic or narrative work; or a literary form [...] based on a debate or discussion” (Baldick 89). In the majority of cases, it is the main protagonist Kathy and one of her family members or friends who communicate. Kathy is constantly involved in the dialogues and interactions, whereas some characters are not included at all.

Concerning shifts of time, flashbacks are prominent in the course of the short story. Mostly, flashbacks are used to refer to the time when Bill still had a job, or when Owen, the family’s neighbour, moved to their area. The flashbacks help to understand the miserable situation Kathy and her family are in. In the following quote, Kathy describes one of the numerous circumstances which make it hard for her to accept Owen:

⁶⁰ <http://literacle.com/literary-social-class/> December 28 2013, 11:02.

Late one afternoon she had been sitting out at the front sunbathing and keeping an eye on her two-year-old niece who she was minding for the afternoon. Jessica, her three-year-old, was entertaining her cousin to a tea party with her toy tea set. They were sitting on an old tartan rug having the greatest fun. [...] Owen was out with his petrol-driven lawnmower. [...] Her lovely peaceful afternoon was ruined. (Ahern et al. 101)

The flashback suggests that, for Kathy, it was not easy to live near Owen in the past, and now, finding herself in a life characterised by financial sorrows, it is even worse for her.

9.3.2. Language

“*Façades*” contains various colloquial expressions and phrases, which characterise the informal environment the story is set in. Especially in situations where the protagonists experience negative emotions, their language is adapted accordingly. Therefore, the aspect of language in this short story focuses on this feature.

One of the informal expressions mentioned is *bloody* [emphasis added] in “Like a bloody dog marking his patch” (Ahern et al. 103). In particular, this expression is “used to express anger, annoyance, or shock, or simply for emphasis”.⁶¹ The latter seems to be relevant for the phrase given above, where Kathy refers to her neighbour Owen and criticises his behaviour. Whereas, at present, *bloody* [emphasis added] is frequently used in informal situations, this has not always been the case. As a matter of fact, “[a]fter the 18th century until quite recently *bloody* [sic] used as a swear word was regarded as unprintable, probably from the mistaken belief that it implied a blasphemous reference to the blood of Christ”.⁶²

What is more, the phrase *blow a gasket* [emphasis added] serves as another example for colloquialism in the short story. Among others, it can be defined as the process of “los[ing] one’s temper”⁶³ – in this case it refers to Kathy’s neighbour Irene complaining about their rival Owen (Ahern et al. 104). In terms of the background of the phrase itself, “to blow a gasket is **to become suddenly angered** [sic]. The surge of energy and anger is compared to the popping (blowing) of an automotive gasket, which is a mechanical seal to prevent the leakage of fluid”.⁶⁴ In “*Façades*” the women are in the middle of raising their complaints about Owen, when Kathy realizes that Irene is “fit to blow a gasket” (104) because of her rage. In the context of Owen as the character who arouses negative emotions, the phrase “Come on,

⁶¹ <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/bloody>-2 December 7 2013, 19:09.

⁶² <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/bloody>-2 December 7 2013, 19:12.

⁶³ http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/blow?q=blow+a+gasket#blow__58 December 7 2013, 19:19.

⁶⁴ <http://englishidiomsblog.blogspot.co.at/2010/12/blowing-gasket.html> December 7 2013, 19:23.

kids, beat those two little horrors” (Ahern et al. 105) illustrate how language serves as the medium to reflect one’s own feelings. Here, the word *horror* [emphasis added] is used to describe “a bad or mischievous person, especially a child”.⁶⁵ On top of that, language might be used as a way of insulting and offending someone, for instance, when Irene refers to their neighbouring family as a whole. Then, she labels the “Pierces [...] [to be] as thick as two short planks” (Ahern et al. 104). This expression is a synonym of “very stupid”⁶⁶, which aims at describing the family members and justifying their unacceptable behaviour.

After all, the title of the short story suggests how the main characters intend to hide their problems. For this text, the definition of the word *facade* [emphasis added] as “a deceptive outward appearance”⁶⁷ is appropriate for the characters’ behaviour. As a matter of fact, everything they do is used as a means to avoid other people noticing their situation. Most importantly, Kathy cannot accept her life as it is herself and continues pretending that her family is alright.

9.4. Practical Implementation of the Short Story in the EFL Classroom

As “*Façades*” can be considered to be chick-lit, it provides an ideal possibility to teach features of this genre to EFL students. As part of the pre-reading process, characteristics of the genre could be discussed with the students in class before actually reading the text. The following features might be addressed in the discussion: *Chick-lit* [emphasis added] is used “to characterize [sic] novels with young twenty- and thirty-something female protagonists, living in trendy urban settings and trying to juggle professional and personal responsibilities” (Wilson 85). Apart from that, chick-lit is about “primarily white, middle-class, heterosexual heroines” (84). While some criticise the use of chick-lit in the classroom, it can be argued in favour of the genre because “[t]he inherently interdisciplinary nature of the chick-lit genre and its connection to critical discussions about literature and feminism provide a variety of creative and interactive teaching opportunities” (83). Most importantly, however, the information discussed during the pre-reading phase should be applied in the post-reading stage. After reading the text, students might recognise certain aspects of chick-lit and can draw conclusions about its use in the text.

⁶⁵ <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/horror> December 7 2013, 19:39.

⁶⁶ http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/as%2Bthick%2Bas%2Btwo%2Bshort%2Bplanks%2Bor%2Bas%2Ba%2Bplank___1 December 7 2013, 23:25.

⁶⁷ <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/facade?q=Facade> December 30 2013, 15:23.

During the while-reading stage, the instructor might ask the "students to think about the main idea, theme, or key concept" (Medina 127). The main purpose of reading this short story in class is to get to know cultural and social problem areas as well as values in Ireland. As a consequence learners should focus on the content in order to recognise the themes prevalent in "*Façades*" as it "provides the cognitive foundation for questioning, visualizing [sic], connecting to prior knowledge, and many other sophisticated reading strategies" (127). In order to achieve this goal, teachers should communicate "that a theme is a universal idea that helps the reader to understand the world, relationships, or ways of behaving" (127). In the particular case of this short story, teachers and students could come up with one theme together to provide an example, followed by the next step where students highlight possible themes on their own. After identifying literary themes in the text, the focus then is on the cultural aspects which could be supported by further research done by the students after reading the short story.

After reading the text teachers could work with their students on the features of the genre. In particular, the post-reading activity could refer to the information given during the pre-reading phase, where the students receive background knowledge on the genre. One of the tasks that students might work on after reading the text, is taking into consideration the features that characterise chick-lit and defining them in the text. A handout with a suitable grid - a table with the theoretical features on one side and the corresponding examples of the text on the other side - to fill in the results is needed to allow a meaningful comparison of the answers.

Alternatively, if the teacher intends to focus more on the characters of the story than on the genre of the text itself, another activity could be applied in class. Students are encouraged to get together in pairs and identify quotes that are typical for the main characters Kathy, Bill, Mari, Ella and Owen and represent significant character traits. Apart from that, students could reflect on how these quotes represent their economic situation and their attitudes. Once students have decided on the quotes they want to choose, they write them down in the speech bubbles on a handout. In a next step, each pair gets together with another pair and shares the results, but at the same time tries to justify the choice they have made and discusses possible similarities and differences that result in a similar or different characterisation of the protagonists. In a last phase, a whole class discussion follows to compare the answers and reflect upon the ideas that the students came up with.

In addition to the method just mentioned, another possibility to work on the characters and in particular, their actions is the “SWBS Strategy”⁶⁸. With this method students have to fill in a grid, consisting of four columns, namely “Somebody”, “Wanted”, “But”, and “So....”.⁶⁹ In fact, learners should focus on the characters, their actions, what influenced their actions, as well as the individual conclusions. In contrast to common activities where students are asked to give traditional summaries of the texts read, it is this method which demands much more involvement of the students. In particular, “[s]tudents have to really think who did what [...], and what they wanted [...], then examine why they weren't able to get it [...] and finally draw conclusions [...] about the conflict to resolve it.”⁷⁰ This method does not only allow the students to think of the plot of the story, but motivates them to focus on the aspects underlying the characters' actions. Moreover, this activity highlights the conflict of the text, which is significant for the protagonists' behaviour.

⁶⁸ http://www.smoran.ednet.ns.ca/Reader'sworkshop/before_during_after_reading.htm December 12 2013, 14:47.

⁶⁹ http://www.smoran.ednet.ns.ca/Reader'sworkshop/S_W-S-B_Strategy.htm February 7 2014, 11:38.

⁷⁰ http://www.smoran.ednet.ns.ca/Reader'sworkshop/before_during_after_reading.htm December 12 2013, 14:47.

10. William Trevor's Short Story "*The Ballroom of Romance*"

10.1. William Trevor- Concise Biography

The author of "*The Ballroom of Romance*" "was born in Mitchelstown, County Cork, in the Republic of Ireland on 24 May 1928."⁷¹ Due to his father's professional career, he moved to numerous other places and finally Dublin where he went to college and got to know his future wife Jane Ryan. After his graduation he started teaching and worked as an artist before he moved to Britain.⁷² Besides, "[h]is first novel, [*A Standard of Behaviour*]", was published in 1958."⁷³ Concerning the themes he addresses in his literary texts, they "range[s] from black comedies characterised by eccentrics and sexual deviants to stories exploring Irish history and politics, and he articulates the tensions between Irish Protestant landowners and Catholic tenants."⁷⁴ Apart from that, the protagonists of his short stories often are women who face challenges or difficulties in their lives.

In an interview he reflects upon this aspect and explains:

I write, for instance, a lot about women out of straight curiosity, because, not being a woman, I don't know, and the only way I can find out the things that puzzle me is to write about them. When I write a story about women, I always hope to get it right and be true in what I am saying, but in some way the story does it for me. (Del Río Álvaro 120)

So, the protagonists of his short stories usually "have deeply felt longings but must accept that life will not change, and the inevitable has to be endured. There are fragmentary moments of illumination, but these are soon quenched, and problems prevail."⁷⁵ Trevor's most popular texts include "Love And Summer", "The Dressmaker's Child", "The Story of Lucy Gault", "Felicia's Journey" and "The Ballroom of Romance".⁷⁶

Regarding literary awards, Trevor received "an honorary CBE in 1977 for his services to literature, and was made a Companion of Literature in 1994. [...] He lives in Devon, and was awarded the Bob Hughes Lifetime Achievement Award in Irish Literature in 2008."⁷⁷

⁷¹ <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/william-trevor> December 11 2013, 16:26.

⁷² <http://www.readireland.ie/aotm/Trevor.html> December 11 2013, 16:49.

⁷³ <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/william-trevor> December 11 2013, 17:24.

⁷⁴ <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/william-trevor> December 11 2013, 17:26.

⁷⁵ <http://www.readireland.ie/aotm/Trevor.html> December 11 2013, 16:53.

⁷⁶ <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/william-trevor> December 11 2013, 18:07.

⁷⁷ <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/william-trevor> December 11 2013, 18:29.

10.2. Analysis of the Story Level

10.2.1. Plot

In his short story, he pictures “with [...] sensitivity the claustrophobia and isolation of the Irish rural community.”⁷⁸ In fact, thirty-six-year-old Bridie lives with her father on a farm in Ireland and supports him due to his health conditions and his wife’s death. Having just one leg, Bridie’s father cannot help on the farm and it is Bridie who has to do the work on her own.

Her “only pleasure amidst the harsh routine of caring for her disabled father on the family farm is a weekly trip to the local dance hall.”⁷⁹ The dance-hall is the place where Bridie has the opportunity to meet people, and in particular, men. Bridie has once fallen in love with “a boy called Patrick Grady” (Trevor 60), but eventually he gets married to another woman, even though Bridie is sure that he loves her (60). After this man, there is nobody with whom Bridie could envisage being married to or having a relationship with. Despite this fact, the main character continues going to the dance hall and spending her Saturday night at this place. One evening Bridie and Bowser Egan get closer to each other on their way home from the dance-hall and talk about their future. Bowser suggests Bridie to spend their lives together, in fact, to get married once his mother has died. Bridie does not reply, but obviously she accepts his idea and drives home.

On her way to the farm she contemplates her future life:

She would wait now and in time Bowser Egan would seek her out because his mother would have died. Her father would probably have died also by then. She would marry Bowser Egan because it would be lonesome being by herself in the farmhouse. (Trevor 72)

For the protagonist, “[m]arriage will eventually be a compromise, and life lived out in the shadow of what might have been.”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/william-trevor> December 11 2013, 18:40.

⁷⁹ <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/william-trevor> December 11 2013, 18:40.

⁸⁰ <http://literature.britishcouncil.org/william-trevor> December 11 2013, 17:15.

10.2.2. Settings and Background

Concerning the setting of the short story, which mainly is the Ballroom of Romance, it can be assumed that the area around the village Glenfarne is the place where the short story takes place. In particular, “Glenfarne is a small parish in north County Leitrim in the Republic of Ireland, [...] 25 miles from Sligo City.”⁸¹ The name of the village of Glenfarne derives from the Irish version “Gleann Fearna” (Mills 206), meaning “‘Valley of alders’” (206).

As the title of the short story implies, the *Ballroom of Romance* [emphasis added] is central to the story. In fact, “[t]he original Ballroom of Romance (The Rainbow) was established in Glenfarne [...] in the 1930s” (Ferriter 243). More precisely, “[t]he late John Mc Givern built the Ballroom in early 1934 and it opened the same year.”⁸² At that time, however, the dance-hall had not already had its name, but “was then known as Mc Givern’s Dance Hall, although locally it was referred to as the “Nissan Hut”, as its galvanised iron construction was reminiscent of the British Army huts of the same name.”⁸³ In the short story, the main function of the *Ballroom of Romance* [emphasis added] is the dance-hall, but at the same time it serves as a place where people go to in order to listen to famous musicians and bands. As a matter of fact, “[t]he very first function held [...] consisted of a variety concert, followed by the first dance in the [...] hall with music provided by the local Glenfarne Dance Band.”⁸⁴

Later on, the new name *Ballroom of Romance* [emphasis added] derived from

John [Mc Givern]’s introduction at dances of the “romantic interlude”, a fifteen minute period where he would join the band on stage dressed in a black suit, white shirt and black bow tie, to sing romantic songs. In between verses of these songs John would ask the dancing couples to get to know each other (if they had not done so already) by shaking hands, exchanging greetings, etc.⁸⁵

Later on, “bigger and more modern ballrooms with resident bands and orchestras began to appear in the 1940s, including the “National” in Dublin in 1945 and ‘Seapoint’ in Salthill, County Galway, in 1949” (Ferriter 243). Nevertheless, “[t]here were many others in provincial towns and rural areas, and increased mobility made them more accessible” (243). This aspect is a crucial element in the short story as Bridie’s only means of transport is a bike and thus, she is mainly bound to the farm.

⁸¹ <http://www.glenfarne.com/about/> December 21 2013, 21:43.

⁸² <http://www.rainbowballroomofromance.ie/index.php/history> December 21 2013, 21:16.

⁸³ <http://www.rainbowballroomofromance.ie/index.php/history> December 21 2013, 21:16.

⁸⁴ <http://www.rainbowballroomofromance.ie/index.php/history> December 21 2013, 21:16.

⁸⁵ <http://www.rainbowballroomofromance.ie/index.php/history> December 21 2013, 21:20.

In the story the reader gets to know Bridie's school career before she lived on the farm together with her father. In fact,

Bridie had been going to the dance-hall since first she left the Presentation Nuns, before her mother's death. She didn't mind the journey, which was seven miles there and seven back: she'd travelled as far every day to the Presentation Nuns on the same bicycle, which had once been the property of her mother [...]. (Trevor 53)

The "Presentation Sisters" play an essential part in Ireland and they founded their schools from the 18th century on.⁸⁶ On their homepage, the "Presentation Sisters" emphasise that they "are women of compassion, who are rooted in contemplation. As a result they are moved to solidarity with the oppressed. [...] Today Presentation Sisters are in five continents, promoting the rights and dignity of those who are poor."⁸⁷ In the context with these aspects that are part of the Presentation Sisters' lives, it is not surprising that the main character adheres exactly to these guidelines, namely to feel sympathy for those who are underprivileged.

10.2.3. Characters and Characterisation

The most essential characters in "The Ballroom of Romance" are Bridie, her father, Bowser Egan, Dano Ryan, Mr and Mrs Dwyer, as well as Canon O'Connell.

First and foremost, the main character's name reveals the most essential information about her. Bridie is a version of the name Bridget⁸⁸, however, she is never called that way in the story. Concerning the origin of the name, Bridget is "also known as St Bridget of Ireland. She was venerated in Ireland as a virgin saint and noted in miracle stories for her compassion."⁸⁹ Indeed, the main character represents sympathy for her father and leads her life according to his needs. Apart from that, her name reminds of the word *bride* [emphasis added], a goal that Bridie does not seem to reach without compromises. The search for a man whom she loves seems to determine her entire life.

In the course of the story the reader gets to know that "Bridie was thirty-six. She was tall and strong: the skin of her fingers and her palms were stained, and harsh to touch" (Trevor 52). Regarding the woman's outward appearance it can be concluded that she does not represent a

⁸⁶ <http://www.presentation-sisters.ie/content/view/14/28/> December 21 2013, 23:23.

⁸⁷ <http://www.presentation-sisters.ie/content/view/14/28/> December 21 2013, 23:32.

⁸⁸ <http://www.sheknows.com/baby-names/name/bridie> December 19 2013, 20:52.

⁸⁹ <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/Bridget-St?q=Bridget> December 19 2013, 20:56.

typical feminine person. However, when Bridie goes to the dance-hall, she wears “different dresses” (52) and obviously aims at impressing the single men of her area. Obviously, Bridie is a down-to-earth person who is used to hard work and “since childhood she’d torn away the rough scotch grass that grew each spring among her father’s mangolds and sugar berr” (52).

Apparently, routine plays an essential role in Bridie’s life, which is revealed when her daily routine is described:

As well as Mass on Sundays and her weekly visits to a wayside dance-hall Bridie went shopping once every month, cycling to the town early on a Friday afternoon. [...] She talked in the shops to some of the girls she’d been at school with, girls who had married shop-assistants or shop-keepers, or had become assistants themselves. (Trevor 50f)

It seems that Bridie needs her structured life, but at the same time she feels trapped and is not able to escape. This might be the reason for her discontent with her own way of life and the fact that she has not been able to find a suitable husband. This issue is the main aspect that constitutes Bridie’s personality and is the central part of her sorrow. In the course of the story, it is clear that the sole reason why she cannot live the life she intends to have is her father because “[i]f it hadn’t been for her father she’d have wanted to work in the town also, in the tinned meat factory maybe, or in a shop” (Trevor 51). It can be concluded that Bridie is not primarily interested in her professional career, but rather works on the farm to care for her father.

Apart from her working-life, Bridie spends a lot of energy into her interpersonal relationships and possible husbands. For years, she has spent her Saturday nights at the Ballroom of Romance, and consequently, sticks to this tradition. On the one hand, this demonstrates determination and loyalty, but on the other hand, it illustrates her powerlessness to change her miserable situation. In terms of relationships, Bridie appears to be a pragmatic person, however, she seems to experience intense feelings for some men that she meets. For instance, “[t]here’d been a boy called Patrick Grady whom she had loved in those days” (60) or Dano Ryan whom “[s]he wanted [...] [to] to put his arm around her so that she could lean her head against it” (68). At the very end of the story, it is obvious that Bridie gives up hope to finally take control over her life and eventually start her *own* [emphasis added] life when she says that “[i]f you couldn’t have love, the next best thing was surely a decent man” (61). This quote illustrates the pragmatic and rational aspects of her personality, or rather her inability to take actions. Indeed, “Bridie’s last chance seems to be Bowser Egan, one of the famous

bachelors. Her opinion of him is not a very positive one” (Saá 130). Nevertheless, it does not prevent her from considering marriage with this man.

Bridie is an emotionally dependent daughter and sacrifices almost everything she does to her father’s interests and needs. Even when considering whether or not Dano would be a suitable person to live with she thinks that he “would have done because she felt he wouldn’t mind coming to live in the farmhouse while her one-legged father was still about the place” (Trevor 58). Moreover, she appears to be quite a disciplined person concerning the feelings she shows to her father because “[i]n her life, on the farm and in the house there was no place for tears. [...] It wouldn’t have been fair ever to have wept in the kitchen while her father [...] had more right to weep, having lost a leg” (67).

There is only limited information given on Bridie’s father apart from the fact that he once lost a leg and is hardly able to live a normal life on his own. Throughout the text, Bridie’s father’s name is not mentioned and the characters involved refer to him as “father” (68). In fact, “[s]ince Canon O’Connell had made his offer, in 1953, Bridie’s father hadn’t left the farm” (50). He spends his time on the farm reading and listening to radio programmes (56). However, he is aware of the sacrifices that his daughter makes in order to support him and he knows that “[i]t’s a terrible thing for [her]” (51). Apart from that, he is a grateful person and would not know how to cope without Bridie’s help (51). Through several quotes it becomes apparent that Bridie’s father feels guilty and ashamed because of his inability to organise his life independently. His daughter tries to do her best to avoid her father noticing how she feels and puts on a mask, “[...] but her father knew she was pretending” (51). His mere explanation for their pathetic situation is his wife’s death and everything would be different if she had not died (51). With only limited resources he tries to brighten up his daughter’s life by asking her to attend the weekly dance events (52). Thus, it can be concluded that he is a sensitive person who feels pity for his Bridie.

One of the central figures that play an essential part in Bridie’s life is Bowser Egan, whom she meets once a week at the Ballroom of Romance. Bowser and Bridie have known each other for nine years even though they have quite an ambivalent relationship (64). Through his actions and behaviour Bowser appears to be a rough and dominant person who intends to have control over Bridie. His dominance becomes evident in passages such as, “Bowser Egan held her hard against him” (69), “[o]ften she’d been kissed by Bowser Egan, on the nights when he insisted on riding part of the way home with her” (64), and “[a]ren’t you my girl, Bridie, and

always have been?’” (68). Despite Bowser’s struggle for Bridie’s attention, he does not seem to be as honest as he pretends to be. At the very end of the story he reveals his plan: “When his mother died he would sell his farm and spend the money in the town. After that he would think of getting married because he’d have nowhere to go, because he’d want a fire to sit at and a woman to cook food for him” (72).

Dano Ryan plays a minor role in the story, however, he considerably influences Bridie and her weekly visits at the Ballroom of Romance. He is described as “a big man, heavily made, with black hair that was slightly touched with grey, and big hands” (63). Besides, he is “a member of the band who also works as a road-mender” (Saá 130). Bridie and Dano had their first dance at the age of sixteen at the time when he was playing in the band (Trevor 60f). Although Bridie appreciates Dano, he does not represent a possible husband for her as he “is at the moment taking care of a widowed Mrs Griffin and her mentally affected son” (130). Besides, Bridie also had romantic feelings for “Patrick Grady [who] left the village, found a wife in town and emigrated to England leaving a desolate Bridie” (130).

In addition to the characters already mentioned, Mr and Mrs Dwyer are the ones who organise the get-togethers in the Ballroom of Romance. They are practised and experienced in what they do which is especially noticeable when they prepare the dance-hall:

On Saturday nights Mr Justin Dwyer, a small, thin man, unlocked the metal grid that protected his property and drew it back, creating an open mouth from which music would later pour. He helped his wife to carry crates of lemonade and packets of biscuits from their car, and then took up a position in the tiny vestibule between the drawn-back grid and the pink swing-doors. (Trevor 53)

On the surface level, it would appear that they are both interested in the young people’s well-being, however, the financial aspect of the entire events is mentioned several times and thus creates a negative impression of both of the characters. Mr Dwyer’s attitude is described when “[h]e sat a card-table, with money and tickets spread out before him. He’d made a fortune, people said: he owned other ballrooms also” (Trevor 53). Nevertheless, each time Bridie goes to the dance-hall, Mr Dwyer asks Bridie how she is, and he keeps telling her that at some point he is going to visit her father (53).

Mr and Mrs Dwyer’s values and attitudes are difficult to define as on the one hand they are materialistic people, but on the other hand they want their dance-hall to “be, as much as possible, a dignified place” (54). What is more, “Mr Dwyer in fact had never sought a licence for any of his premises, knowing that romance and alcohol were difficult commodities to mix,

especially in a dignified ballroom” (59). As his general opinions do not correlate with his actual behaviour, it is hard to infer an authentic characterisation of the person.

Canon O’Connell, the priest in the story, is the character who supports Bridie and her father insofar as he “hold[s] a private service with Bridie’s father, who couldn’t get about any more” (50). Canon obviously appreciates what Bridie does on the farm and he tells the father “that he was certainly lucky to have her” (51).

10.2.4. Themes and Motifs

In “*The Ballroom of Romance*” several themes and motifs are addressed such as “loneliness, sexual frustration and emigration from 1950s Ireland” (Ferriter 243). Apart from that, issues of dance and responsibility as well as secret love are covered in the story.

Most of the time, Bridie leads a rather lonely life. Together with her father she lives on the farm and, despite the weekly meetings at the dance-hall, where she has the possibility to meet other people, she is a lonesome woman who rather lives in her daydreams than in real life. The location of her father’s farm makes her situation even worse and complicates her social life. In general, “[l]oneliness is synonymous with perceived social isolation [...] People can live relatively solitary lives and not feel lonely, and conversely, they can live an ostensibly rich social life and feel lonely nevertheless” (Hawkley and Cacioppo 218). It seems that Bridie could have an adequate social life if she had the opportunity to intensify her contacts. Instead, she goes to the dance-hall once a week, looking for a suitable husband to live with, while she spends the rest of the week in isolation.

Her dissatisfaction about the situation becomes noticeable when Bridie compares life in the city to her own life:

The town had a cinema called the Electric, and a fish-and-chip shop where people met at night, eating chips out of newspaper on the pavement outside. In the evenings, sitting in the farmhouse with her father, she often thought about the town [...]. But the town was eleven miles away, which was too far to cycle, there and back, for an evening’s entertainment. (Trevor 51)

Obviously, she would appreciate living a life she imagines, but she does not find a compromise to reach her aim. Hawkley and Cacioppo indicate that “[h]uman sociality is prominent even in contemporary individualistic societies” (224). This claim reveals what

social life is about, namely to follow personal goals, but at the same time living in a community.

Furthermore, sexual relationships and sexual frustration determine the characters' behaviour in the dance-hall. Apparently, individuals go there in order to find a partner, but for numerous people this is not the case. On the one hand, the men's disappointment is shown in "the comments of the men about the women [which] are overtly sexual [...]" (Ferriter 243). Women, on the other hand, do not approve of the men's behaviour and "their own lack of care for their appearance and hygiene repulses Bridie, [...]" (243). Although, the men at the *Ballroom of Romance* [emphasis added] might not meet her expectations, Bridie gets involved with some of the men, like Bowser Egan or Dano Ryan. She has no alternative because "women looking for companionship in these areas had little to choose from" (243).

The aspect of emigration is part of both Irish history, and Trevor's short story. While some of Bridie's acquaintances aim at emigrating, others continue to live in rural Ireland. One Saturday night, when Bridie is at the *Ballroom of Romance* [emphasis added], a man she is dancing with explains to her that "he was saving up to emigrate, the nation in his opinion being finished" (Trevor 56). In this case, emigration from Ireland seems to be a desirable goal to reach as Ireland seems to be, at least for this character, a country without perspectives.

On a surface level, Trevor's short story intends to give the impression of a rather romantic atmosphere. However, looked closely at it, "[t]here can be no romance or glamour in such a dying rural culture. This is a society populated by an assortment of aging men and women, the sons and daughters left behind (or abandoned) like so much human jetsam by successive waves of emigration" (Wyndham 150). The name of the dance-hall, *The Ballroom of Romance* [emphasis added], does not keep its promise but rather shows singles "desperately seeking marriage partners" (150). This theme is not only central to this short story, but "[t]he suffocating emptiness and sterility of such rural communities is a factor in many revisionist portrayals of rural Ireland" (150).

Moreover, Saá claims that "Bridie's only illusion and satisfaction is the excursion she makes every Saturday night to a dance-hall" (129). In this context, dancing is a means of getting to know future partners. Similarities between Trevor's "*The Ballroom of Romance*" and Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* can be discerned as "dance is important not for its erotic undertones and power, but for its symbolic meaning, its status as a public sign. Again and again, the matter of who dances with whom bears distinct relation to who marries whom"

(Seigneuret *A-J* 317). Whereas in Trevor's short story, sexual aspects are intentioned by the dancing of the men and women, it also provides an indication of future couples.

Besides, the theme of secret love between Patrick and Bridie becomes apparent. Secret love "includes any romantic or sentimental passion kept hidden, for an unspecified period of time, from one or more persons" (Seigneuret *L-Z* 1148). Bridie explains the situation between herself and Patrick and stresses the fact that neither she nor Patrick dared to reveal their feelings (Trevor 60).

The main character believes that

[i]t had been different, dancing with Patrick Grady, and she'd felt that he found it different dancing with her, although he'd never said so. At night she'd dreamed of him and in the daytime too, while she helped her mother in the kitchen or her father with the cows. [...] Often they'd stood together drinking lemonade, not saying anything, not knowing what to say. She knew he loved her, and she believed then that he would lead her one day from the dim, romantic ballroom, from its blueness and its pinkness and its crystal bowl of light and its music. (Trevor 60)

Eventually, it has been secret love which- paradoxically - prevents them from a shared future, while, according to Bridie's description, it would have been an ideal relationship if only they had the courage to say what they feel.

Apart from Bridie's main goal, namely finding a partner, she is occupied with supporting her father because there are no other relatives in their lives and she feels the obligation to stick to the role imposed upon her. To be more precise, Bridie carries responsibility, which can be defined "as an ethical phenomenon indicating duty, morality, and virtue" (Seigneuret *L-Z* 1060). Apparently, the character perceives what is expected of her and takes on responsibility.

10.2.4.1. Features of Irishness: Marital and Family Status

Central to the short story, and subject to the main character's existence, is the fact that she has never been married or formed a relationship. The female characters in the story are mostly described in terms of their marital status or their desire to finally get married.

Seigneuret states that

[...] marriage is viewed and treated in different ways. On the one hand it is a practical arrangement, a legal contract dealing with financial and social concerns; on the other, it is an idealized [sic] union based on love, analogous to such other archetypal relationships as that between body and soul, Christ and the church. (820)

In particular, these two aspects of marriage are part of Bridie's ideas. Whereas she wishes to get to know a person she truly loves, she finally decides to marry a man out of pragmatic interests. The protagonist's decision is representative for the difficulty people face when choosing between alternatives. Macvarish points out that "[m]uch of the literature about single women has been concerned with challenging the construction of the single woman as antithetical to feminine norms" (par. 4). Bridie is aware of the fact that the majority of her friends is married and she does not intend to end up like her friend who "was already a figure of fun in the ballroom, the way she ran after the bachelors" (Trevor 858).

In addition to that, the issue of family considerably influences Bridie's life. Insofar as she is unable to lead an independent life, she seems to be "trapped by family ties" (Saá 129). The reader does not get to know any information about other relatives apart from her father who desperately needs her help. Seigneuret views "the family as a more generally symbolic and ironic construct, a manifold assemblage of potentiality and restraint" (A-J 503). As Bridie might also feel hindered by her father, this also seems to be the case with the two main protagonists. However, being aware of the fact that Bridie's mother died, her nuclear family obviously consists of herself and her father. This picture of two people forming a family does not represent a stereotypical Irish family which used to consist of a considerable number of children.

10.3. Analysis of the Discourse Level

In the following, features of the narrative technique applied in the story "*The Ballroom of Romance*" will be analysed. Apart from that, characteristics of language serving as another aspect of interpretation will be addressed.

10.3.1. Narrative Technique

In "The Ballroom of Romance" a third-person omniscient narrator tells the story of the protagonist, and the reader is also told about the character's thoughts and emotional processes. However, "[t]he third person narrator filters the narrative through Bridie's mind but adopts an ironic distance that puts into display the dramatic and tragic collusion that takes place between the young girl's expectations and the reality that she tends to avoid" (Saá 130). The narrator lets the reader assume what Bridie pretends to think and tries to hide reality. This insight into Bridie's emotional life points towards the use of a dissonant psycho-narrator.

Herman and Vervaeck outline that “[i]n psycho- narration the characters’ unconscious may be represented since the narrator has unrestricted access to their interior selves. In fact, this method provides the only way to render the emotions and thoughts of which the character is not aware” (24). The most relevant features of Bridie’s life are not revealed and the reader is informed about the protagonist’s emotional state and consciousness. In general, psycho-narrations “is [...] the most traditional method of consciousness representation” (24). However, the narrator “does not represent the character’s thoughts word for word but paraphrases them” (91). In particular, the “relationship[s] between narrator and character” (24) is characterised as dissonant, where “the narrator is distanced from the character’s discourse” (Logan, George, and Hegeman 258). More precisely, a distance between the narrator and the character becomes evident.

At the very end of the story, the main protagonist’s future life is hinted at with the use of a flashforward. When Bridie reveals her plan, namely to marry Bowser Egan, “a future event is related as an interruption to the ‘present’ time of the narration” (Baldick 271). In the last few sentences Bridie thinks that “[s]he would wait now and in time Bowser Egan would seek her out because his mother would have died. Her father would probably have died also by then. She would marry Bowser Egan because it would be lonesome being by herself in the farmhouse” (Trevor 72). Even though Bridie’s future is showed here, it functions as a way of conveying her feelings about it. With this mode of representation it seems to be clear that Bridie rather resigns than being satisfied with her future prospects.

Contrary to the scene where the future is indicated, a flashback is used at the beginning of the story when the reader gets information on the reason why Bridie and her father live on their own. She tells that her father “had a leg amputated after gangrene had set in. They’d had a pony and cart then and Bridie’s mother had been alive” (Trevor 50). The introductory scene represents the way the protagonists’ lives changed after the mother’s death. Not only “the pony had gone lame” (Trevor 50), but the father’s as well as the daughter’s way of living has changed for the worse.

10.3.2. Language

The title “*Ballroom of Romance*” is mentioned several times and the paradox of the title and the actual situation becomes apparent throughout the story. Quotes like “[o]n pink pebbled cement its title was painted in an azure blue that matched the depth of the background shade

yet stood out well, unfussily proclaiming *The Ballroom of Romance* [sic]" (Trevor 52) emphasise the irony of the situation. The title of the story is mentioned in scenes, where there is no sign of any romantic atmosphere between the people involved. Saá points out that "[t]he irony of the name of the dance-hall is emphasised by the third-person narrator's reference to the 'business' that takes place on Saturday nights" (129). In general, the adjective *romantic* [emphasis added] is used in more than one context. To be more precise, "[i]n the ballroom there is a band also called the 'Romantic Jazz Band' and they play melodies such as 'The Destiny Waltz.'" This is the place where single men and women meet and flirt and look for a partner and, therefore, the title of the song is quite foreboding" (Saá 129). Thus, the language used in the text is in contrast to the life of the characters. Even though Bridie is in "*The Ballroom of Romance*", dancing to romantic songs, her aim, namely finding a husband in order to share a practically oriented life, does not seem to be romantic at all.

10.4. Practical Implementation of the Story in the EFL Classroom

To raise students' interest in the topic, the song version of "*The Ballroom of Romance*" by Chris de Burgh might be used as a pre-reading activity in class. The atmosphere described could be compared to the mood prevalent in both the short story and the film. Before students and the teacher actually read the short story in class, the song could be analysed accordingly. Thaler supports the view that "[m]usic and song have proved to be of enormous motivational potential in English language classrooms" (169). Music and songs are an integral part of teenagers' lives and thus learners find it easy to relate to this kind of media. As a consequence, "[s]ongs are attractive, authentic, up-to-date teaching material [...], which provide a change from everyday routine [...], are omnipresent [...], reflect young people's concerns [...], and can foster student-centred learning" (169). After reading the short story the situation of the people in the text and the song could be compared by defining similarities and differences.

Further, in order to consider students own ideas, various visual aids, such as book covers, pictures, etc., and the title of the story could be analysed and "students can make predictions about the content of the text" (Ajideh 8). This activity might support learners in activating prior knowledge and releases pressure when students read the text. Ajideh emphasises that "[b]y taking advantage of contextual clues- titles, headings, pictures, students are encouraged to draw inferences prior to reading" (8). Obviously, if the text does not offer any visual aids, it

is the teacher's task to provide suitable material. However, the teacher needs to ask suitable questions to make sure that an appropriate prediction and interpretation is reached (8).

During the while-and post-reading stage, learners could be asked to write diary entries.⁹⁰ After reading the first few paragraphs and getting an insight into the story, students could start their diary entries by pretending to be one of the protagonists in the text.⁹¹ Learners should "[w]rite down events that happen during the story and reflect on how they affected the character and why."⁹² This activity allows students to produce written language, but at the same time sharing of the texts in class is possible. As Bridie tends to be a character that hides her true feelings, the opportunity arises to ask students to keep a diary where she reveals what she feels. Apart from that, it might be another challenging activity to write diary entries for Bridie's father, as the story does not give the reader the possibility to get to know his thoughts.

After the students have read the text, the entire reading process should be finished off with an appropriate post-reading activity. For the following activity, students are divided up in groups of three to four in order to create a possible movie poster⁹³ of the story. In groups, learners should, "[a]s in the movies, take what seems the most compelling image(s) and create an ad."⁹⁴ For this activity, students do not only need to reflect upon the story, but they have to put their thoughts into practice by producing the poster. Regarding the final exam where students need to be able to produce coherent oral language and give a presentation, this activity provides an ideal opportunity to practise speaking in the classroom as a protected area. If teachers decide to view the film version of "The Ballroom of Romance" the activity described above could serve as a lead-in activity.

10.4.1. Film Adaption for Teaching Purposes

Alternatively, the film version of the short story might serve as a while-or post-reading activity. Especially in the EFL classroom, the film version of "*The Ballroom of Romance*" can easily be implemented and serves as a valuable illustration of the scenes read in class. More precisely, the opportunity arises to implement "Pat O'Connor's breakthrough production *The Ballroom of Romance* (1982)" (Wyndham 150). While this film version

⁹⁰ <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/82> December 27 2013, 13:12.

⁹¹ <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/82> December 27 2013, 13:12.

⁹² <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/82> December 27 2013, 13:12.

⁹³ <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/82> December 27 2013, 13:12.

⁹⁴ <http://www.readingrockets.org/article/82> December 27 2013, 13:12.

depicts Irish rural life, “[t]he West-of-Ireland settings are beautifully photographed, but this ineffably sad and moving film also captures the lives of quiet desperation lived out in this visual splendor [sic]” (150).

The use of films in the EFL classroom needs to be reasonably justified and appropriate teaching methods should supplement the procedure. By showing a film in class, the teacher “uses authentic material, trains receptive and productive language competences, promotes intercultural as well as media competences and is of high personal relevance” (Thaler 174). One of the first few challenges that teachers face when intending to view a film adaption in class is the fact that “a film is long, a lesson, however, is short. To integrate 90-minute feature films into TEFL, you therefore have to resort to time-saving approaches of presentation” (174).

Another challenging aspect for English language learners is the ability to understand the spoken words in the film. In order “[t]o avoid feelings of frustration students must be encouraged to say farewell to wanting to understand everything” (175). Once students realise there is no need for them to understand every single word said to comprehend the message of the film, it definitely reduces pressure and enables them to concentrate on the most relevant aspects. However, it should be noted the different reasons why both students and teachers watch a film. While “teenagers watch movies for entertainment and relaxation, teachers use them to teach and want pupils to learn” (175). Therefore, it is vital to put the message across to the students that even though they do not need to understand everything said, they should nevertheless focus on the central themes in the film. As a consequence, Russell stresses that “it is crucial to make students aware of the requirements and clearly explain and clarify expectations. Informing students of expectations will help ensure the students’ success” (4). In this regard, it might be useful to refrain from using subtitles as “viewers tend to focus on the written inserts and neglect listening comprehension” (Thaler 175).

Generally speaking, apart from pedagogic and didactic aspects, one of the central aims of discussing the film in class is to support students in developing “[t]he ability to study relevant social problems of the past or present and make informed decisions or conclusions” (Russell 12). Further, the focus is on helping students developing and verbalising their own opinion and trying to bring the issues shown in the film into question. It is crucial to signalise that “[a]s soon as we stop questioning, we are in danger of accepting easy and obvious ‘truths’ that can, in fact, blind us to important issues” (Lehman and Luhr 5).

A combination of reading the short story and watching the film version helps to “identify the parallels and differences” (Thaler 177). Regarding the film, it might be interesting “to explain why the director decided on the changes he made” (177). Here, students have to justify their claims and it might support them in finding their own point of view, while at the same time discovering the differences between the two genres. Thaler states that “[w]hen teachers want to analyse a film, they should draw learners’ attention to the specific elements of this genre and their affects” (178). To be more precise, elements of “the cinematic dimension [...], the dramatic dimension (casting, acting, dialogues, locations, props, make-up, costumes), and the literary dimension (story, topics, characters, setting, narrative point of view)” (178) should be discussed in class. In relation to these aspects, it is important to note that “[p]art of understanding movies is understanding the complex ways in which they relate to the society that produced them” (Lehman and Luhr 3). The circumstances and social and cultural aspects under which the film was produced can be compared to the issues depicted in the film itself.

Naturally, there are numerous methods in order to present the film to the students, however, activities that seem to be highly relevant for EFL teaching are included in this diploma thesis. First and foremost, in relation to the time issue, it might be reasonable to decide for “[s]howing of selected scenes, [and] summarizing deleted scenes” (Thaler 176) instead of showing the full film. One of the benefits of focusing on a few scenes is the fact that it allows for “[s]kipping irrelevant scenes” (176). Thus, scenes that the teacher does not want to address can be left out without losing time. Similar to teaching reading, teachers should make use of “[p]re/while/post stages” (176). Yet, it has to be considered that showing separate scenes might result in “[f]ragmentation and distortion of [the] film” (176).

Possible pre-viewing activities involve “[p]redicting the opening” (179), or “[b]ased on the DVD cover (film poster, photo), students design the opening scene of the film” (179). Besides, teachers can prepare activities that “[i]ntroduce new vocabulary” (Russell 3) and facilitate understanding of the film. Most interestingly, there is in particular one activity that keeps students busy from the pre-viewing stage to the post-viewing stage. Thaler suggests that “[b]efore viewing each student picks one question from a pot, and answers it after viewing” (180). During the while-viewing stage students could “reenact a scene from the film” (Russell 4) or “conduct a mock interview with the star, director, and/or producer of the film” (4). After viewing the film, learners could work on a “[r]emake” (Thaler 180) of the film, or “develop a plan for a remake of a film in a different setting” (180). As the development of all four skills,

namely listening, reading, speaking and writing, is a central part of EFL teaching, a possible writing task could consist of finding a way to “rewrite the ending of the film” (Russell 4).

11. Motivating Austrian EFL Learners to Read Short Fiction

Apart from engaging students in the subject matter of the short stories, it is essential to point out to students the relevance of reading short stories in the first place. More precisely, a rather holistic approach has to be taken that reveals to students the benefit and value of reading short fiction amongst other texts. EFL learners need to realise the effect that the selected short stories have on their language skills, and what major contributions literary texts may provide to reach the students' learning goals, particularly competences. The standardised outcomes allow a straightforward justification of the content covered in class and make an achievement of the individual learning goals more transparent.

One of the central challenges students have to face at the upper secondary level is the new standardised school-leaving exam (i.e.: Zentralmatura) which is based on competences. Therefore, it lies both in the students' and in the teachers' interests to work towards reaching those competences. A suitable discussion of the importance of reading those texts might stress the purpose of it and making it meaningful to the students. As it is with other standardised documents, such as the CEFR and the ELP, this "standardized [sic] school leaving examination [...] focuses on the skills of listening and speaking, reading and writing" (Council of Europe, *Language Education Policy Profile* 25). The new leaving exam "is based on the new curriculum for the upper level of academic secondary schools, according to which pupils should achieve B2 for all four skills in their first foreign language" (Council of Europe, *Language Education Policy Profile* 25). In order to reach the level B2 students have to work on their skills, and it is the teacher's responsibility to provide appropriate materials. Covering literary texts in class provides students with the opportunity to improve all of the skills needed for their school-leaving exam and for possible requirements in their later career. Only if students realise that the study of short stories is not only an end in itself, but a means to an end, it will probably enhance the students' awareness and motivation.

Generally speaking, "[t]he introduction of this new examination will be another step towards a more competence-based approach and will help to make learning outcomes transparent and comparable" (Council of Europe, *Language Education Policy Profile* 25). The extension activities for the short stories in this diploma thesis will comply with the learning outcomes that teachers might set for their individual lessons. Before actually reading one of the short stories, it is advisable to demonstrate to students what outcome they are supposed to reach as another strategy to make the learning and teaching process more transparent.

Above all, one of the points of criticism is, as mentioned earlier, the fact that some consider literary texts to become less relevant in the EFL context, and thus, less likely to raise the students' motivation to read them in the first place. The aim of this thesis is, however, to show that if the texts are applied appropriately and are aligned with the rather new outcomes-based approach, they continue to represent a source of helpful material for students in order to successfully reach B2 level and thus, their school-leaving exam. Once students are aware of this aspect that might improve their language knowledge, they will be more likely to develop an autonomous attitude towards their learning needs and becomes responsible for their own progress.

Referring to the CEFR, “[i]t is much to be hoped that teachers of literature at all levels may find many sections of the Framework relevant to their concerns and useful in making their aims and methods more transparent” (Council of Europe, *Common European Framework* 56). Pointing out the outcomes learners are supposed to reach with reading the short stories, might lead to transparency of the students' performance and achievement. To be more precise, if students know what outcomes are expected of them, they will be more motivated to cooperate and participate actively. Killen states that “[t]he main idea is that outcomes are *demonstrations* [sic] of learning- they are things that learners can *do* [sic] as a result of their learning” (Killen 49). Those statements are formed in a straightforward way that allows students to assess themselves easily and they do not depend on their teacher's evaluation of their performances. However, in the context of teaching in secondary education it goes without saying that the curriculum guidelines were considered first, before the content of the lessons could be chosen. Killen stresses that “the selection of content follows the selection of outcomes” (Killen 55). Given that the aims are clearly set, there is still enough room for the teacher to choose appropriate texts. If the teacher comes up with a selection of alternatives, learners could inform themselves in advance about the content of the stories to decide in class what text they are most interested in. This aspect enhances learner autonomy and raises their motivation to work on the texts.

On the whole, Tudor indicates that “the practical relevance of learning content and the transparency of course structure” (Tudor 28) are two of the most essential features when it comes to student motivation. Because the choice of the short stories, and the outcomes of the standardised guidelines provide a meaningful combination, it can be assumed that student motivation can be raised.

12. Conclusion

This diploma thesis has given an account of implementing Irish short stories in the EFL classroom with reference to current standardised guidelines. While the first part of the thesis consisted of a general approach of the standardised documents, which are relevant for teaching English as a second language in Austria, the second part aimed at presenting possible ways of interpreting the short stories. Apart from that, a practical guide of concrete activities for English lessons has been provided to offer possible ways of realising those standardised principles in the Austrian language classroom.

Part of the central chapters of the diploma thesis were the interpretations of the short stories. The analysis of Conlon-McKenna's text revealed thematic aspects of the issues of unwanted pregnancies and emigration and discussed the main character's way of dealing with her past decisions as well as the consequences her actions had on her life. It seemed that Christine, as the protagonist of the story, represents numerous Irish women who decided for adoption as a suitable alternative to accepting single motherhood, or abortion abroad. Despite adhering to the outcomes of the guidelines which focus on features of language knowledge, this text serves as an ideal basis for informing students on cultural and legal aspects of the subject matter. Gender stereotypes and their influence in rural Ireland were supposed to be covered in Keegan's short story *"Men and Women"* and it was assumed that its film version could be used in combination with the written version. With this method a discussion of the similarities and differences between these two genres and the different representations were shown.

Apart from the issue of homosexuality, the aspects of a strained father-son relationship were central to *"Father"*. The author Micheál Ó Conghaile describes a highly authentic situation resulting from the challenges that the main character faces due to his coming out. The central aim of integrating this story in the EFL classroom was to counter common prejudices and thematising homosexuality in the context of Ireland. Being aware of the Celtic Tiger, *"Façades"* by Patricia Scanlan discusses a totally different aspect, namely a time of unemployment and poverty. By pointing out relevant features of "chick lit", the genre was supposed to be illustrated with this short story. What is more, *"The Ballroom of Romance"* represents implications of rural Ireland on the social life of the individual. As it was with *"Men and Women"* the film version of the short story should support the reading of the literary text. As a combination of these two media was aimed at, it was assumed that it serves

as another possible way of raising students' motivation to participate actively in the foreign language classroom.

Apart from proposing interpretations and useful approaches to implementing the short stories in the EFL classroom, one of the most essential aspects of teaching literature has been illustrated. It has been emphasised that in order to reach an optimum of the learners' motivation and offer a valid purpose of literary texts, the teacher should point out the relevance for the standardised school- leaving exam.

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15. Abstract

This diploma thesis is going to aim at showing the importance of teaching literature in the EFL classroom and its practical implementation. In particular, the value of reading Irish short fiction will be addressed and exemplified by a selection of five short stories written by contemporary Irish authors. Works by Marita Conlon-McKenna, Clare Keegan, Micheál Ó Conghaile, Patricia Scanlan and William Trevor serve as the basis of this diploma thesis and include themes typical for Ireland. Issues such as unwanted extra-marital pregnancies and their consequences will be addressed, as well as the termination of marriage and family formation. Apart from that, some of the stories will cover the issue of gender stereotypes within families, and homosexuality in Ireland. Another essential part of Irish family life is emigration, and domestic poverty, resulting from unemployment – especially from 2008 on.

Central to this thesis is demonstrating the relevance of implementing short stories in the EFL classroom of the 21st century by discussing the theoretical background of the short stories, the possible teaching methods and the didactic potential of short stories in general. It is going to be clarified that literature contributes to meeting standardised guidelines such as the Common European Framework, the European Language Portfolio or the Austrian curriculum. Apart from that, students' attitudes towards reading short stories in class are to be examined and ways to raise the students' motivation will be addressed. Concerning the theoretical framework and the practical use of short stories in the EFL classroom, it will be argued that the use of short fiction in the EFL classroom is compatible with standardised guidelines in the 21st century.

16. German Abstract

Die Diplomarbeit stellt Kurzgeschichten von Marita Conlon- McKenna, Clare Keegan, Micheál Ó Conghaile, Patricia Scanlan und William Trevor in den Mittelpunkt. Hierbei handelt es sich ausschließlich um Texte irischer Autoren und Autorinnen, wodurch charakteristische Besonderheiten und zentrale Problembereiche irischer Kultur und Konvention behandelt werden sollen.

Adoption zählt zu den möglichen Konsequenzen ungewollter Schwangerschaft, und stellt im Gegensatz zur Abtreibung, eine legale Alternative dar. Es wird auf die Vor- und Nachteile von Adoption für die Eltern, als auch die zur Adoption freigegebenen Kinder eingegangen. Abtreibung ist nur in Ausnahmefällen gesetzlich erlaubt, sollte das Leben der Mutter gefährdet sein. Die Protagonistin der Kurzgeschichte *“Flesh and Blood”* von Marita Conlon-McKenna muss mit den Auswirkungen ihrer Entscheidungen in der Vergangenheit zurechtkommen, im Besonderen als sie ihre leibliche Tochter Rachel, die sie zur Adoption freigab, kennenlernt. Des Weiteren werden die in Irland seit 1996/1997 gesetzlich erlaubte Scheidung bzw. Formen der Auflösung der Ehe erwähnt.

In Clare Keegans Kurzgeschichte *“Men and Women”* beeinflussen Geschlechtsstereotype das Leben der weiblichen Protagonisten. Für die Verwendung der Kurzgeschichte im Fremdsprachenunterricht wird sowohl der Text selbst, als auch die Filmversion vorgestellt. Im Vergleich der beiden Genres, sollen Schüler und Schülerinnen auf Ähnlichkeiten und Unterschiede hinweisen. Ein weiterer Aspekt, der das irische Zusammenleben beeinflusst, ist die Art und Weise, wie mit Homosexualität umgegangen wird. Der Hauptcharakter der Kurzgeschichte *“Father”* von Micheál Ó Conghaile beschreibt das Coming-out des Hauptcharakters und die Reaktion seines Vaters. Darüber hinaus werden die Auswirkungen von Arbeitslosigkeit in der Kurzgeschichte *“Façades”* von Patricia Scanlan dargestellt. Die Konsequenzen von Armut stellen vor allem für die Protagonistin eine Herausforderung dar, doch durch den Zusammenhalt der Familie, werden immaterielle über materielle Güter gestellt. Familiengründung, als auch die Verantwortung, die Familienmitglieder füreinander tragen, ist Hauptthema in William Trevors Kurzgeschichte *“The Ballroom of Romance”*.

Ziel dieser Diplomarbeit ist es, die Kurzgeschichten als Grundlage für den Fremdsprachenunterricht so anzupassen, dass sie aktuellen Anforderungen im Bildungssystem gerecht werden. Sowohl Änderungen im Rahmen der neuen Reifeprüfung, als auch der Einfluss des Gemeinsamen Europäischen Referenzrahmens und die Einführung des

Europäischen Sprachenportfolios beeinflussen den Englischunterricht maßgeblich. Abgesehen davon, muss in diesem Zusammenhang der Lehrplan für Lebende Fremdsprachen für die Sekundarstufe II miteinbezogen werden.

Curriculum Vitae

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Education and Qualification

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