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To my parents, with love and gratitude

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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

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 are truthfully acknowledged and identified in the text and/or in footnotes.

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1 Introduction

As the issues of globalisation, cultural, religious and ethnic heterogeneity, as well as the concepts of multi-, and interculturality are constantly growing in significance for contemporary society and academia, additional scholarly attention needs to be drawn to these study areas. This thesis focuses on these academically relevant areas by linking the topics of cultural diversity and interculturality as reflected in literature with considerations of teaching this topic in the Austrian EFL classroom. By critically analysing four contemporary Irish short stories which have intercultural encounters as a central theme, this study aims at combining the current (scholarly) interest in interculturality with (Irish) literature studies. The short stories in question are: *An Independent Woman* (2002) by Morag Prunty, Colum McCann's *As If There Were Trees* (2005), Roddy Doyle's *Home to Harlem* (2008) and Billy O'Callaghan's *Keep Well to Seaward* (2013).

As far as the methodology of the primary sources' analyses is concerned, a method of literary analysis has been applied which covers both the story level and the discourse level. Furthermore, each analysis includes a detailed investigation of the literary sample's didactic potential for teaching in the (Austrian) EFL classroom, complete with teaching materials for an AHS setting.

After a brief introduction to the methodology applied in this thesis, as well as to significant previous studies, chapter four provides a comprehensive overview of the concepts of interculturality and intercultural competence. The major emphasis here is on the issues' relevance for present school environments and teaching. In chapter five, theoretical considerations on the (Irish) short story as a genre are provided. Hence, the readers are introduced to the genre's historical development, several differing definitions, significant characteristics and popular topics and themes addressed. Moreover, some important aspects in view of the short story's potential for teaching in the EFL classroom are presented in detail.

Chapter six constitutes the main body of this thesis and focuses on the in-depth analyses of the Irish short stories selected. Each primary source is at first explored on a rather theoretic level, including the presentation of noteworthy preliminary matters concerning the author and publication details. Additionally, a concise plot summary and an analysis of the main characters are provided. The most extensive part in the analysis of the individual short stories is the detailed presentation, analysis and interpretation of the intercultural encounters in the text. Therefore, the respective subchapters aim at presenting relevant background information, insights into stereotypical representations of nations, societies, and ethnicities and other aspects of relevance for the overall topic of this thesis. Finally, the short story's relevance and didactic potential for teaching in the Austrian EFL classroom is dealt with in some detail. Therefore, not only the respective passages of the Austrian curriculum, the CEFR and the guidelines for the new SCOR are included in this section, but also practical approaches and activities for the text's use in class. The actual teaching materials are provided in the final chapter of the thesis.

2 Methodology

As far as the methodology of the thesis under consideration is concerned, it has to be mentioned that, as it consists of several different parts, several approaches have been used in order to achieve the best possible outcome. Thus, the first two main parts of this thesis, dealing with some theoretical aspects relating to the concept of interculturality, as well as the topic of (Irish) short stories, have been compiled on the basis of many different secondary sources regarding the overall issue. These studies have been analysed qualitatively in great detail according to their relevance for the topics under consideration.

Focussing on the third major part of this diploma thesis, namely the analysis of the four Irish short stories selected, it can be argued that a literary– analysis-procedure has been applied in order to investigate the primary sources on both, the story level and the discourse level. Moreover, a critical reflection method is used to examine the literary works thoroughly as regards their usefulness and potential in the (Austrian) EFL classroom.

Finally, the afore gained knowledge is used for creating inspiring, vital and useful material for dealing with the highly complex issue of interculturality in EFL classes. Therefore, already existing activities and exercises are adapted according to the specific needs the issue under consideration entails, as well as completely new ones created in order to provide some useful study material based on the four Irish short stories considered.

3 Previous Studies/Researches

With regard to one of the main key issues of the paper under consideration, namely the one of interculturality itself, it has to be mentioned that in the course of the past decades, many scholars have focused on examining and analysing the various aspects the issue of 'intercultural competence' features. These include, for example, various contextual approaches in intercultural communication, or the examination of the importance of intercultural training in a school environment for students and teachers.

One collaborative and in-depth research to be mentioned in this context, has been carried out by Sercu et al. and was published under the title *Foreign Language Teachers and Intercultural Competence. An International Investigation* in the year 2005. To be more precise, the academic book addresses various different and extraordinarily interesting aspects concerning the importance of acquiring intercultural competence in the course of foreign language learning. With regard to the data used in this survey, it has to be mentioned that a number of detailed questionnaire answers that have been given by teachers working in all together seven different countries, enable its authors to draw significant conclusions concerning the above mentioned issue. Putting one of these conclusions, namely the need for more authentic teaching material and methods, into practice, several recommendations for teaching intercultural competence in foreign language education are presented in this study, including the essential role of the teacher in the process of awareness-raising connected with this issue. Moreover, the authors not only present some current trends regarding the various methods used for intercultural training, but also provide their readers with stimulating future perspectives. Additionally, the research under consideration aims at discussing the overall subject matter as one being of great actuality, as not only teachers, but also people in general find themselves in an intercultural world. This last aspect becomes apparent when focusing on chapters 1 to 4 of the aforesaid scholarly work, which aims at presenting the reality of the "intercultural world", especially in connection with the pupils' different "culture-and-language learning profiles" (Sercu et al., Table of contents). This highly interesting and current condition is analysed in greater detail in the course of the following chapters.

Another selected issue of investigation that puts additional emphasis upon the specific aspect of the topic's great actuality, focuses on the teachers' professional development regarding the issue of intercultural competence, which was also addressed in a study by Sales, Traver and García, published in 2011. Appearing under the title *Action research as a school-based strategy in intercultural professional development for teachers*, the survey under consideration features a more practical approach than the inquiry presented above and was conducted in a Spanish school during the years 2007 and 2008. To be more precise, it aims at putting emphasis on the fact that the teachers themselves have to be seen as "a key factor in school improvement" (Sales, Traver, and García 911) and that it is thus indispensable to provide them with as much help and actual teaching material as possible.

One of the probably most interesting and significant findings the case study under consideration entails is that "[t]he need for change must be recognised by the school community (management team, teaching staff and families). This cannot be a top-down imposed process, but must be called for and managed by the teachers themselves" (Sales, Traver, and García 918). Moreover, the authors note that greater attention to critical self-reflections is needed in order to adapt the teaching strategies to the intercultural needs of each individual class and student. Bearing in mind that cultural diversity in a school environment is often perceived as being challenging for both, teachers and pupils, the survey under consideration provides its readers with interesting insights, as well as extraordinarily helpful suggestions ensuring a more intercultural and inclusive approach in teaching.

Turning the attention to the second major theme of this diploma thesis, namely Irish short stories, it has to be mentioned that the article of Nainsí J. Houston, entitled *Traditional Irish Storytelling and the Contemporary Irish Short Story*, has been the starting point for further analyses with respect to the above mentioned issue. In the course of her academic writing, Houston shares the experiences gained while teaching a seminar on Irish short stories, with the readers. Thus, she addresses one main problem that often occurs in connection to Irish literature in general, namely several wide-spread preconceived notions and opinions about Irish literary works, or the concept of "Irishness" as such.

Irishness, for example, encompasses the limitation of the country and its culture to such aspects as being rural, poor, or remote (Houston 69).

What is also interesting is that the article by Houston addresses various characteristic features of the short story as a literary genre, by not only referring to several typical aspects, but also by providing an interesting insight into its historical background and development. Due to the central importance of these points of study, especially the historical development of the (Irish) short story as a genre is elaborated in greater detail in the course of the thesis' next chapters.

One last academic study to be presented in this context was published under the title *Teaching Short Stories to Students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at Tertiary Level* in the *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, first edition of 2014. Although the article under consideration is not limited to Irish short stories as such, it features several hands-on suggestions about how to successfully include this specific literary genre into the process of teaching English as a Foreign Language. According to the author Anna Wing-Bo Tso (111), "EFL learners should be given opportunities to develop cultural sensitivity and reading strategies towards various text types, including literary texts. In light of this, the aim of this paper is to suggest ways in which English teachers could integrate literature into a language class". To be more precise, by making analytical use of Angela Carter's story *The Snow Child*, the scholarly paper under consideration provides various useful methodological strategies to be used for the pre-, while-, or post-reading stages, the latter one including several follow-up activities.

To go a bit more into detail, one possible way to incorporate literature and (inter)cultural studies into EFL classes as presented in the course of this academic article, is to start analysing the story on a rather basic level, by simply summarising the text in one's own words. Afterwards, more advanced activities are proposed, including, for instance, thinking about various similarities and differences compared to other stories of the same genre, or trying to analyse it from various distinctive perspectives (e.g. feminist perspective, queer reading, etc.) (Tso 115). In her article's concluding section, the author puts emphasis on the fact that "teaching literature in the EFL classroom may require more preparation than teaching the straight-forward and conventional mechanics of

English language”, but that it “can be a useful resource not just for language learning, but also for cultivating students’ cultural and critical literacies” (Tso 115).

In short, the four selected scholarly works and previous studies concerning the topic of interculturality on the one, as well as the issue of (Irish) short stories on the other hand, function as a basis for further research undertaken in the following chapters of the diploma thesis. Thus, many ideas and concepts of the articles and the handbook are going to be applied to the subject matter of intercultural encounters as a theme in Irish short stories, while simultaneously, other areas that have not been examined on an academic level so far, are incorporated in this research as well. These areas include, for instance, an extensive research on how to successfully apply a selected Irish short story canon in the (Austrian) EFL classroom in order to stimulate the students’ cultural development and skills via intercultural training. However, before dealing with this rather practical approach in greater detail, the following sections aim at introducing the readers to the basic concepts of interculturality, as well as the subject of Irish short stories, including the genre’s historical development as an area of interest.

4 The Concept of Interculturality

As presented in the previous section, the issue of interculturality and cultural diversity has been the focus of attention of many different scholarly works. This proves the topic's great actuality and interest for academic researches. Thus, the chapter under consideration aims at analysing the issue's importance and its enormous potential regarding the handling of cultural diversity in everyday-life in general, as well as in the teaching of English as a foreign language in particular. However, before discussing this subject matter in greater detail, a brief outline of the concept's historical development and its various interpretations and definitions, is provided in order to obviate any possible misconceptions immediately.

4.1 Intercultural Theory: Definition(s) and Historical Development

According to the Oxford Online Dictionary, the adjective *intercultural* denotes something "[t]aking place between cultures, or derived from different cultures" (Oxford Online Dictionary, intercultural). Bearing in mind that the term *culture* itself is highly ambiguous and subsequently often understood in different ways, the dictionary's short description of what intercultural means, is far from satisfactory. Therefore, a more detailed look at the several existing meanings of *interculturality* and *intercultural theory* is required in order to fully understand this highly controversial concept.

Before dealing with the ambiguity of the linguistic expression under consideration in detail, the more general term *culture* itself needs to be analysed, as this concept entails some diversity. According to Raymond Williams, one of the most influential figures in contemporary cultural studies, "culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language [...] because it has now come to be used for important concepts in several distinct intellectual disciplines and in several distinct and incompatible systems of thought" (Williams 76f.). When taking a closer look at the term's development in the course of human history, several shifts of its underlying meaning can be identified. To be more precise, the literary term culture, in its earliest stage of usage, referred to the

agricultural sphere, meaning the “cultivation” of crops or animals and the like. During the Enlightenment, also termed the ‘Age of Reason`, a period characterised by the central position of the human mind, and its relevance for the improvement of man and environment through learning, the term under consideration was aligned to, as well as connected to the one of *civilization* itself (Smith and Riley 1). This latter aspect of this kind became also apparent in the course of the 19th century, where culture was used synonymously to refer to the Western civilization, with the underlying meaning of it being superior to other cultures (Jandt 6).

Although the concept of culture is constantly changing, Edward Tylor’s definition, which he proposed in his study *Primitive Culture*, published in 1871, is especially suitable for the term’s current usage as well. According to Tylor, culture has to be seen as a “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (qtd. in Burke 30). Apart from Tylor, many other scholars also aimed at coming up with a suitable definition of the concept and various different notions of culture can be found in secondary literature. To be more precise, the anthropologists Kroeber and Kluckhohn, for instance, have determined culture as “[t]ransmitted patterns of values, ideas and other symbolic systems that shape behaviour”, while Geert Hofstede thinks of it as “[t]he collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another” (qtd. in Heringer, *Sprache und Kultur* 105).

What all these different definitions and conceptions of culture have in common is that the concept is interpreted as a sort of social code which is shared amongst the members of a certain “in-group”. Subsequently, when bearing all these definitions and aspects in mind, it can be argued that

[w]e can have no direct knowledge of a culture other than our own. Our experience with and knowledge of other cultures is limited by the perceptual bias of our own culture. [...] To begin to understand a culture, you need to understand all the experiences that guide its individual members through life: such things as language and gestures; personal appearance and social relationships; religion, philosophy, and values; [...] government systems; and economic systems. [...] All these cultural elements are learned through interaction with others in the culture (Jandt 7f).

This quotation by Jandt puts the focus of attention back to the beginning of this chapter, dealing with the question of how exactly the term *intercultural* can be defined and what it implies in the course of everyday-life, as well as with regard to teaching EFL. After what has been presented so far, it can be stated that the concept of culture as such, cannot be limited to so called “high culture”, meaning arts, classical music, classical literature etc., but rather refers to a shared set of knowledge, beliefs and values that differ from one culture to another. Subsequently, interculturality implies any interaction between two or more of these cultures.

Furthermore, when dealing with the issue of possible definitions and interpretations of the concept of interculturality, it has to be mentioned that the term is often wrongly used similarly to the ones of multi-, cross-, or transculturality. Although all four concepts under consideration are closely related, there are some important differences to be noted in order to ensure that they are used correctly. Thus, according to Witte and Harden (1),

[t]he concept of interculturality can be contrasted to the concept of multiculturalism. Whereas the latter [...] leaves the underlying ‘cultures’ untouched and merely views them in additive fashion, [...] interculturality [...] establishes a genuinely new field ‘in between’. [...] The related concepts of crossculturality and transculturality are located in-between the opposites of interculturality and multiculturalism. Crosscultural encounters *may* have a destabilising effect on the original entities but not necessarily so. Transculturality implies the creation of new cultural phenomena by the merging of two cultures over longer periods of time, e.g. in process of colonisation.

Another aspect to be dealt with in greater detail in the course of this chapter is based on what has been mentioned before, namely that our knowledge of other cultures is limited, which can often lead to more or less severe problems and misunderstandings. This is where the concepts of intercultural competence and intercultural communication come into play, as these fields of study aim at reducing complications arising out of so called “cultural clashes”, by providing reasonable ways and methods for dealing successfully with members of other cultures, as well as for reducing various existing uncertainties with regard to them. This is especially necessary when bearing in mind that “[b]usiness and politics constantly bring people of different cultural groups into contact with each other. Immigration is also a factor that continues to bring different cultures together. Knowledge of diverse cultures can help people to better communicate across”

(Jandt 26) them. As far as the aspect of intercultural communication is concerned, it can be argued that the concept deals with the ability to communicate with members of other “cultural groups” in the same way, or with the same (successful) outcome as with members of one’s own culture, by successfully mastering the problems that arise out of the unforeseen that goes along with these situations (Knapp-Potthoff 196).

Before dealing with the cultural field’s great impact on the actual society and learning environment, a closer look at the discipline’s development is provided. As reported by Kulich (744), when talking about interculturality and intercultural communication, popular figures such as Edward T. Hall, Brislin, Hammer, Wiseman, Landis and Collier, who significantly shaped the issue under consideration in the 1980s and 1990s, come into mind immediately, as each one of these scholars framed the construct on a theoretical, empirical or multi-national basis. “And yet it was in the 1970s that IC began to emerge as a recognizable field, where various academic and applied streams of scholars and practitioners came together to shape a new discipline, develop networks, form associations, and produce the first publications” (Kulich 746). Moreover, the list of scholars provided above, indicates that the discipline under consideration has been influenced by several other academic domains, such as anthropology, sociology, linguistics, psychology and cultural studies (Kulich 745).

When turning the attention to the research done in the academic field of cultural studies nowadays, it can be observed that the branches of both, intercultural theory on the one, and intercultural communication and competence on the other hand, have become a central and important part of intercultural studies. This fact certainly is ascribed to the increasing importance in everyday life in general, as well as the field of academia in particular. “As globalization becomes a household word, the intercultural agenda is becoming the world’s agenda. Interculturalists have been working for decades to improve intercultural understanding, but it is now increasingly imperative to reach this goal”. This perception, as formulated in Fowler and Blohm’s (37) research on the need for intercultural training, is a phenomenon that can currently be experienced nearly everywhere. Nevertheless, as the focus of this thesis is on teaching intercultural competence in the Austrian EFL classroom, the focus is now turned to the various developments with regard to the notion of interculturality in Austria.

4.2 The Need for Intercultural Competence in Austria

When taking a more detailed look at current movements, trends and attitudes, not only in Austria's society in particular, but also all around the globe, one phenomenon can be noticed very easily, namely the tendency of nations and societies to become multi- and intercultural.

What both phenomena have in common is the change in society that comes along with the concepts under consideration; a change which is often discussed as a result of 'globalisation'. As stated in Bok (ix),

Every serious account of the major forces transforming our world today includes the word globalization. Of course, much of what we mean by globalization is largely a continuation of trends or practices that were evident before the 21st century. Yet there are aspects of today's world that seem different enough, or at least accentuated enough, to make our situation seem different from what has gone before.

This quotation clearly identifies the phenomenon of interculturality as a current trend and ongoing change in society and thus puts emphasis on the fact that the concepts of intercultural competence and intercultural communications are definitely fields worth researching on. In order to further illustrate the need for a greater focus on the issues under consideration, the following charts present the current national, and thus also cultural and ethnical diversity in Austria (Statistik Austria 21):

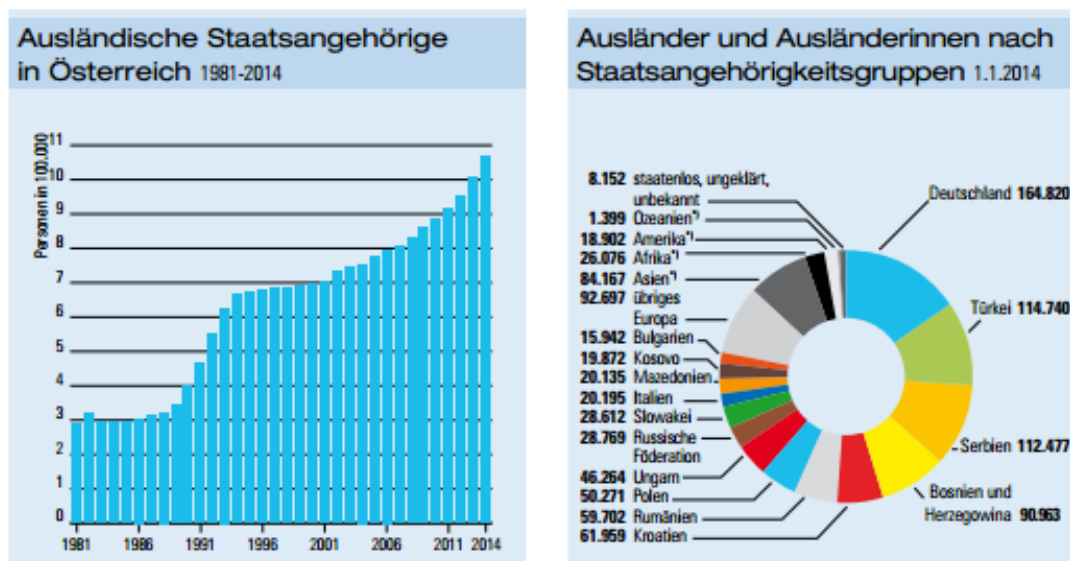


Figure 1: Migrants in Austria According to their Nationality

The figure above provides significant insights into the enormous rise of foreign citizens in Austria within the past 23 years, as well as how they can be “grouped” by nationality. When taking a closer look at the first aspect under consideration, it can be seen that the number of people living in Austria having a foreign nationality is currently more than three times as high as this was the case in the year of 1981. To be more precise, in 2014 over one million Austrian inhabitants were having another citizenship, which makes of 12.5 per cent of the country’s total population. Focussing on their different nationalities, it can be ascertained that almost half of all migrants living in Austria originally come from another EU-country, of which people coming from Germany constitute by far the biggest group. Moreover, the graph clearly presents the considerable diversity of nationalities and cultures, ethnicities and religions that currently live in Austria itself. This intercultural diversity entails both, a huge potential with regard to the field of cultural development, but also problems, conflicts and critical incidents based on these cultural and national differences.

These aspects the concept of interculturality involves, are present in nearly every aspect of everyday life. However, as this thesis is going to analyse the value of intercultural competence and communication in the context of teaching, to be more precise within a school environment, the focus of attention is now turned to this very aspect by again referring to various facts and figures that help

to highlight the current situation. To be more precise, according to the *Nationaler Bildungsbericht Österreich* (Bruneforth and Lassnigg 5), a report about Austria's educational system of the year 2012¹, about one fifth of the country's total population has a migration background. Thus, this fact is also apparent in Austrian schools. In order to visualise this aspect in detail, the following figure (see information sheets of BMUKK) presents the percentage and the development of Austrian school children speaking a primary language other than German:

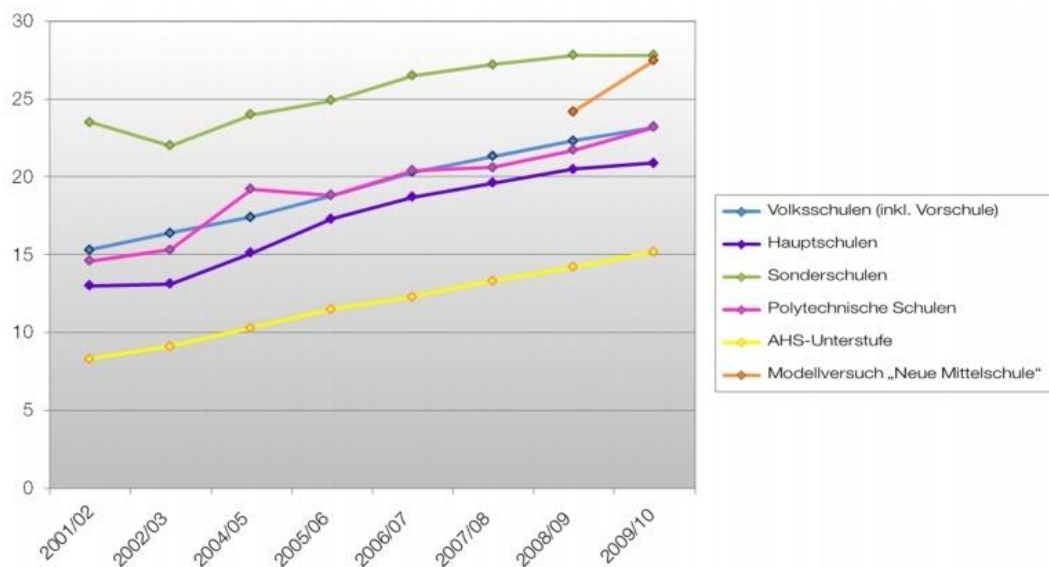


Figure 2: Percentage of Austrian Pupils having Another Primary Language than German

As Figure 2 clearly shows, the percentage of Austrian school children who have a primary language other than German is constantly rising in the course of each school type presented in the chart. When focussing on the data indicated by the yellow line, presenting the pupils in the lower grade of grammar schools who have a migration background, it can be argued that this percentage is by far the lowest, starting from about eight per cent in 2001/02 and rising up to 15 per cent by the end of the century's first decade. In contrast to this aspect, the highest percentage of pupils having a primary language other than German can be found in so called "Sonderschulen" (schools for pupils with a learning handicap), as

¹ The NBB of 2012 is the second published report by the Austrian Institute of educational research, innovation and development of the Austrian educational system and comprises two volumes that feature various researches, tables and figures with regard to actual problematical issues and developments of Austria's education.

presented by the green line. Thus, by the end of the school year of 2009/10, almost 28 per cent of non-German native speakers were attending this special type of school. In primary-, and secondary schools, as well as polytechnic institutes by comparison, this percentage varies only between 20 and 25 during the school year 2009/2010.

Bearing these data in mind, the figure definitely proves the fact that Austria's educational system faces a significant increase when it comes to the aspect of multiculturalism inside the classrooms. In order to not only successfully deal with this cultural diversity, but also use it as a vital resource and potential to enlarge the pupils' intercultural competences, a more detailed look needs to be taken on several possibilities and methods of teaching these intercultural issues.

4.3 Teaching and Developing Intercultural Competences

As the section above clearly demonstrates, the aspects of cultural, ethnical, as well as religious diversity are already deep-seated in current society; a fact which also becomes apparent when taking a closer look at the environments of the various schools around the globe. Thus, this chapter presents and discusses several questions related the overall issue under consideration. These areas of interest include, for example, the necessity of linking language and (inter)cultural learning with the teaching of EFL, the proposal of an intercultural approach in current language teaching, as well as the important link between the topic under consideration and its role in the current (Austrian) curriculum. Moreover, a short introduction into the various methods to be used for dealing with this topic in class is presented in order to provide the readers with a more hands- on and practical approach regarding the issue of interculturality in the EFL classroom.

4.3.1 Towards an Intercultural Approach in Language Teaching

When dealing with the concept of interculturality and its implementation in the classrooms of several different school types in greater detail, the question of why the topic of cultural diversity, or cultural studies, is connected with language

teaching and learning may arise. Exactly this question has already been the area of interest of many scholars and their differing researches dealing with the topic under consideration. Almost all of them argue for the need of linking language and culture in the process of teaching.

As reported in Michael Byram's article about an integrated model for teaching culture and language, "[a]lthough there have been attempts in British secondary schools to teach children about European cultures without teaching a foreign language, traditions of secondary education have usually taken for granted that language and culture teaching must be clearly linked" (Byram 17). This assumption is justified by indicating that language teaching is the "key" for dealing with cultural aspects in class as well. Bearing this in mind, language teaching consists of two different divisions, namely its linguistic and literary aims on the one, and human and social aims, on the other hand (Byram 17). Thus, the overall goal of successful language and culture teaching is to deal with the two aspects in perfect balance in class, as both are dependent on each other. "Language is not simply a reflector of an objective cultural reality. It is an integral part of that reality through which other parts are shaped and interpreted. It is both a symbol of the whole and a part of the whole which shapes and is in turn shaped by sociocultural actions, beliefs and values" (Byram 18).

The same applies not only for focussing on the "regional" culture in class, but rather when broaching the issue of interculturality and intercultural aspects in the course of the EFL classroom. To be more precise, the "[a]cquisition of Intercultural Competence is possible in different environments or settings but the most suitable is certainly one that is connected to foreign language acquisition. [...] This leads us to the problem of teaching/learning a foreign language at school" and "the types of resources and tools" (Costa Afonso 127) that are needed in order to ensure the best possible outcome with regard to the improvement of this competence.

Taking this viewpoint into account, it can be assumed that the study of (inter)cultural aspects already forms a substantial part of language teaching and vice versa. However, several studies and schoolbook-analyses confirm that this is often not the case. Rather, cultural issues and intercultural aspects are presented in an isolated form at the very end of each chapter, conveying the effect of being additional material to be used as some sort of gap-filling activities

when there is time left at the end of the lesson (Byram 17f). As stated in Costa Afonso (128),

the course books that are used to support language classes generally serve only one function: the teacher limits his or her teaching efforts to the sociocultural information contained in the course book and does little to stimulate discussion, encourage projects or other such work. This happens not infrequently because the teacher's own knowledge of the topics is limited, sometimes because the teacher does not feel the need to broaden his or her own knowledge.

This "widespread amateurism" within the professional field of foreign language teachers strongly characterises the domain of socio-cultural learning in the foreign language classroom which is mostly based on the teachers' lack of relevant skills and appropriate material (Risager 182). Therefore, the following sections aim at discussing several important aspects to be kept in mind when focussing on the teaching of intercultural competence, as well as suggestions of useful and vital methods to be applied for ensuring a satisfactory acquiring-process.

4.3.2 Teaching Intercultural Competence: Development, Challenges, Methods

As already mentioned in the chapter above, the teaching of intercultural competence can most successfully be linked to foreign language teaching and subsequently to the acquisition of a language other than the pupils' own mother tongue. Thus, this chapter provides interesting insights into the aims of incorporating intercultural studies in EFL classes, potential problems and limitations with regard to this topic, as well as the presentation of useful methods and tools suitable for this specific purpose.

Although the aspect of teaching intercultural competences nowadays plays a more or less important role concerning second language acquisition in general, as well as the teaching of English as a Foreign Language in particular, it has to be mentioned that it took a long time until this tendency developed in the way it can be found in present teaching and current course books. As reported by Fowler and Blohm (37),

the intercultural field is still relatively young. At the midpoint of the 20th century, it is doubtful that people thought of themselves as intercultural trainers. During that time, so-called “area studies” trainers relied on the traditional methods of the college professor: lecture, perhaps a film, the written word, and maps. It was not until 1971 that the first culture assimilator or intercultural sensitizer was developed. [...] Over the ensuing decades” however, “intercultural training methods have been generated and have undergone great transformation.

Moreover, in the course of this context a very important shift has to be mentioned, dealing with the progressive replacement of the communicative competence, a concept which still plays an important role in foreign language teaching, by the one of intercultural competence, which is assumed to have taken place during the 1980s (Harden 81). This replacement was due to the fact that “[c]ommunicative competence, with its standardised native speaker norms, is as utopian as the notion of the idealised native speaker-listener. [...] It is this monolithic perception of language and culture” that needed to undergo some change (Alptekin 59). Nevertheless, both competences are closely linked and dependent on each other. A more detailed look at various methodological approaches with regard to the concept’s usage in the EFL classroom will prove this assumption.

As many researches on this specific topic have shown, EFL teachers often feel insecure and badly trained when it comes to the issue of successfully dealing with the acquisition of intercultural competences in class. As reported in Borghetti (141), “[t]he difficulty language teachers face in promoting IC is that they are supposed to pursue stated educational goals [...] without having access to equally clear methodological directions”. As the sections presented above have shown, teaching, as well as learning and acquiring intercultural competences is regarded as a major concern not only in the course of language teaching itself, but also for the exposure to the cultural diversity in current society. Therefore the presentation of various helpful guidelines and methods aim at facilitating these teaching and acquiring processes.

To begin with, when focussing on the cultural diversity in Austria’s school environment, it is of great importance for the teachers to be able to master a great variety of methods when dealing with intercultural aspects in class, as no single method will work for every student all the time (Fowler and Blohm 37). This also applies for teaching other issues and concepts. The usage of several varying

methods which aim at the pupils' different abilities and skills is a vital basis for successfully dealing with the concept under consideration. In this context, Paige (185) mentions the importance of "the appropriate mix of experiential and didactic methods, culture-specific and culture-general content, cognitive/affective/behavioral-learning activities". In order to create a better understanding for these different categories, the authors Fowler and Blohm, provide their readers with suggestions of various methods to be used for each one of them. As formulated in Gudykunst et al. (qtd. in Fowler and Blohm 39):

For example, under didactic culture-general, they list lecture and discussions, videotapes, and culture-general assimilators. In experiential culture-general, they cite culture-general simulations and self assessments. For culture-specific training, they list area orientation briefings, language training, culture-specific assimilators, and culture-specific reading as didactic methods. Under experiential methods they cite bicultural communication workshops, culture-specific simulations, and culture-specific role plays.

To put these suggestions and recommendations in other words, the two categories of experiential and didactic feature processes in the course of which intercultural training is actually delivered, while the two remaining ones include the training's content itself (Fowler and Blohm 39).

Turning the attention to a more hands-on aspect in the course of teaching intercultural competences in the Foreign Language classroom, some specific exercises of interest are presented and analysed. One of the probably mostly used and well known exercises is role play, which can be considered as being "among the 'classics' in the field of intercultural training" (Rost-Roth 496). As stated in Hiller and Woźniak (117), "the design of the role-plays usually consists of a situation in which two somehow 'differently poled' groups (cultures) have to interact. They reveal an unexpected behaviour to each other, which has to be handled in a certain way, according to the aim of the exercise (e.g. sensitization for own cultural imprint)". Thus, the exercises under consideration enable the (language) learners not only to experience certain situations from another point of view, but also to subsequently reflect on the differences in behaviour.

Another specific type of exercise to be dealt with in this context is the use of so called 'critical incidents', meaning the dealing with problematic intercultural conflict situations in class, in order to train the students' intercultural, and problem solving competences. Moreover, these incidents are not only used for training,

but also for analysing intercultural communication. To be more precise, a 'typical critical incident' usually features a communicational situation, in the course of which participants from two or more different cultures face various difficulties due to a lack of background knowledge concerning the other cultures' values, beliefs, and behaviours (Heringer, *Critical Incidents* 218f). Thus, "the objective is to prepare participants for encountering their own and other cultural orientation systems by means of cognitive insights" (Rost-Roth 497).

Although only two different activities with regard to teaching intercultural competences have been presented in the course of this chapter, the already existing great variety of these exercises helps to ensure, when used appropriately, that each student's individual needs are addressed equally, as well as to achieve the desired outcomes. According to Fowler and Blohm (45), these "desired goals are the knowledge, skills, or attitudes needed for working or living in a new environment or being more effective in a current and changing multicultural environment".

As the inclusion of the issue of interculturality in the Austrian curriculum functions as a solid basis for achieving these desired goals, the following chapter aims at providing some theoretical background on the need for intercultural training in the EFL classroom, by taking a closer look at its implementation in the Austrian curriculum, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), as well as with regard to the requirements of the new "Standardised Competence-Oriented Reifeprüfung".

4.3.3 Intercultural Competence: A Major Topic in the ELT Classroom

When focussing in greater detail on the various regulations and guidelines with regard to teaching the topics being dealt with, as well as on several didactic principles to be applied in the Austrian EFL classroom, it can be noticed that the teaching and acquiring of intercultural competences not only features a major part in the Austrian curriculum for English as such, but is also an integral part of the CEFR and of the new "Standardised Competence-Oriented Reifeprüfung". These aspects will be considered in more detail in the following sections, which will

provide a closer look at the issues of interculturality and cultural diversity in the context of teaching English.

4.3.3.1 The Austrian Curriculum

The Austrian curriculum consists of four major parts; the first three are focussed on general topics, as for instance, important educational objectives, didactic principles, as well as factors affecting the educational design of a school. The fourth part deals with the specific syllabi of each individual subject by issuing its content and achieving goals in great detail. Moreover, it has to be mentioned that each Austrian school type entails its own specific curriculum. However, with regard to the overall topic of the thesis under consideration, the main focus of the following analyses will be on the curriculum of secondary schools of higher education (henceforth AHS).

When turning the attention to the curriculum's first major part, covering the educational objectives to be kept in mind when teaching, it can be noted that the issue of interculturality already plays a main part. To be more precise, the topics of integration, interculturality and globalisation are considered to be extraordinarily important in the AHS curriculum:

Der europäische Integrationsprozess ist im Gange, die Internationalisierung der Wirtschaft schreitet voran, zunehmend stellen sich Fragen der interkulturellen Begegnung und Herausforderungen im Bereich Chancengleichheit und Gleichstellung der Geschlechter. In diesem Zusammenhang kommt der Auseinandersetzung mit der regionalen, österreichischen und europäischen Identität unter dem Aspekt der Weltoffenheit besondere Bedeutung zu. Akzeptanz, Respekt und gegenseitige Achtung sind wichtige Erziehungsziele insbesondere im Rahmen des interkulturellen Lernens und des Umgangs der Geschlechter miteinander (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen, Lehrplan 1).

Focusing on the second part of the Austrian AHS curriculum, which features general didactic principles to be kept in mind when teaching, the concept of interculturality is again discussed in greater detail in one subchapter, dealing with intercultural learning. In the course of this section, it is stated that it is of great importance to make use of the enormous potential, cultural diversity entails in class. Furthermore, it is advised to evoke the pupils' curiosity regarding this issue,

in order for them to experience and to collectively participate in the process of discerning and adopting of cultural values (see Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen, Lehrplan 2).

Finally, the fourth part of the curriculum, which deals with individual subject matters and their goals, entails important references and links to interculturality. Thus, when turning the attention to the subchapter dealing with the teaching of intercultural competences, it can be stated that the students should be alerted to the current cultural and linguistic diversity in Europe and the whole world. In the original document this claim is stated as follows:

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 (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen, Lehrplan 4).

4.3.3.2 Common European Framework of Reference

Another theoretical document that is consulted in order to put emphasis on the fact that intercultural competence forms an integral part of EFL teaching in the Austrian curriculum is the Common European Framework of Reference (henceforth CEFR)². Basically, the CEFR functions as a basis for the common development of language syllabi in Europe and provides various useful guidelines concerning, for instance, individual curriculums, examinations, as well as textbooks used in Europe (Council of Europe 1). With regard to its overall purpose it can be claimed that the aim of the CEFR is “to stimulate reflection on current

² The CEFR was published in the year 2001, after a lot of piloting and research on how to successfully provide a reference frame for language teachers all over Europe has been done. Being available in all together 39 different languages, the document provides a basis for the design of curriculums, syllabi, as well as teaching and learning materials. Moreover, the CEFR makes use of a scheme describing the language proficiency with the help of different levels (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2). This makes it possible to compare individual results of exams across all participating countries and languages (Council of Europe 1ff.).

practice and to provide common reference levels to facilitate communication, comparison of courses and qualifications, plus, eventually, personal mobility as a result” (North, *Illustrative Descriptor Scales* 228).

Focussing on the document’s relevance for the issue under consideration, it can be said that the CEFR addresses the topics of intercultural competence and interculturality. Thus, one of the three basic principles that have been set down by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe deals with the aspect “that the rich heritage of diverse languages and cultures in Europe is a valuable common resource to be protected and developed, and that a major educational effort is needed to convert that diversity from a barrier to communication into a source of mutual enrichment and understanding” (Council of Europe 2).

Furthermore, the importance of interculturality within the CEFR becomes apparent when focussing on the different language domains into which the various language activities are contextualised. Basically, these domains comprise all together four different spheres, namely the public, personal, educational and occupational domain. However, each one of them features a great variety of subsections. To be more precise, the public domain, for instance, “refers to everything connected with ordinary social interaction (business and administrative bodies, public services, cultural and leisure activities [...] etc.). Complementarily, the personal domain comprises family relations and individual social practices” (Council of Europe 15). Therefore, it can be inferred that the developing of intercultural competence is regarded as indispensable with regard to achieving the educational goals and guidelines as formulated in the CEFR.

4.3.3.3 Standardized Competence-Oriented “Reifeprüfung”

When turning the attention to the new Standardized Competence-Oriented Reifeprüfung (henceforth SCOR) in the AHS, the great importance of teaching intercultural competences in the Austrian EFL classroom becomes apparent once

more³. Especially when focusing on the newly introduced “pool of topics”, being used in the course of the students’ final oral examination, the necessity of including intercultural issues into the teaching of EFL can be seen very clearly. This pool of topics consists of all together 24 topics the students should be able to discuss in their final exam. The list of topics currently used for the Austrian SCOR in English is presented below (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen, Fremdsprachen 13). However, the original version has been published in German, but in the following chart the topics are given in English translation.

1	Relationships and social networks	13	Arts and culture
2	Habitation and environment	14	Media
3	Fashion and trends	15	Communication
4	Nutrition, health and social security	16	Nature and environment
5	Sports	17	New technologies
6	School and education	18	Individual (future) perspectives
7	Working environment	19	Intercultural aspects
8	Recreational behavior	20	Growing up and determination of identity
9	Consumer society	21	Politics and public institutions
10	Tradition and change	22	The globalised world
11	Transporting systems and tourism	23	Social grouping
12	Regional studies	24	Rules, regulations, laws

Table 1: Topic-pool for SCOR (AHS: Level B2)

These topic areas used for the SCOR in English, aim at testing AHS students at a B2 level, meaning the knowledge, skills and competences they should have acquired at the end of their education. As it can be clearly seen, the issue of

³ The new SCOR was implemented in the course of the school year 2014/15, in order to improve the previous Austrian testing system. Thus, it aims to ensure a higher level of objectivity, transparency, as well as the possibility to compare the individual performances with single schools and students in the whole country. Moreover, the SCOR consists of all together three branches the pupils have to undertake in order to finish their studies. These consist of the VWA (Vorwissenschaftliche Arbeit), and a written and an oral examination on the other hand (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen 2).

interculturality is not only apparent in the course of topic nr. 19 (intercultural aspects), but also features an integral part in other areas as well, as for instance with regard to the ones of social networks, habitation, determination of identity, the globalised world or social groupings.

Bearing these aspects in mind, it can be claimed that interculturality definitely has to find its way into language teaching. However, many teachers lack the relevant skills, teaching materials, as well as methodological approaches for dealing with the topic of interculturality in an appropriate way. One vital way for approaching the issue is definitely the use of appropriate contemporary literary resources. Thus, as the thesis under consideration tries to illustrate the didactic potential of selected Irish short stories with regard to the topic of interculturality, the following sections will focus in greater detail on different aspects of this literary genre and cultural concepts.

5 The Short Story: Aspects of a Literary Genre

The overall aim of the following sections is to provide the readers of this thesis with significant insights into the topic of the short story as a literary genre. Thus, an in-depth overview on the issue under consideration, including various aspects of interest is presented and analysed in detail. These aspects include, for instance, various characteristic features of this specific type of narrative, its historical development, major themes and topics, as well as the introduction of some famous authors who shaped the genre of short fiction significantly. Moreover, a small excursus on the Irish short story as a specific type of the literary genre is provided in order to form a solid basis for the analyses of the four stories by Irish writers, presented in the thesis' main body. Finally, as it has also been the case with the concept of interculturality and intercultural competence before, the topic under consideration is researched in view of its didactic potential and usefulness for the (Austrian) EFL classroom.

5.1 Characteristics and Historical Development

Although often spuriously enjoying a lower prestige than other literary genres, especially within the broad field of English literature, the short story has nearly always been, and still is, extraordinarily popular not only with young readers in the course of literature classes, but it is also extensively used and referred to in university courses, academic journals and other media (Brosch 9). This phenomenon can be further noticed when putting additional focus on the scholarly interest on this topic. Hence, numerous contemporary publications on the theoretical aspects of the genre, as well as on specific stories shape the academic discourses on these issues. This fact is also mirrored, when examining the definition of the short story in two different dictionaries in more detail.

Thus, when drawing the attention to one specific attempt of defining the concept of the short story, the *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* presents various features of this genre on altogether 13 pages to the readers. Cuddon (Penguin Dictionary 815), for instance, draws amongst other

things on the difficulty of classifying the short story according to the aspect of length:

It is doubtful, anyway, whether classification is helpful. Certainly there seems to be little point in measuring it. One is confronted with the question: how long (or short) is short? In athletic terms, if we take the novella as a 'middle-distance' book/story, then the short story comes into the 100/200 metre class. Nevertheless, there are very long short-stories and very short ones.

In comparison to Cuddon, the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (332) defines the short story as follows:

A fictional prose tale of no specified length, but too short to be published as a volume on its own, as novellas sometimes and novels usually are. A short story will normally concentrate on a single event with only one or two characters, more economically than a novel's sustained exploration of social background. There are similar fictional forms of greater antiquity—fables, *lais*, folktales, parables, and the French *conte*—but the short story as we know it flourished in the magazines of the 19th and early 20th centuries, especially in the USA, which has a particularly strong tradition.

Having a closer look on these definitions that provide some information on the term under consideration, it can be noted that the description of what a short story is considered to be, is profoundly shaped by its comparison to other literary genres, such as the novel for example. In her monograph *Short Story. Textsorte und Leseerfahrung*, Renate Brosh (9f) addresses the problem of the genre's strong resistance to appropriate definition by reporting that according to her, the term's differentiation to other literary genres often features its single characteristic.

However, as an in-depth analysis of the secondary literature on short stories may prove conclusively, this widespread assumption is false. Rather, this specific type of literature entails some other features worth focusing on. Thus, when sticking to the aspect of length, it has to be stated that the short story as a genre is characterised by this specific feature. In his academic study *The Short Story*, Ian Reid (9) brings up the challenging question of what short in this context actually means. According to him,

[p]resumably the lower limit comes down in theory to a mere sentence, [...] though in practice it is hard to imagine how anything under a page or two can offer more than a skinny outline of happenings (as with Hemingway's stringently abbreviated piece 'A Short Story') [...]. The upper limit is less clear, and its demarcation will depend partly on whether author, reader or

middleman is made the primary point of reference. Poe said that a 'tale' (which for the moment can be taken as a synonym [...]) is capable of being perused at one sitting.

Although this description leaves some space for loose interpretations (as 'one sitting' usually spans a different period of time for the individual readers), the aspect of a more or less clearly defined length can definitely be considered as one fundamental characteristic feature. Another defining characteristic of the short story is closely connected to the widespread criticism dealing with the genre's assumed lack of complexity, a deep-rooted misconception the factor of length entails. Nevertheless, "[o]nly a naïve reader would confuse significance with bulk. The lyric is by no means less potent and meaningful, inherently, than a discursive poem, and the short story can move us by an intensity which the novel is unable to sustain" (Reid 2). Thus, this intensity of the literary genre under consideration can be regarded as another striking characteristic feature. Finally, it can be argued that the short story is often considered to function as a metaphor illustrating a society or a character's inner life. Additionally, a number of theorists have argued that this literary genre "is particularly good at embodying the voices and the fragmentary experiences of those who are outside the mainstream, [...] the dominant power structures, of their worlds – the poor, the humble, the alienated" (Malcolm 7).

All of the above mentioned characteristic features can be encountered in detail when analysing the four Irish short stories selected. However, before presenting the results in detail, a brief overview on the genre's historical development is to be provided in order to enable a contextualized understanding of the issue under consideration. Being a major part of the oral narrative tradition, the short story can be considered as a prototype of narration, by forming the starting point of any alternate forms of literary genres (Brosch 27). As stated in Malcolm (7), "[s]hort fictional prose narratives are a very old type of text, and pieces of short fiction existed in Europe since classical times. (In the medieval period, many short narratives were written in verse, but they are still seen as part [...] of the short story". According to Reid's chapter on the growth of the genre (19), Boccaccio's *Decameron*, which was finished in the 1350s, was significantly involved in the establishment of prose as a viable option for literary writers.

Nevertheless, the most influential and important historical development with regard to this literary genre occurred in the course of the Romantic Period, an era

representing a literary and intellectual movement in Europe in the late 18th and 19th centuries. As stated in Reid (27f),

[s]hort stories do frequently focus on one or two individuals who are seen as separated from their fellow-men in some way, at odds with social norms, beyond the pale. In this respect, short stories can properly be called romantic [...]. Indeed, since the emergence of the short story as a fully fledged genre in Europe and America coincides, as already noted, with the burgeoning of that protean cultural phenomenon known as Romanticism, there would seem to be a broad basis for the common remark that the short story is in essence a Romantic form: *the* Romantic prose form.

When focusing on literature-related characteristic features embodied in Romanticism, it has to be mentioned that the era's major concern was the rejection of the rules and restrictions upheld by Classical art. To be more precise, this implies "fixed forms and conventions; the unities of time and place, according to which the action had to happen in a single place, within a space of twenty-four hours [...]; a proscription on represented violence and excess; plausibility, wholeness, and consistency" (Hannoosh 454). Furthermore, one of the key issues of Romanticism is the one of individualism. Thus, "[t]he Romantic hero or heroine often stands apart and alone, on the margins of society, in physical or spiritual exile" (Hannoosh 457). Exactly these essential features as elucidated by Hannoosh, form a substantial part in the course of numerous Romantic short story writers' works, including the fiction produced by Frank O'Connor, Byron, Coleridge and Nerval, for example (Reid 27).

Before dealing with some of these important authors in more detail within the next chapter, focussing on the Irish short story as a specific variety of short fiction, it has to be noted that while the short story has been established as a genre during Romanticism, the era of Modernism can be seen as the climax of its development (Brosch 27f.). To be more precise, this period entails a "deliberate break with the dominant modes of nineteenth-century thought" and focuses particularly at "the revolt against positivism, rationalism, and political liberalism; the turning toward nonlinear and increasingly formal modes of artistic representation" (Pearlman 395). Moreover, it has to be mentioned that this era influenced the major representatives of the genre, such as Edgar Allen Poe, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Thomas Hardy or Katherine Mansfield.

5.2 The Irish Short Story

As the main focus of this thesis is on the presentation and the in-depth analysis of four Irish short stories, including a detailed examination of their didactic potential for the Austrian EFL classroom, the following pages aim at highlighting the most important aspects of Irish short fiction. To be more precise, the brief introduction into the historical development of the short story already presented, is expanded to various substantial features dealing with short fiction produced by Irish writers. Furthermore, several central themes and topics are discussed according to their impact on the development of Irish short stories. In the course of this section, the attention is primarily turned to the issues of race and migration on the one, as well as the concept of Irishness and national identity on the other hand, as both topics are substantial parts in the literary analyses presented within the next main chapter. Finally, also the genre's didactic potential for the (Austrian) EFL classroom is discussed in great detail, especially by focusing on its implementation in the Austrian AHS curriculum, the CEFR and the new "Standardized Competence Oriented Reifeprüfung".

5.2.1 A Brief History of the Irish Short Story

When dealing with the historical development of the Irish short story in greater detail, the question of to what extent it can be distinguished from its British equivalent may immediately arise. This concern is primarily based on the fact that both varieties of the short story often feature similar developments with regard to their historical background (D. Malcolm xiii). To be more precise, before the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922, in the course of which alternate forms to British literary modernism have been established, Irish writers were closely linked to the British literary system (Kiberd 43f). Nevertheless, as stated in D. Malcolm (21), "[t]he history and development of short fiction in Ireland have followed substantially different paths from those of the British short story. First, there is the question of status. [...] For most of the twentieth century, the short story was the preferred form" of literary work for numerous Irish writers. Thus, the above mentioned aspect of status can be closely linked to the genre's wide exploitation

by the country's authors. Secondly, a closer look needs to be taken at the specific experience of Ireland that "has for centuries been closer to that of a colonised country – with all its complexities of affiliation and rejection – than that of any part of mainland Britain" (D. Malcolm 21). This experience significantly shaped the way Irish short fiction is produced and seen by the society. Due to the above mentioned crucial differences, it is indispensable to focus in detail on the historical development of the Irish variety of the short story as a literary genre, in order to be able to retrace various of its main topics and themes.

Although the section above has already stated that the short story as a literary genre can be considered as a prototype of narration, which "highlights its origins in the Gaelic oral tradition" (Maunder, Irish short fiction), the main focus of this chapter will be on the late nineteenth and the twentieth century. According to Cheryl Alexander Malcolm and David Malcolm (xv), "[t]he decision to start the coverage of the development of the short story in Britain and Ireland after 1880 is based on the scholarly consensus that, while early nineteenth-century and high-Victorian authors wrote short fiction", they did not take it very seriously. In other words, many scholars argue that this period is marked by a general lack of interest regarding short fiction, as the novel usually was the preferred text type to be produced by both, Irish and British authors (Korte 74).

One central aspect involved in the growth of interest in Irish short stories, is illustrated by the massive rise of periodicals publishing short fiction. Thus, as stated in Kilroy (10),

[a] stimulation for the energetic production of short stories [...] has been the development of periodicals [...]. In the early years of the period in which the short story emerged, an audience had been established for the books of short fiction by Maria Edgeworth. Regional tales of Ireland drew strong interest from English audiences. [...] After the demise of Dublin as a capital city, book and periodical publication declined, but in few generations scores of short stories began to appear in new magazines aimed at a middle-class audience.

To be more precise, several magazines, amongst them the *Dublin University Magazine* (1833-77), the *Dublin Penny Journal* (1832-1836), the *Irish Penny Journal* (1840-1841), the *Nation* (1842-1892), or the *Irish Homestead* (1895-1923) (Kilroy 10ff.) provided a vital platform for the publishing of Irish literature.

Furthermore, the era of the Irish Literary Revival (a period starting in the last century of the nineteenth century and lasting until the mid 1920s) was profoundly

shaped by two different kinds of short stories: fiction dealing with the topics of legend, myth and folklore on the one, as well as stories covering the issues of Irish rural and urban living on the other hand (D. Malcolm 23). Both varieties were published in numerous works written by many different Irish authors. George Moore's short story collection *The Untilled Field* and James Joyce's *Dubliners*, for instance, provide classic examples. According to Debbie Brouckmans (85), "*The Untilled Field* is often regarded as a turning point in the development of the modern Irish short story" and is "generally considered a precursor of James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914)". Concerning the two significant characteristics of the modern Irish short story mentioned above, it can be stated that *The Untilled Fields* features both of them. Thus, the various stories of the collection were not only published in several volumes of the periodical *The New Ireland Review*, but are also linked by the setting. "Even though Moore looks at Irish rural life as well as Irish urban life in *The Untilled Field*, the stories all take place in either North Mayo or in Dublin of the 1880s" (Brouckmans 87). Being a second characteristic example of the period of the Irish Literary Revival, James Joyce's *Dubliners* need to be briefly mentioned in the course of this context. "Almost contemporary with *The Untilled Field* [...], the stories in James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914), with their sober detailing of the *accidie* of the lives of the denizens of the early twentieth-century provincial imperial capital, [...] have done much to make Dublin one of the literary *loci* in Europe" (D. Malcolm 26).

When turning the attention to Ireland at the beginning of the twentieth-century, a period known as The Troubles, a closer look needs to be taken on various historical developments and their subsequent impact on Irish short fiction. As noted by Cheryl Alexander Malcolm and David Malcolm (10), "[t]he disruptions of Irish history and the developments of Irish society during the war against the British, the Civil War, and the period of national reflection that followed proved particularly stimulating for the short story". Thus, countless literary works that were produced in the course of this era aim at critically reflecting on several historical and socio-political events, such as the Easter Rising (1916), or the beginning of military conflicts between the I.R.A. and the British soldiers (Kilroy 14f.).

Directing the focus of interest on some important historical developments in the course of post-war Ireland, it has to be argued that once more, several

aspects bear great relevance for the development of Irish short fiction. To be more precise, in his academic survey dealing with *The British and Irish Short Story: 1945 – Present*, Cheryl Alexander Malcolm and David Malcolm (249) present various events of Irish political and social history which find echoes in the several short stories produced at that time. These include, for example, not only the Northern Ireland conflict that started in the late 1960s and protracted until the end of the century, but also issues like poverty, the Irish Republic's social and economic transformation in the second half of the twentieth century, as well as immigration and emigration. Although this latter aspect has already been a big problem after the period of massive starvation, known as the Great Famine, this chapter explores the process's influence on contemporary Irish society. Hence, several incidents connected to the Celtic Tiger economy on the one, as well as the Good Friday Peace Accords (1998) on the other hand transformed Ireland and Dublin in particular, into a melting pot of different cultures. "With immigrants from Asia, Africa, Central and Eastern Europe joining thousands of repatriated Irish, entirely new questions of national identity are being considered" (Winston 273). Especially the aspects of immigration, cultural, ethnical and religious diversity, as well as the concept of Irishness thus form substantial parts of late twentieth-century and contemporary short fiction writing.

As the chapter under consideration clearly reveals, the historical development of Ireland has very much defined the topics and themes addressed in Irish short stories. In order to provide a comprehensive insight into this issue, the following chapter aims at presenting the most important themes in Irish short fiction.

5.2.2 Themes in Irish Short Fiction

As analysed in the previous chapter, the historical development of Ireland as a country is closely connected to the establishment of the Irish short story as a literary genre and can thus be considered as extraordinarily important for the different themes and topics being dealt with in the course of this type of short fiction. Therefore, this section focuses in detail on altogether three selected major themes which provide the centerpiece of individual short stories. Amongst them

are the topics of fantasy and myth, the discrepancy between city and country, and, of course, the issues of race and (im)migration.

With regard to the first topic area under consideration, including the supernatural, fantastical or science fictional encounters, as well as the concept of myth, it has to be stated that the deep fascination on the part of the Irish culture in general, and national writers of short fiction in particular already established itself in the eighteenth century and has persisted up to contemporary society and literature. Nevertheless, it can be stated that these themes received by far the most popularity and attention during the period of Irish Modernism and thus play central roles in the writings of James Joyce, W.B. Yeats and Samuel Beckett for instance. "While on the one hand the fantastic seems at odds with the idea of literary Modernism, it is quite often a part of Modernism's essential paradox of 'making new' while simultaneously drawing on strands of older or traditional forms of classical art and literature" (Beville 64). Therefore, in the introductory part to his *Celtic Twilight*, Yeats (I) emphasises the need for creating "a little world out of the beautiful, pleasant, and significant things of this marred and clumsy world, and to show in a vision something of the face of Ireland to any of [his] own people who would look where [he bids] them". Moreover, when focusing in detail on several routes of the topics of fantasy and myth, it has to be noted that according to Smyth (48), there are four main sources to reflect on when dealing with the tendency of Irish short story writers to include these themes into their works. Thus, he lists "the violence of colonialism and decolonisation; the experimental possibilities afforded by an invented or rediscovered tradition of myth and magic; the nightmare of an alienated 'Gothic' history [...]; and the 'unreal' or 'anti-rational' nature of literature itself".

A second central theme, addressed in numerous Irish short stories, deals with the discrepancies between the country's urban and rural spheres. Resulting from the various developments connected to the Industrial Revolution, the topic under consideration has again been featured extensively in the short fiction of the eighteenth century. "On the one hand, there is the myth of a modern civilization evolving into a better [...] way of life. On the other hand, there is the draw of the traditional community, the security of complete identification with the landscape and cultural idioms of one's [...] environment" (Smyth 58). Thus, short stories dealing with either the urban way of living, or the concept of the rural idyll, or a

combination of both, subsequently include aspects of cultural nationalism and Irishness as well. To be more precise, several stories produced by “Daniel Corkery, Frank O’Connor, and Sean O’Faolain”, portraying events connected to the Easter Rising and the War of Independence, for instance, “were written in the mode of romantic nationalism”, and thus aim at recreating “in the reader, particularly the Irish reader, the intense emotions associated with revolution and nationalism” (Storey 16). Nevertheless, as mentioned previously, the opposition between city and country is still apparent in short fiction produced by contemporary Irish writers, although being presented and reflected on in a quite different way compared to revolutionary short story writing. Thus, contemporaneous stories often draw on the issue of Irishness; a fact that also becomes apparent when dealing with the analysis of the four Irish short stories selected in greater detail in the course of the thesis’ next main chapter.

The final theme to be addressed in this section focuses on the issues of race and migration featuring in many Irish short stories. As all four literary works which are also analysed in view of their didactic potential in the EFL classroom deal with exactly these themes, a closer look needs to be taken at its establishment in the sphere of Irish literature, especially with regard to various significant historical developments. Therefore it has to be stated that also in this context, the War of Independence in 1922 can be considered as a striking turning point regarding the topics of emigration and immigration, as well as race in Ireland. It reinforced a new “nationalist conception of Irishness – white, Catholic, rural, pre-industrial”, where “the others” “had no place in the national narrative” (McKeown 32). In other words, as stated by McGarrity (185f), “The Irish racial imaginary in the post 1922 era rejected the possibility of multiple forms of Irish identities and insisted on a union between the ethnic/racial makeup of the nation and the state it now forms”. Furthermore, various dates and percentages prove the assumption that the country was rapidly transformed into a multicultural community in the course of the Celtic Tiger, due to an enormous economic growth and the subsequent need for labourers. Thus, “[f]or the first time immigration overtook emigration” (McKeown 8).

What is especially interesting regarding the overall topic of this thesis is the fact that these issues are reflected in numerous contemporary short stories, being produced by both, immigrant Irish writers on the one, as well as native Irish

authors on the other hand. Thus, various figures in contemporary Irish short story writing, amongst them the authors Roddy Doyle, Morag Prunty, Billy O'Callaghan, Colum McCann or Colm Toibin, for instance, are critically addressing the aspects of cultural diversity, immigration, emmigration and integration throughout their works. Before dealing with these in greater detail, the following section briefly focuses on the didactic potential of the literary genre under consideration in general, as well of the four Irish short stories in particular.

5.3 (Irish) Short Fiction in the EFL Classroom

When bearing in mind the above presented characteristic features the literary genre of short stories entails, it can be stated that short fiction can be considered as extraordinarily useful and relevant for teaching English as a Foreign Language. These useful features include for example the texts' limited length, as well as their cultural backgrounds, which provide considerable didactic potential. Turning the attention to the Austrian EFL classroom, it has to be mentioned that this potential becomes apparent when focusing on the AHS curriculum, the CEFR, as well as the requirements of the new "Standardized Competence Oriented Reifeprüfung", especially with regard to the "Vorwissenschaftliche Arbeit". Thus, the following pages aim at presenting these aspects in more detail.

5.3.1 The Austrian Curriculum – Subject: English as a Foreign Language

As has already been stated, the teaching and learning of intercultural competence, is significant in the Austrian curriculum. To be more precise, the guidelines of the curriculum emphasise the fact that within EFL teaching, the students should not only become acquainted with a great variety of subject areas, but also with different kinds of texts, in order to be able to master a range of different situations. In the curriculum itself, this aim is stated as follows:

Zur Erlangung eines möglichst umfassenden lexikalischen Repertoires sind verschiedenste Themenbereiche zu bearbeiten (wie zB Sprache und

ihre Anwendungsmöglichkeiten; [...] Prozesse der Globalisierung; kulturelle und interkulturelle Interaktion; Umwelt; aktuelle Entwicklungen in Technik und Wissenschaft; Kunst in ihren Ausdrucksformen Literatur, Musik, bildende Künste). [...] Die verschiedenen Themenbereiche sind durch möglichst vielfältige Textsorten zu erschließen (wie zB Sachverhaltsdarstellungen, Analysen, Stellungnahmen, Anweisungen, Zusammenfassungen, Berichte, Beschreibungen, Kommentare, Reflexionen, Geschichten, Dialoge, Briefe, E-Mails, Märchen, Lieder, Gedichte). Im Sinne einer humanistisch orientierten Allgemeinbildung ist bei der thematischen Auswahl fremdsprachiger Texte auch literarischen Werken ein entsprechender Stellenwert einzuräumen (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Frauen, Lehrplan 4).

In other words, it is of great importance when teaching EFL in an Austrian AHS, to address many different topic areas and to draw on a diversity of texts. Amongst them, literary works including short stories. Moreover, the Austrian AHS curriculum of English as a Foreign Language makes several references to the defining descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference, which is highlighted in the following subchapter.

5.3.2 Common European Framework of Reference

As discussed earlier in the course of this thesis, the CEFR can be seen as the major tool for the common development of European language curricula, activities or tests and is thus also extraordinarily significant for the Austrian EFL classroom. As stated in Figueras (478), the CEFR provides its users with “definitions of different levels along the proficiency scale at six main levels, which were described in general terms and in relation to language activities and language tasks in over 50 descriptor scales, commonly referred to as the ‘vertical dimension’”.

What is of profound importance when focusing principally on the teaching of intercultural competence by using (Irish) short stories is the wide-spread “opinion that the CEFR is hostile to the teaching of literature.” However, “this could not be farther from the truth” (North, *Relevance* 56). In fact, the document under consideration contains so called illustrative descriptors, meaning scales that provide useful information on relevant skills students of English should acquire at a certain level. These illustrative descriptors include a variety of skills

and aspects to be considered in EFL teaching, such as receptive, interactive and productive communicative activities, as well as communication strategies, the working with a text and the communicative language competence (Council of Europe 3). According to North (*Scales*, 657), the descriptors “can be claimed to be empirically validated and to address the fundamental criticisms of previous descriptor scales: Each is worded in positive terms, even for lower levels, and each presents an independent, standalone criterion, defined independently from other descriptors”.

Turning the attention to an issue of great interest in this chapter, namely including (Irish) short stories in EFL teaching, it has to be noted that the descriptive scales dealing with receptive communication skills, are addressing several skills that are intended to advance the students’ overall reading comprehension. These skills include, for instance, the ability to apply a variety of techniques, such as reading for gist, or reading for specific information, as well as reading for orientation or the reading of instructions (Council of Europe 68ff). To be more precise, the descriptor for the overall reading comprehension skill at level B2, which is the level the pupils should reach by the end of the AHS, implies that each student “[c]an 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 10). Thus, it is indispensable to provide the language learners with numerous different text types on several important issues in order to train these above mentioned abilities. The importance of these guidelines becomes additionally obvious when turning the attention to the new “Standardized Competence Oriented Reifeprüfung”, which consists of several reading activities based on these illustrative descriptors.

Nevertheless, before dealing with this highly important issue in more detail, the following table provides a particularly interesting insight into the attitude of teachers towards using literature when teaching English. To be more precise, the data below have been derived from the answers given in the course of “a qualitative attitude questionnaire”, which “was distributed to twelve English language teachers at the University of Central Lancashire, all involved in teaching

a range of both EFL and EAP classes from intermediate (B1) to advanced (C1) levels” (Jones and Carter 70).

Attitudes towards using literature in the English language classroom	Strongly Disagree %	Disagree %	Not Sure %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
1. Literature is a useful source of classroom material		16.6		75	8.3
2. Literature is best saved for advanced learners	25	50	8.3	16.6	
3. Textbooks don't feature enough literature as reading material		16.6	16.6	41.6	25
4. Using literature can help develop cultural awareness				66.6	33.3
5. Using literature takes a lot of preparation		33.3	8.3	41.6	16.6
6. Most students will react positively to literature if used in class	8.3		50	33.3	8.3
7. Not enough classroom time is available for using literature		16.6	25	41.6	16.6
8. Literature often contains a lot of difficult cultural references and low frequency language which students struggle with		33.3		66.6	
9. Understanding literature is not what most learners need to do	8.3	16.6	33.3	50	
10. Literature can improve a learner's awareness of language use in a helpful context			16.6	66.6	16.6

Table 2: Attitudes towards Using Literature in the English Language Classroom

When trying to draw significant conclusions from the figures presented in Table 2, the scholars who carried out this survey argue that

[i]t is clear from these results that the teachers have clear beliefs about using literature in the EFL classroom. They show that 75% of these teachers feel that it is a useful classroom resource and 66.6% felt it can help to develop language and cultural awareness. However, it is also clear that there are concerns that using literature will not meet students' needs, with 50% of respondents agreeing it was not what students need and 50% unsure if their learners would react positively to it (Jones and Carter 73).

In other words, the teachers surveyed claim that the use of literature in the EFL classroom can definitely be considered as a vital approach for addressing cultural issues and raising intercultural awareness. However, it has to be mentioned that most of them also think that the same outcome could as well be achieved by

utilising other materials and methods. Bearing these data in mind, the main part of this thesis, focussing on the in-depth analysis of four Irish short stories, aims at presenting vital and appropriate approaches that help to obviate any misconceptions and concerns regarding the issue under consideration. Nevertheless, before focussing on this topic in greater detail, the relevance of teaching short fiction in the EFL classroom as regards the new SCOR needs to be considered.

5.3.3 “Standardized Competence Oriented Reifeprüfung” (SCOR)

While the section presenting the need for teaching and learning intercultural competence in the EFL classroom focused exclusively on the SCOR’s third branch, namely the oral examination to be taken at the very end of the AHS, this chapter turns the attention towards the remaining areas. To be more precise, the focal point is on the relevance for including short stories in the Austrian EFL teaching with regard to the written SCOR, as well as for the so called “Vorwissenschaftliche Arbeit” (henceforth VWA).

Turning the attention to the first aspect of the new SCOR testing in Austria, the written examination, it has to be mentioned that it consists of all together four sections. These include the testing of two productive skills, being composed of the competence areas of English in Use and Writing, as well as two receptive skills, namely Listening and Reading (Tanzmeister, Übersicht über die standardisierte Reifeprüfung in den Lebenden Fremdsprachen). As the latter aspect is most relevant for this thesis, a closer look is taken at its various components. Thus, when examining the B2 Reading Test Specifications in greater detail, it can be noted that the pupils are provided with four texts (entire ones or excerpts), on the basis of which several contrastive testing methods are applied. These include, for instance, the formats of multiple choice, multiple matching, note form, sequencing, or the method of true/false/justification (Tanzmeister, Übersicht über die standardisierte Reifeprüfung in den Lebenden Fremdsprachen). According to the homepage of the BIFIE (Standardisierte Reife- und Diplomprüfung), it is thus indispensable, to properly prepare the students for the above mentioned tasks. Therefore, EFL teachers are advised to deal with a

great variety of texts and literary genres in class, as well as to include these testing methods into their teaching at a rather early stage.

When focusing on the third branch of the new SCOR, the VwA⁴, it may be argued that also in this part of “matura” testing, short stories dealing with the themes of race and (im)migration in particular, prove to be suitable. In a recent study, undertaken by the Austrian library-association on this issue, it is stated quite clearly that numerous VwAs tend to draw on the individual student’s social, ethical, or political environment (Feigl et al. 15). Bearing in mind what has been discussed earlier in the course of this thesis, namely that a considerable increase in migration cannot only be noted in Austrian society, but is also manifest in the classroom, it can be argued that the issues of race and migration are vital and related to many individual students’ experience. In order to properly prepare the language learners for various difficulties that might arise in the process of finding a suitable research topic, several aspects relating to the undergraduates’ living environment should be covered in the course of (EFL) teaching. As short fiction often is considerably reduced in length, as well as dealing intensively with themes and topics relating to various important social, cultural and political issues, the literary genre under consideration provides a great potential for the adequate preparation for this part of the new SCOR.

When briefly summarising what has been discussed in this thesis so far, we may state that the analyses of the major issues, interculturality, intercultural competence and (Irish) short stories, have provided some interesting insights about their didactic potential in the (Austrian) EFL classroom. To be more precise, the previous sections firstly aimed at presenting the need for dealing with issues relating to interculturality not only in an economic context, but rather in the context of teaching, by referring to various documents of the Austrian AHS, such as the current curriculum, the CEFR, as well as the new “Standardized Competence Oriented Reifeprüfung”. Secondly, the concentration on (Irish) short stories as a literary genre and the subsequent presentation of various significant historic

⁴ Basically, the VwA is a final pre-academic paper with a length of 40.000-60.000 letters, every pupil has to submit as the first of all together three parts of the new SCOR. To be more precise, this branch comprises not only the production, but also the presentation and discussion of the individual papers (Handreichung Standardisierte, kompetenzorientierte Reifeprüfung an AHS, 3). Moreover, it has to be noted that each student’s personally topic chosen, is not assigned to a specific subject (as this was the case with the *Fachbereichsarbeit*), and can thus be supervised by every teacher. In this context it is important to mention that a supervisor is not allowed to reject a particular student, but can refuse only a specific topic chosen by the pupil (Feigl et al. 17).

developments in Ireland, as well as the major themes and topic areas addressed can be considered as a well-established starting point for the in-depth analysis to be carried out in the following chapters. Thus, the next sections aim at dealing with these topic areas in greater detail by examining the four Irish short stories in view of the topic of intercultural encounters. Moreover, the short stories are subsequently also analysed in view of their didactic potential for the Austrian EFL classroom.

6 Intercultural Encounters in Selected Irish Short Stories

As already mentioned in the previous chapters, the main body of this thesis focuses on the analysis and interpretation of four Irish short stories. The examples selected are of considerable importance in that they all address the topic of interculturality, as well as issues of cultural diversity, (im)migration and the potential problems involved. Thus, the following pages aim at discussing in particular the short story *An Independent Woman* by Morag Prunty, Colum McCann's *As If There Were Trees*, Roddy Doyle's *Home to Harlem* and Billy O'Callaghan's *Keep Well to Seaward*.

The methodological approach applied in elaborating this contextualised reading, is that of a contextualised close reading of each story. First, a basic introduction into various important preliminary matters will be given, such as information on the author and publication details. This is relevant because most of these narratives include autobiographical elements.

Secondly, an in-depth analysis of the individual stories' content levels is carried out, including concise plot summaries and the analysis of the main characters. The minor character(s), however, are introduced only rather briefly. According to Jahn (N7):

[t]echniques of characterization are used in texts to enable readers to form a mental construct of a character. There are six main aspects to be considered: How is the character described, by whom is the character described, how is the characterization distributed throughout the text, how reliable is the source of information, what do we learn about a character's inner life and in which arrangements of contrasts and correspondences is the character depicted (qtd. in Lethbridge and Mildorf 49).

Exactly these areas of interest, as formulated by Jahn, form the basis for the subsequent close examination of the stories' major characters. Therefore, the respective sections aim at investigating various crucial questions relating to the mode of presenting the protagonists' appearance and inner life (explicitly or implicitly), as well as the way this information is transmitted (figural or authorial) (Pfister 184). Additionally, particular attention is put on the characters' complexity and development, as well as on the reliability of each characterisation.

Based on what has been argued in the previous section of this thesis, dealing with the claim that the topics of race and (im)migration are recurring themes in Irish short fiction, this will be an additional focus. To be more precise, extensive research regarding the usefulness and potential of the short stories selected for teaching intercultural competence in the Austrian EFL classroom has been carried out. Significant insights into important aspects of their background and cultural context are provided. These areas of interest will be related to the given historical background.

Finally, each short story is analysed in view of its didactic potential for the practical use in the Austrian EFL classroom. This is achieved by not only focussing on relevant paragraphs in the Austrian curriculum, the CEFR and the SCOR, but also by introducing the readers to various didactic methods to be applied when dealing with these pieces of short fiction in class. Additionally, a more hands-on approach is provided by incorporating authentic study materials, which are appended to this final chapter of the thesis.

6.1 *An Independent Woman* (2002) by Morag Prunty

6.1.1 Preliminary Information

Morag Prunty, mostly known under her pseudonym Kate Kerrigan, was born in 1964 and raised in London by Irish parents. At the beginning of the 1990s she moved to Ireland in order to work as an editor of the Irish *Tatler*, before starting to publish her own works (Irish Writers Online, Prunty, Morag). “Pre Kate Kerrigan [she] wrote four Morag Prunty books - "madcap comedies" just about covers them before swapping over to [her] heartfelt style of historical/modern fiction and changing [her] (pen) name although, confusingly, a couple of [her] novels are published under both names in different countries” (Kate Kerrigan, homepage). One of Prunty’s most popular works is *Recipes for a Perfect Marriage*, which was nominated for the Romantic Novel of the Year Award in 2006 (panmacmillan, morag prunty).

Her short story *An Independent Woman* is part of the collection entitled *Irish Girls About Town*, published in 2002. “Originally published in the United Kingdom and Ireland, a portion of the proceeds from each book sold were given to Barnardo’s, the United Kingdom’s largest children’s charity, and The Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Ireland, which works to alleviate the effects of poverty” (Binchy et al. Foreword). The collection comprises altogether 16 stories, written by popular female Irish writers of short fiction. Amongst them are Maeve Binchy, Marian Keyes, Cathy Kelly, Julie Parsons, Tina Reilly, and, of course, Morag Prunty. Furthermore, each of the stories can be classified as a work of Chick Lit, denoting popular literature for women, produced by women. This specific genre “reflects the lives of everyday working young women and men and appeals to readers who want to see their own lives in all the messy detail, reflected in fiction” (Ferriss and Young 3). The tone of Chick Lit-fiction resembles instances of best friends telling each other about their lives; a feature that also applies to the short story under consideration.

6.1.2 Plot Summary

Basically, the short story *An Independent Woman* presents the expectations of the middle aged woman Bridie, as well as the subsequent experiences made, before and during her first blind date. The female Irish protagonist who now lives in Kingsbury London shares a flat with her daughter Sharon and works at a local chemist's shop that is selling cosmetics. Via an ad in the *Hendon Times*, a hint she has been given by her best friend Sheila, Bridie arranges a date with a man named Pat. The information given in the advert about him is only that he is a doctor by profession, non smoking and having a good sense of humor. However, the final abbreviation in his ad, E.O., leaves some space for interpretation. Bridie, decoding it at first as "eating out", is dreadfully shocked when she finds out that this obviously refers to Pat's "ethnic origin".

Holding strong and deep-rooted prejudices against foreigners, the protagonist is embarrassed when her rendezvous turns out to be Indian and she feels humiliated and offended when he starts speaking to her. Despite her prejudice and reluctance to spend the entire evening with the disappointing date, she is too shocked to leave the bar immediately. As the date goes on, however, Pat tells her that his name is short for Patel and that he studied at Trinity College before returning to London where he had spent almost his entire childhood. At this stage of the story the readers are faced with numerous racist situations and statements reflected in Bridie's thoughts. These include, for example, her being unable to believe that "someone like him" is a doctor, or being afraid "he would smell of curry" (Prunty 372). After finishing their drinks at the *Orange Grove* pub, they decide to have dinner in an Italian restaurant where they can enjoy some more privacy.

When Pat starts talking about himself feeling rather English than Indian, Bridie begins to relax. Moreover, she recognizes that both of them share quite similar opinions concerning current political situations about British immigration laws, as well as that both of them attended elocution lessons at the very same institution. At the end of the story, the readers will recognize a change in the way the woman sees Patel, especially when she remarks that his hand, in fact, is not really black, "[m]ore of a light brown" (Prunty 376). Additionally, they both agree

on meeting again the following week end at a factory warehouse in order to go shopping.

6.1.3 Characterisation

6.1.3.1 *Bridie*

Bridie, the female protagonist in Morag Prunty's short story, is a divorced, middle-aged woman who lives in London, to be more precise, in Kingsbury. As Jack, one of her brothers, used to regularly send cheques, the single mother never really had to work in order to make a living. However, when she needed to raise money for her daughter's course in beauty therapy, Bridie started selling cosmetics in a local chemist's shop. Although considering herself an independent woman, the female protagonist seems to be rather insecure when it comes to the issue of dating. Moreover, Bridie appears to be slightly racist and (silently) utters numerous prejudicial views on people having different cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Especially when finding out that her date Pat is in fact Indian, the woman is both shocked and embarrassed. However, as the evening goes on, Bridie seems to relax and to adapt to this specific situation, and seems to accept the Indian doctor. At the end of the story, the reader will witness a development of Bridie as she is able to overcome her racial prejudice.

Turning the attention to the first aspect to be considered when carrying out a close character analysis according to the guidelines by Jahn, a more detailed look needs to be taken at the introduction and the presentation of the individual character. Thus, the short story's protagonist Bridie is described explicitly, as well as implicitly. With regard to the latter mode, "the reader must figure out (or infer) for themselves what the character is like by interpreting what is revealed about the character indirectly" (Dutra 99). This mainly applies to the way he or she speaks, thinks or acts. When focusing on the implicit description of Bridie one may infer that her character is significantly shaped by the way she thinks of and speaks to foreign people in general, and Pat in particular. On the other hand, the protagonist's explicit characterisation is achieved by referring to her outward appearance, for instance, when mentioning "her thin white skin" (Prunty 359), as

well as by presenting important aspects of her family life, location and social milieu.

The second question to be answered in order to provide an in-depth analysis of the major characters deals with the issue of “whether the information used to delineate [a] character is transmitted by one of the figures (‘figural’) or whether it can only be associated with the position of the implied author as its expressive subject (‘authorial’)” (Pfister 184). As the readers experience the whole story only through Bridie’s eyes, its protagonist’s characterisation is an authorial one, or, to be more precise, a self-characterisation.

Moreover, when exploring a character’s complexity, the so called aspect of the penetration of inner life, as formulated by Rimmon-Kenan (42) is of great importance. This means that “[t]he more one knows about a character’s thoughts and emotional responses, the more complex the character will appear and the more ready the reader is to emphasize with the character”. When bearing in mind that the short story under consideration is told through Bridie’s eyes, the readers perceive the events from her perspective and thus may be able to gain significant insights into her thoughts. These thoughts suggest that her character is rather complex.

The last feature to be highlighted regarding the story’s protagonist is her character development. According to Lois Lowry: “if a character does not go through some sort of change, if a character is not affected by events, or if a character does not proactively change the course of his or her situation, then there is no point in writing the story” (qtd. in Cappellini 103). However, traditionally “[c]haracters can be classified as static or dynamic. A static character is one who does not change much in the course of a story. By contrast, a dynamic character changes as a result of the story’s events” (Anderson et al. 868). Focussing on Bridie’s deep-rooted prejudices against her Indian date Pat and, especially on how these notions change during the progress of the action, her character is definitely not a static one. Rather, the protagonist is able to overcome her preconceived notions about her race date, though she is not quite able to overcome her prejudices completely.

6.1.3.2 *Pat*

Turning the attention to the second major character in the story, Pat, the very same approach is applied. Pat, whose full name is Patel, is a doctor of ethnic Indian origin and, according to his profile in the ad, a non-smoker, and endowed with a good sense of humour. Especially this latter character trait becomes manifest repeatedly in the story. Moreover, he pays attention to his outward appearance, for example, by wearing a fashionable beige suit and “a healthy portion of Chanel Pour Homme” (Prunty 372). Although having studied at Trinity College, Pat returns to London, where he has been educated, as he grew fond of the British culture. While “many of [his] contemporaries were moving back to India, getting more and more in touch with their heritage, their own history” (Prunty 374), Patel has almost completely lost his Indian accent and considers London as his home. However, what is particularly interesting is Pat’s view on current immigration laws, as well as his preconceived opinion on foreign traditions. This aspect becomes obvious in the following text passage:

Surprisingly, Bridie found that they shared many of the same political opinions. Pat was a staunch conservative and believed that the immigration laws in Britain were far too lenient. ‘This England, after all. Why should foreign cultures take over our traditional street markets? Our shops?’ Sunday shopping, they both agreed, was entirely the fault of the Pakistanis” (Prunty 375).

What is remarkable in this description is that Pat is talking about “our traditional street markets” and “our shops” and thus completely identifies with the British society while simply rejecting his Indian roots.

As regards the mode of the character’s representation it has to be noted that Pat is primarily described in an explicit way by the information provided in the newspaper ad, as well as by Bridie’s account of his outward appearance. Nevertheless, the story enables the readers to draw significant conclusions about Patel’s character traits by the way he behaves and talks to Bridie. In other words, he is characterised both explicitly and implicitly.

As the Indian doctor is exclusively seen through Bridie’s eyes and, thus presented via her thoughts, a figural characterisation of Pat is applied. However, it is important to keep in mind that this representation is inevitably subjective and

not wholly reliable. Thus it is indispensable to think critically about the objectivity of the representation under consideration.

Focussing on the complexity of the character and his development throughout the story, it can be argued that Pat is quite a static character, as he does not undergo a change in the course of the narrative, which multi-dimensional, meaning that he features a number of facets. He is definitely no stereotypical personality; a fact which is ironically addressed by himself when uttering: “Well, I am. A doctor and an Indian. All at the same time” (Prunty 370).

6.1.3.3 Minor Characters

Apart from the major characters examined in the preceding section, the short story features all together four minor characters, consisting of Bridie’s daughter Sharon, her best friend Sheila, as well as her two brothers Jack and Kevin. Although having subordinate roles in the action and the plot, each character can be considered as relevant as regards plot and characterisation of the female protagonist.

Bridie’s daughter Sharon is living in West Hampstead together with her coloured boyfriend. Nevertheless she still keeps a room at her mother’s apartment in Kingsbury. Sharon loves her mother but also feels offended by her racist attitudes and opinions. Sharon is mainly characterised in an explicit and figural way. This assumption is based on the fact that the young woman is mainly presented through her mother’s eyes. It is thus impossible for the readers to gain objective insights into Sharon’s own thoughts. As she only has a minor role in the story, Bridie’s daughter is a flat and static character.

The same applies to the protagonist’s best friend Sheila, who, although mentioned more often than Sharon, is a rather flat and static character. Furthermore, Sheila is introduced quite elaborately and explicitly to the readers, as, for instance, in the following passage:

Sheila lived in a mansion block around the corner. She had been at school with Bridie, and they had met up again recently when Sheila had moved to the area after her divorce. Sheila was a teacher, and her children were now grown-up. She was always nagging at Bridie to get a job and lately Bridie had become irritated by her persistence. [...] ‘You should go back to college, Bridie. You have too much time on your hands.’ It was a

deliberate dig, Bridie felt. Sheila was just jealous because she had to work and wasn't as well preserved as her friend (Prunty 363f).

Bridie's brothers Jack and Kevin are merely referred to in a few sections of the short story. The readers are only told that both of them are affluent men living in America. Being characterised explicitly by Bridie herself, their disrupted family ties are made apparent. "Untidy and unsophisticated, for all their money and education they had very bad manners. She disliked their loud raucous laughter at jokes which she did not understand; and they still had those common Mayo accents, she complained to Sheila one day" (Prunty 366).

The latter aspect mentioned in the course of this excerpt highlights an issue which seems to run like a thread through the whole story, namely Bridie's strong aversion to "foreign" accents and uncultivated behaviour. As this phenomenon appears to be of central importance in the short story, the following chapter's main focus will deal with the problematic balancing act between adapting to new cultures while not completely rejecting one's ethnic origins.

6.1.4 Cultural Roots vs. Foreign Traditions – A Balancing Act for Migrants

Throughout the whole short story, the issue of migrants rejecting their own origins and trying to overcome their roots and traditions appears to be a recurring, major theme. This claim is confirmed when focussing especially on the various political views and prejudiced opinions both major characters hold regarding the topics of immigration and integration.

Thus, when turning the attention to the female protagonist Bridie, who is indeed Irish but moved to England a long time ago, numerous instances of the issue of integration and/or an immigrant's experience are addressed. To be more precise, she proudly considers herself as an independent London woman being part of the posh and glamorous British society, while deploring the lifestyles of others who are not so well-off. As regards her brothers and sisters-in-law, for instance, Bridie argues that there is "[n]o glamour or spark to them at all", as they are "[t]oo interested in their children, and not [...] interested in their appearance at all" (Prunty 362). Furthermore, the middle-aged woman not only rejects every kind of "non-British" lifestyle, but also seems to be completely obsessed with the

idea of a linguistic uniformity, especially as far as English accents is concerned. This becomes obvious in the following passage: " 'I think accents are nice,' said Sheila 'I still have mine'. 'Oh no,' said Bridie reassuringly, 'you've lost yours almost completely. You have a lovely cultured voice.'" (Prunty 366). A similar situation occurs when Bridie tells Pat that "accents are common. English should be spoken with a proper English accent" (Prunty 373). In other words, the story's protagonist considers the variety of British English to be the only "true" and cultured one; a standard of English every inhabitant of Great Britain has to acquire in order to become a fully cultivated member of the English society.

Although Pat has managed to completely get rid of his Indian accent, he does not seem to entirely share Bridie's view on the importance of a linguistic purity. Although the doctor has lost his Indian accent after taking elocution lessons, he "sometimes think[s] it's a shame to get rid of your accent" (Prunty 373). What is of greater interest is, however, Pat's desire to totally overcome his roots and traditions and to become assimilated to British culture. He has "been living in England since [he] was a child, and [his] Indian-ness – well, it was nearly all gone. Many of [his] contemporaries were moving back to India, getting more and more in touch with their heritage, their own history" (Prunty 374).

Both issues presented above give rise to many probing questions concerning the situations migrants are faced with when finding themselves in new societies and cultural contexts: What does successful integration really mean? Is it necessary to entirely abandon the heritage, history, religion or beliefs of one's original culture in order to be able to become part of a new one? Is it indeed impossible for different cultural values and traditions to coexist?

When examining the aspect of linguistic uniformity, as presented in Morag Prunty's short story, the very stimulating study by American scholars in the early second half of the 20th century may prove helpful. This study claims that the immigrants' complete usage of the local (variety of a) language is usually established within three generations. This claim, however, is by now considered outdated in the contemporary European society, which is characterised by multilingualism and multiculturalism (Wyssmüller and Fibbi 23f). The aspects of cultural diversity, bi-, or multilingualism, as well as globalisation can be regarded as key features of our current society. Although it could be argued that exactly these features entail a great potential regarding a more open-minded and

multifaceted community and use of languages and various accents in particular, these are often issues of social prestige:

As social beings, we inevitably size up one another according to perceived similarity-difference. Thus it is no real surprise that listeners rate their own accents positively, while foreign accents tend to be viewed negatively by comparison. At the same time [...] language attitude studies [show] that certain foreign accents get high marks for status and intelligence (e.g., Asian and European ones in English), so prestige is not only about sounding 'standard' (Moyer 14).

Even though this latter assumption contrasts with the widespread view on foreign accents, as stated by Bridie in *An Independent Woman*, migrants are still confronted with enormous difficulties as far as their language proficiency and pronunciation is concerned.

Turning to the highly controversial issue of how to define the concept of integration and the often claimed need for rejecting one's cultural roots and traditions allegedly produced by it, no conclusive answers can be given. The concept of integration changed fundamentally in the course of the past decades. To be more precise, many scholars of the late 20th century argued that an integration process can only be considered successful if an entire assimilation of the new cultural habits, values and beliefs has taken place by the members of a foreign society, ethnic groups or individual citizens. Contrastively, contemporary sociologists link the concept of integration to the one of multiculturalism, by equally highlighting the need for individualism (Bloemraad, Korteweg and Yurdakul 30f).

Summing up it can be stated that there are many diverse conceptions of integration and the subsequent balancing act between sticking to one's original traditions and adopting the new cultural values and traditions of the immigrant's society. While a certain degree of adaptation to local habits, values and beliefs is indispensable for successful integration in a respective society, the examination of, as well as the ongoing interest in one's own cultural, ethnical and religious origins can ultimately be seen as a subjective, individual choice.

6.1.5 Historical Encounters: The Indo-Pakistani Conflict

Towards the end of Morag Prunty's short story *An Independent Woman*, an important historical reference is made, addressing the various Indo-Pakistani conflicts and wars. To be more precise, "Pat explained to Bridie that he was not, by any stretch of the imagination, a Pakistani. That in fact the Indians and the Pakistanis hated each other. Something to do with land, she didn't really understand it, but it was very interesting nonetheless" (Prunty 375). As these incidents are very interesting and key passages for the in-depth analysis of conflicting intercultural encounters included in the story, this section aims at providing the relevant information on the given historical background.

The Indo-Pakistani conflict evolved after World War II and the subsequent collapse of the British Empire, and sadly has endured up to present political debates and tensions:

Since their emergence as independent states from the detritus of the British Indian empire, India and Pakistan have gone to war four times: in 1947-48, almost immediately after Independence, they fought a long and intense battle over the formerly independent state of Jammu and Kashmir; in 1965 they fought another war over the same piece of land; in 1971 the two engaged during the civil war that served East Pakistan into the nascent state of Bangladesh; and in 1999 they fought once more in the mountains of Kashmir (Ganguly, *Conflict* 1).

As can be derived from the quotation above, the main point of the conflict has indeed "[s]omething to do with land" (Prunty 375), to be more precise, with the region of Kashmir. As stated in Ganguly (*War* 168), "[a]nother deliberately planned war over Kashmir is unlikely as both sides realize the material and political costs that another war would impose". Nevertheless, due to the "quasi-nuclear status of both states and the substantially greater firepower they now possess, another Indo-Pakistani war may not be as limited as past conflicts".

Additionally, it has to be mentioned that the passage from Prunty's short story presented above highlights another particularly important fact regarding the overall issue of the Indo-Pakistani conflict, namely its impact on contemporary English society in addition to the societies of India and Pakistan. Although, another war between both parties is extraordinarily unlikely, the tensions between Indians and Pakistanis are still present in the minds of Indian and Pakistani people. Moreover, the historic-political topic presented in the course of this

chapter can be linked to what has been discussed within the preceding chapter, focussing on Pat's and Bridie's assumption that successful integration can only be based on the complete rejection of one's traditions and origins. When taking a closer look on the respective sections in the story, however, it becomes obvious that the Pakistani culture in Britain is the only negative example for the process of integration of immigrants to Great Britain. Thus, the Indo-Pakistani conflict has remained a problem and a cause of clashes between Indian and Pakistani immigrants in England.

6.1.6 About Curry and the Fighting Irish – National Stereotypes in the Story

The short story *An Independent Woman* can be considered as a masterpiece, especially concerning its portrayal of preconceived notions and cultural stereotypes. As every scene is presented through the eyes of the female Irish protagonist and reflector character Bridie and her relationship to a man of Indian decent, most of the racial prejudices addressed are focussed on the culture and traditions of India. Nevertheless, there are also some interesting stereotypical views of Ireland, amongst them the wide-spread notion of the fighting, uncultured and drunk Irish.

Each of these stereotypical characteristics seems to perfectly apply to Bridie's Irish brothers Jack and Kevin, who are described as "coarse and ignorant [...] Untidy and unsophisticated, for all their money and education they had very bad manners. She disliked their loud raucous laughter at jokes which she did not understand" (Prunty 366). These preconceived notions are particularly expressed by Bridie when talking about Irish pubs. "'They are all so rough. All that drinking and singing and no appreciation for the finer things in life'" (Prunty 376). By talking about "bad manners" and "the finer things in life" the attitude of "superiority" of the British culture to the Irish becomes manifest as well. Thus, the clichés of the Irish drunk and the uncultured Irish serve the purpose of establishing hierarchies between different nationalities and cultures; a fact which is also addressed in another passage: "'Well,' Bridie said, straightening her back and trying her best to look haughty and superior" (Prunty 371). Nevertheless, the above included passage highlights another stereotype, which carries a quite

positive connotation, namely the one of the song-loving Irishmen. This cliché dates back to the era of Irish folk tales, but obviously persists up to contemporary debates, as shown by Prunty.

Such instances of superiority and inferiority, representing the clash between colonizer and colonized, are portrayed in the stereotypical encounters with Indian culture and its traditions and values. Bridie, in one situation, expresses her uneasiness about Pat, anticipating that he might be smelling of curry. This preconceived notion is of particular interest when bearing in mind that the middle-aged woman loves eating Chicken Korma herself. Furthermore she seems to be hugely surprised when catching a glimpse of “a little Indian man reading the paper. It was unusual to see an Indian in a pub, she thought. But then, they were everywhere these days” (Prunty 367). This situation draws again on both stereotypical notions of the ‘ethnic other’ in the short story; the Irish drunk spending lots of time in pubs, and the allegedly non drinking Indians, usually going to oriental markets to get their curry.

All these instances of preconceived notions concerning a given culture or nationality arise from prejudice and received clichés and stereotypes of the Irish and of the Indians respectively. A stereotype is defined as “a set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a group of people” (Mitulla 70). According to Kirci (28), “[a]scribing positive or negative and sometimes even neutral characteristics to certain nations and their people has a longstanding tradition. [...] [S]everal decisive aspects such as wars, trade and different types of social, cultural and intellectual contact have facilitated the development of stereotyped images” in people’s minds. Nevertheless, as shown in the last pages of the short story, there seems to be a surprisingly easy way to dissolve prejudices against foreign cultures and nationalities: By getting in touch with these people. Social interaction and cross-cultural encounters and communication helps to overcome ethnic prejudices, and may advance mutual understanding between people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

6.1.7 Didactic Potential

The various interesting insights gained in the course of the in-depth analysis of Morag Prunty's short fiction *An Independent Women*, especially concerning the central issue of intercultural encounters in Irish literature explored in this thesis, indicate that this story has great didactic potential. Especially, the sections focussing on the story's contextualisation and relevant background information, notably the Indo-Pakistani conflict, the different opinions on the concept of integration, as well as the stereotypical representation of Indians, Pakistanis and the Irish, provide a vital basis for lively in-class discussions. Also the close analysis of the story's characters may provide subject matter for discussion and further elaboration in the EFL classroom.

Before considering the potential methods and activities to be applied when dealing with this short story within EFL teaching in more detail, a brief reflection on its relevance for the topics suggested by the CEFR and the requirements of the new SCOR is provided. Firstly, as "[e]ach act of language use is set in the context of a particular situation within one of the domains (spheres of action or areas of concern) in which social life is organised" (Council of Europe 45), a more elaborate look needs to be taken on the domains addressed in the given text. Thus, it can be stated that the short story *An Independent Woman* covers several major topics which can mostly be aligned to the personal, as well as the public domain. Amongst these are, for instance, the issues of race, national identity, family structures, ethnic and moral beliefs and values, and interpersonal relations. As regards the new SCOR, the short story under consideration likewise addresses a great number of topics included in the "pool of topics" proposed for the oral "matura" examination. Thus, the short story deals with the issues of relationships and social networks, fashion and trends, social environments, tradition and change, regional studies, communication, individual perspectives, intercultural aspects, identity, politics, and the globalised world. Therefore, when bearing this extensive list of topics in mind, it can be argued that the literary sample presented in this section is definitely extraordinarily useful for teaching intercultural competence in the EFL classroom.

Although having already discussed the short story's appropriateness concerning the guidelines of the CEFR and the new SCOR, the question of its

practical implementation in the (Austrian) EFL classroom still needs to be addressed in greater detail. Morag Prunty's short story offers a great potential for authentic, vital and enjoyable classroom activities, which – following Hedge - can be grouped into three stages:

[i]t is now standard practice in the design of reading tasks to use a three-phase procedure involving pre-, while-, and post-reading stages. The intention is to ensure that reading is 'taught' in the sense of helping readers develop increasing ability to tackle texts. [...] During the pre-reading phase, learners can be encouraged to do a number of things: become oriented to the context of the text, for example for what purpose was it originally produced?; [...] review their own experiences in relation to the topic [...]. Post-reading activities can be as varied as the texts they follow, but ideally will tie up with the reading purpose set, so that students check and discuss activities done while reading and making use of what they have read in a meaningful way, for example, by discussing their response to the writer's opinions (Hedge 209ff).

When bearing these reading-stages in mind, numerous tasks which help to develop the students' critical reading ability and intercultural competence can be conceived. These include, for example, the following pre-reading questions for discussion: What could the story be about considering its title? What is an independent woman? Who is to be called British/Irish/Indian? Additionally, if a teacher wishes to include new media into EFL teaching, it can be extraordinarily useful for the pupils to get themselves acquainted with the text by providing some information on the author, publication information, or on reviews on the Internet. After having read the short story *An Independent Woman*, a great variety of follow-up activities can be performed in order to creatively deal with the topic. These include, creative writing activities, such as the production of an alternative ending, or the rewriting of the story from another character's point of view (e.g. Pat, the barkeeper at the Orange Grove Pub, etc.). Moreover, role playing, i.e. the dramatic presentation of individual scenes, or larger projects like the production of screen plays or a talk show featuring both major characters can be considered as potential in-class activities. In order to provide the readers of this thesis with actual and vital teaching material for the usage of Morag Prunty's short story in the EFL classroom, several practical examples of such activities have been developed and added to the last section of the thesis.

6.2 *As If There Were Trees* (2005) by Colum McCann

6.2.1 Preliminary Information

The second Irish short story examined exhaustively in the main part of this thesis is Colum McCann's masterpiece *As If There Were Trees*. McCann was born and raised in Dublin, but moved to America after his studies of journalism. "[H]e has been the recipient of many international honours, including the National Book Award, the International Dublin Impac Prize, [...] election to the Irish arts academy, several European awards, the 2010 Best Foreign Novel Award in China, and an Oscar nomination" (Colum McCann, homepage). As far as his short story collections are concerned, the author's latest publication, the collection entitled *Thirteen Ways of Looking*, has obtained a Pushcart Prize and has been named as one of the Best American Short Stories of 2015 (Colum McCann, homepage). Regarding the main topics of McCann's writing, Hand (276) notes that

[h]is fiction [...] confronts directly the conundrum of how, despite Irish space offering a bedrock of stability and continuity, the discourses that surround it tell a story of dislocation and fragmentation. In the specifically Irish context, he investigates the boundaries between Ireland and the rest of the world, dealing in a number of his works specifically with the problem of emigration and immigration.

Exactly these instances of emigration and immigration, as well as Ireland's boundaries to other countries and nationalities provide the centrepiece of his short story *As If There Were Trees*.

When focussing on the relevant publication information of McCann's short story, it has to be mentioned that it is a substantial part of the short story collection *New Dubliners*. Having been published in 2005, this volume comprises altogether eleven stories, written by some of the most eminent figures in contemporary Irish short story writing. Amongst them are Roddy Doyle, Dermot Bolger, Joseph O'Connor and Desmond Hogan. As it has been published exactly 100 years after Joyce's *Dubliners*, the collection aims at celebrating "Joyce and the Dublin of our own time. *New Dubliners* also offers expansive, imaginative, hilarious, poignant and daring considerations of the life of Joyce's much changed capital city." (Frawley v).

6.2.2 Plot Summary

As stated in Frawley's (vi) introductory part to *New Dubliners*, "[w]ith 'As if There Were Trees' Colum McCann reminds us that not all of contemporary Dublin has been visited by economic success, and draws a startling picture of the collision between the world of the immigrant come to Dublin and the world of the inner city and its struggles".

Basically, the short story presents a set of events as experienced by the first person narrator Mary, a waitress working in a local bar called The Well. After having finished her daily shift, Mary watches the seventeen-year old Jamie who "used to work on the overpass until he got fired" (McCann 54), sitting on a horse while holding his little baby tight to his body. He is riding towards the overpass, approaching four men who are working there. "Three of them were standing on the ramp smoking cigarettes and one was on a rope beneath the ramp" (McCann 55), swinging. Mary thinks that she remembers the man on the rope from The Well, but he is too far away for her to be seen clearly. All of a sudden, the waitress catches a glimpse of the knife in Jamie's hand and immediately heads towards the scenario, as she fears that something tragic might happen. "[She] could see [her] own youngsters in Jamie, that's why [she] ran. [She] could see [her] young Michael and Tibby and even Orla, [she] could see them in Jamie" (McCann 58). But Mary is too slow and thus has to watch the young man stopping his horse right underneath the ropeman and, after having received a cigarette from him, starts plunging the knife into his arms and legs. Covered in blood, the other men immediately pull on the rope to get their friend out of this dangerous situation. Although being terribly injured, the worker has not been killed by Jamie.

The last two pages of the story shed light on the identity of the male workers, as well as on the text's major theme, namely the collision between Dublin's local people and the immigrant world. Mary calls to her mind that these men are Romanians, by remembering the day she refused to serve them in The Well. That the foreigners are hated by the "Dubs" is moreover highlighted by Mary's husband, Tommy, mentioning that "they were lucky to walk, let alone drink, taking our jobs like that, fucking Romanians" (McCann 59).

6.2.3 Characterisation

Both major characters Mary and Jamie can be considered as the protagonists of the story. However, focussing on the different definitions of 'protagonist', it can be argued that

[...][p]rotagonist examples in many stories are not shown to be flawless. They generally undergo some change that causes a turn of events, which makes a story interesting and helps deliver a message. Sometimes, a moral weakness is highlighted that causes the fall of the protagonist. For example: in William Shakespeare's play *Hamlet*, the protagonist experiences terrible events because of his indecisiveness, which troubles him while murdering his evil uncle (Literary Devices, protagonist).

Bearing in mind that Jamie, just as Hamlet, has experienced a traumatic event which, according to him, happened because of the foreigners, this definition can be applied to Jamie. However, another feature of a 'protagonist' is that "[t]he events occurring in a story [are] always viewed from the perspective of the protagonist" (Literary Devices, protagonist). This only applies to Mary, and therefore she is the real protagonist of the short story. Nevertheless, as the characters are of equal importance in the story, both of them are considered as main characters and are analysed in detail.

6.2.3.1 Mary

All the events in *As if There Were Trees* are seen and subsequently narrated by the waitress Mary. This instance refers to narrative voice. "Voice in narration", according to Abbott (70), refers to the "question of who it is we 'hear' doing the narrating". Thus, when Mary is the protagonist of the short story, she takes over the role of the autodiegetic narrator. Mary is a married woman and mother of three children, who earns her living by working in a local bar, called The Well. Although telling the readers that she refuses to serve the foreigners, she seems to be a rather sensitive person. This latter aspect is made apparent at the very end of McCann's story as the readers will recognize Mary's anxiety regarding her own xenophobia. "Tommy was crushing the Romanian's balls and he was kicking the Romanian's head [...] and I thought to myself that maybe I would like to see it too and that made me shiver" (McCann 60).

When analysing the character traits of the main characters, the first question to be addressed is the one of explicit or implicit characterisation. Mary characterises herself explicitly by providing the readers with important insights into her life, relevant family structures and her social surroundings. She states, for instance: "I was thinking about going home to my young ones who were there with my husband Tommy – Tommy looks after them since Cadbury's had the lay-offs", and, "[t]wenty smokes a day but I ran like I was fifteen years old" (McCann 54ff). When drawing the attention to the character's implicit characterisation, it can be argued that the readers of the story are undoubtedly able to gain significant insights into Mary's character by the way she thinks and acts. Accordingly, the text's very last page is of particular relevance as it reveals the woman's probably most important and ambiguous character traits.

The second probing question to be explored thoroughly deals with aspects of narration. Mary clearly provides aspects of self-characterisation, hence her portrayal is subjective. This claim is supported by the fact that everything the reader finds out about her is exclusively presented by her. As far as the aspect of reliability is concerned, " [g]enerally , a reader will treat self-characterisation with care, since a character's self-proclaimed opinion of him- or herself can be distorted or given for purposes other than honest self-characterisation" (Lethbridge and Mildorf 51). However, as first-person narrating is always subjective, and as Mary is truly honest to the readers of the story as regards her anxiety about her own racist thinking, she would seem to be a reliable rather than an unreliable narrator.

When finally highlighting the questions of character complexity and development, one may claim that Mary seems to undergo a modest development towards the end of the story, but nonetheless she appears to be a rather mono-dimensional character. Not very many of her character traits are presented to the readers.

6.2.3.2 *Jamie*

The second major character in McCann's story *As if There Were Trees*, Jamie, is the seventeen-year old father of a little baby girl, who recently got fired because

of his drug abuse. "They caught him with a works when he was on the job. [...] They couldn't help him because of the junk" (McCann 54). Prior to this event, he used to work at the construction site of the nearby overpass at the economically deprived area of Ballymun on Dublin's north side (McKeown 113). It may be assumed that Jamie is a representative of Dublin's working class in this area and is thus used to facing the various problems of everyday life. This becomes manifest on the very last page of the text, showing that most of the other Irish characters seem to share Jamie's opinions.

Due to the numerous descriptions of Jamie by the story's narrator Mary, the seventeen-year-old is characterised explicitly in some detail. He is described "all thin", wearing "big construction boots", and, as "quiet" and "even [reading] a book" (McCann 53ff). Nevertheless, what is probably more significant when focussing on his characterisation is the fact that the readers are able to deduce numerous character-traits of Jamie implicitly, mostly from his behaviour before, during and after attacking the foreigners. When bearing in mind the overall topic of this thesis, the character's attitude towards the Romanian workers is especially important.

As already mentioned, Jamie is characterised throughout by Mary, the narrator of the story. Therefore, an external characterisation has been applied. However, this point of view does not enable the readers to gain authentic insights into Jamie's thoughts and feelings. Thus, it is indispensable to question the reliability of the character's portrayal, as it is not completely clear if the narrator only reports what she wants the reader to know about this character or not.

Finally, when discussing the aspects of character complexity and development, it can be argued that Jamie is a round but static character. This assumption is based on the fact that different character traits are presented in the progress of the action. To be more precise, while Mary repeatedly makes references to Jamie's calm nature, she once reports that they "were surprised when [they] heard about him shooting up on the building site though" (McCann 56). In view of the issue of character development, the story only presents a short period in Jamie's life. Therefore he does not undergo a significant change in the given time span of the action and the plot.

6.2.3.3 *Minor Characters*

Although McCann's short story features several other characters apart from the major figures Jamie and Mary, none one of them is described in great detail. The four Romanian workers are briefly introduced by the narrator Mary in order to indicate that they are immigrants and to reveal their inferior immigrant status amongst the Irish society. Mary's husband Tom, however, is given a more detailed characterisation.

Tommy is characterised explicitly as Mary's husband, who looks after their children "since Cadbury's had the lay-offs" (McCann 54). Apart from this information, the most important character trait known of Tommy is his anxiety and hatred of the foreign workers at the overpass. When talking to his wife about not serving them in the bar, Tommy says: "The Well has enough trouble without serving foreigners. Imagine having foreigners" (McCann 56). Moreover, his xenophobia is fully revealed on the story's last page, presenting Tommy's reaction to Jamie's attack: "there was something like a smile on his face and I could tell he was there with Jamie and, in his loneliness, Tommy was crushing the Romanian's balls and he was kicking the Romanian's head in and he was rifling the Romanian's pockets and he was sending them home to his dark children" (McCann 60).

Turning the attention to the Romanian workers in the story, it has to be argued that they are hardly individualised and subsequently mostly referred to as "the Romanians" or "the foreigners". This lack of individualisation of the minor characters is the result of the social attitude of the narrator/protagonist, reflecting the sense of "superiority" of the Irish population over the foreigners⁵. McCann also describes an event in which: "[t]hree of [the Romanians] were standing on the ramp smoking cigarettes and one was on the rope beneath the ramp. The one below was swinging around on the rope. [...] He had a great movement to him – I mean he would have made a great sort of jungle man or something, swinging through the trees" (McCann 55). This reference in the text reinforces the

⁵ The same phenomenon can be encountered in numerous postcolonial, imperial and modernist texts, such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, or Rider Haggard's *King Solomon's Mines*. Both examples feature the presentation of the foreign population as a black, unsophisticated mass which is seen as "the other", compared to the white, male protagonists and heroes of the stories. Another characteristic of Rider-Haggard's and Conrad's stories is the comparison of the outward appearance and behaviour of the foreign population to the ones of animals.

comparison of the Romanian workers to primitive animals living in the jungle, far away from any civilisation.

As all of the characters analysed above reinforce various important issues to be dealt with in the course of this thesis, the following sections aim at discussing several aspects that are of profound significance for the story's critical contextualisation. Thus, an interpretation of the title as well as the concept of xenophobia is presented by drawing on consequential instances concerning the historical background of the story. Moreover, a brief insight into Ireland's economic development is given. This latter section additionally draws on the issues of the problematic labour market and the connected aspects of immigration and emigration.

6.2.4 "As if There Were Trees" – Xenophobic Instances in the Story

As with any piece of literature, special attention has to be paid on the title of McCann's short fiction *As if There Were Trees*, as it enables the readers to critically interpret the respective historical, cultural and socio-political background. Therefore, the initial focus is on the symbolic meaning of trees in narration:

As an element of the environment, [a tree] symbolizes life and its cultural significance and is therefore shared by all cultures of the world. Every nation, depending on its culture and state of knowledge and the requirements of the time, has held it sacred in its own way. The myths, fables, and symbols related to the tree across cultures date back to the time before the advent of religions. In our attempt to know being, it has found a spiritual and religious expression in the most ancient stages of human culture and civilization. The presence of talking trees in myths and the symbolic relation between humanity and the tree provide further evidence that the tree is the archetype of life and eternity. We believe that revealing the secrets of the tree, and the profound cultural significance associated with it, provides a dialogue between civilization, a dialogue which in turn provides a solution to the problems the environment is facing today and creates unity among the nations of the world (Chatrudi and Jalali 75).

By suggesting that there are no trees in the industrial area of Ballymun, northern Dublin, the author implies that subsequently there is no unity either between the local and the foreign people.

Furthermore, as has already been highlighted in the previous section, the author uses animal imagery to put additional emphasis on the existing hostility and prejudicial views against Dublin's foreign population in general, and the Romanian workers in particular. In the original text this derogatory attitude is addressed as follows: "I mean he would have made a great sort of jungle man or something, swinging through the trees, except of course there's no trees around here" (McCann 55). Bearing in mind what has been argued so far, it can be maintained that, the fact that there are no trees in the economically deprived area of northern Dublin suggests that there is also no place for any foreign people.

It may thus be argued that this assumption reflects the widespread xenophobia amongst the local working class people. When aiming for a psychological definition of xenophobia, Yakushko (43f) claims that

[x]enophobia is a form of attitudinal, affective, and behavioral prejudice toward immigrants and those perceived as foreign. [...] the term has been historically used to emphasize a sense of fright of outsiders. However, more recent definitions of xenophobia suggest that the fear of foreigners and their impact is linked with ethnocentrism, which is characterized by the attitude that one's own group or culture is superior to others.

When focussing on the representation of the Romanians in McCann's short story, almost every aspect stated in the quote above seems to apply. Thus, the establishment of hierarchies, to be more precise, the alleged inferiority of the foreign workers, for instance, is conveyed by linking the Romanians to certain stereotypical features, such as being uncultivated and animal-like. This claim is supported by the fact that the "ropeman" is stabbed by the horse-riding Jamie using a knife, while the victim himself does not have any weaponry at all. However, when trying to analyse this situation from another point of view, it may be argued that because "Jamie had ridden the horse right underneath where the ropeman was swinging" (McCann 58), he places himself in a lower, and subsequently in a more inferior position. This reading can be further supported by Jamie's emotional reaction after the attack: "[h]e still had the baby in his arms and the cigarette in his mouth but he had dropped the knife and there were tears streaming from Jamie's eyes" (McCann 59). This suggests that the seventeen-year-old Jamie is shocked, and frightened and even remorseful by his own deed while simultaneously recognising that this act of violence and hostility makes him morally inferior to the foreign workers.

Moreover, when further exploring the second aspect mentioned by Yakushko, namely the presumed anxiety locals have about foreign people, several instances of this phenomenon can be noted throughout the short story. Thus, the probably clearest reference to the fright the Irish community has is addressed via the recurring theme of unemployment. Although the readers are provided with the information that both men, Tommy and Jamie, have not been made redundant because of the numerous cheap foreign workers, their frustration about their unemployment is clearly focussed on the Romanians.

This latter aspect leads the analysis to another interesting and important issue highlighted in McCann's short story *As if There Were Trees*. This is the description of the setting of northern Dublin as an economically deprived area. When bearing in mind that Ireland's economy experienced an astonishing recovery in the 1990s, especially during the time of the Celtic Tiger, the portrayal of the area around the tower blocks of Ballymun needs to be focussed on in-depth within the next chapter.

6.2.5 A Short Excursus on Ireland's Economy in the 1990s

As already mentioned in the previous section, the critical reflection on the meanings of the title of a literary work is indispensable when aiming at a comprehensive scholarly interpretation. McCann's story is set in an area in which there are no trees at all, which evokes the picture of a bleak industrial, "ghetto-like" suburb, which is contrasted to the green, peaceful and blossoming capital of Dublin. According to McKeown (113), addressing "universal themes through local settings and vice versa is characteristic of McCann's style. His representation of the situation in Ballymun is applicable to any similar working-class areas around [...] the world, where competition for scarce resources breeds resentment and hatred". As the interplay between immigration and a country's individual labour market seems to have a considerable effect on a nation's economy, a brief excursus on Ireland's economic development over the past three decades is provided in this chapter.

When examining the economic situation of Ireland in the course of the late 20th and the beginning of the 21st century, it is indispensable to reflect on the era

known as “the Celtic Tiger”. Basically, this term denotes a period in Irish history marked by enormous economic growth. In concrete terms it can be stated that “[s]ince the start of the decade the average yearly rate of growth has been 6.3 per cent of GDP” (Gross Domestic Product) (Allen 9). Nevertheless, what is probably of greater interest for this thesis’ central topic is the fact that emigration, which has been a major issue throughout Ireland’s history, has, not only “dried up, but there is now a small stream of both refugees and economic migrants coming to Ireland. [...] Not only has de Valera’s rural idyll of sturdy self-reliant farm folk disappeared, but large farmers now feel themselves victims of a labor shortage” (Allen 10). This fact is of profound significance when considering the breakdown of the country’s economy in the early 21st century, which caused a sudden and devastating end of the previous boost. As stated in O’Flynn, Monaghan and Power (923): “The ‘illusory’ status of Ireland’s economic miracle [...] was effectively exposed as finance capitalism crashed in 2008, culminating in massive bank bailouts and socialized losses.”

The collapse of Ireland’s economy and subsequently also its labour market led to an extremely high degree of unemployment amongst the Irish population. This social problem is also addressed in McCann’s short story, although it was already published in 2005, i.e. before the financial crisis. With regard to the time the story is set in, there are no explicit references to be found within the text. Nevertheless, it can be presumed that the narrative is set between the late 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century (McKeown 115).

The themes of unemployment and the frustration and depression amongst the Irish working class are also addressed on a more abstract level by the story’s detailed description of the shabby neighbourhood around the tower blocks of Ballymun. In the story, the setting is described as follows: “She went right through the goalposts and past all the burnt-out cars and she stepped around a couple of tyres” (McCann 56). Together with the description of Jamie and his malnourished baby, McCann creates the image of a bleak and completely deprived area on the north side of Dublin faced by two major problems: the extremely bad economic situation along with unemployment, and the effects immigration has on the local working class people. Both issues are metaphorically reflected in the short story’s title *As if There Were Trees*.

6.2.6 Didactic Potential

Colum McCann's short story *As if There Were Trees* can surely be regarded as a relevant and appropriate resource for teaching Irish literature and intercultural competence in the (Austrian) EFL classroom. Especially due to the factor of length (the whole story comprises only eight pages), it can be argued that the text has considerable didactic potential for the language learners. At the same time, when focussing on possible problematic instances that might occur, McCann's short story requires a more extensive orientation to the text before actually reading and dealing with it in greater detail in the language classroom. This assumption is based on the requirement of a profound understanding of Ireland's past and contemporary economic situation, as well as of the differing situations the local working class and the immigrants have to face. Nevertheless, the thorough comprehension of these factors can be enhanced by several pre-reading activities which are presented later on in this chapter.

Before turning the attention to the discussion of appropriate in-class activities to be applied before, while and after the reading process, a brief outline as far as the short story's significance for the CEFR and the new SCOR is concerned, is presented. Thus, when initially focussing on the CEFR and the subsequent already mentioned domains of social life, which have "far-reaching implications for the selection of situations, purposes, tasks, themes and texts for teaching and testing materials and activities" (Council of Europe 45), several areas of interest have to be addressed in the course of this chapter. To be more precise, the short story draws on various existing features embedded not only in the personal and public domain, but also within the occupational sphere. When initially drawing the attention to the personal sphere and the respective external contexts within the story, *As if There Were Trees* clearly concentrates on key issues like the ones of family life, the discrepancy between a person's social network and strangers, living routines and the specific location of northern Dublin. As far as the public domain is concerned, the text definitely highlights the problematic question of membership and the belonging to a social and national "in-group". Finally, the occupational sphere is represented by the themes of migrant workers, the construction of the overpass, and the subject matter of unemployment.

In view of the list of topics which form the basis for the new oral SCOR, McCann's short fiction can be regarded as an extraordinarily appropriate and vital text when preparing for the "matura" exam as it requires the pupils to critically reflect on several issues included in the "pool of topics". These are, for instance, the subject matters of relationships and social networks, habitation and environment, social security, working environment, tradition and change, regional studies, individual perspectives, intercultural aspects, the process of growing up, identity, politics and public institutions, as well as social grouping. Moreover, the short story cannot only be successfully used for preparing pupils for the oral part of SCOR, but also with regard to its third part, the VwA. Hence, the text provides an outstanding starting point for further analyses on the issues of nationality, immigration in Ireland and cross-cultural encounters and the situation of the local working class at the time of economic depression in the early 21st century.

When again aiming at providing the readers of this thesis with actual, appropriate in-class activities for using McCann's short story in the EFL classroom, several exercises are to be presented in this section. As already mentioned above, the text requires a considerable degree of preparation in order to familiarize the students with the complex historical, political and social background. In order to gather relevant background information, a WebQuest might be used, which is a creative way for combining the use of new media with task-based teaching. Basically, this method is a specific kind of electronic treasure hunt in the course of which the pupils should find as much information on a certain topic as possible. As stated in March (42):

[a] real WebQuest is a scaffolded learning structure that uses links to essential resources on the World Wide Web and an authentic task to motivate students' investigation of an open-ended question, development of individual expertise, and participation in a group produces that transforms newly acquired information into a more sophisticated understanding.

Again, this exercise has been adapted in the given context to the needs of McCann's short story *As if There Were Trees*. The WebQuest will be illustrated in the final section of this thesis.

During the while-reading process, the language learners can be provided with appropriate and creative information-gap activities. They might be asked, for example, to draw a picture of the setting and the scene as described in the story. Additionally, an in-class character analysis, focussing on each character's

individual values and character details and how they change in the course of the story, can be applied. This aims at creating an understanding of how significant conclusions regarding the fiction's underlying meanings can be drawn out of the various characterisations. Moreover, the students will become aware of the lack of individualisation as far as the portrayal of the Romanians is concerned.

After having carefully read the short story, more specific and engaging exercises and activities are to be introduced, for instance to compare the present situation concerning immigration and the labour market in Austria and how this is perceived by the Austrian population. In a next step, the findings are to be presented and reflected on in class. Especially this latter process aims at encouraging a lively discussion of the topics mentioned above (A sample questionnaire to be used for this specific activity can be found in the last chapter).

6.3 *Home to Harlem* (2008) by Roddy Doyle

6.3.1 Preliminary Information

“Doyle’s short stories rest on the comical limitations – and emotional largeness – of his Irish characters At the same time, they question what it means to be Irish when the face of Ireland has changed. In exploring the theme, Doyle makes sport of everyone.”

- *San Francisco Chronicle* (Doyle, Praise for *The Deportees*)

The features addressed in this quotation relating to bestselling author Roddy Doyle’s writing do not only apply to the collection of short stories *The Deportees*, but also to other works of fiction produced by the Irish writer. According to White (25), the essence of Doyle, who was born in Kilbarrack, a suburb of Dublin, is “his sense of perspective. Whether in his fiction or in his life – personal, political and public – Doyle is able to distinguish what is important from what is not”. As this particular feature of his writing and his persona is relevant for the following analysis of his short story *Home to Harlem*, special attention is paid to this very aspect.

Although Doyle has also written for the stage, he has primarily produced novels and stories. Doyle is the author of the novels “*The Commitments*, *The Snapper*, and the 1991 Booker Prize finalist *The Van*”. Moreover, he published the novels “*Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*; *The Woman Who Walked Into Doors*; *A Star Called Henry*; *Oh, Play That Thing*; and *Paula Spencer*” (Doyle, About the author). All of these works clearly feature Doyle’s individual style and approach to fiction. Unlike McCann’s works, Doyle’s writing “is laden with dialogue imbued with the North Dublin vernacular, and this is instrumental in his creation of very specific and locally identifiable characters” (McKeown 114).

The short story *Home to Harlem* is a rather recently published text, which constitutes a major part of Doyle’s collection entitled *The Deportees and other Stories*. It is divided into 10 subchapters. This first ever produced short story collection by Roddy Doyle was published in 2007 by Penguin and comprises altogether eight stories. As mentioned in its introductory part: “[t]he stories in this book have their tennis-racket moments. Characters disappear, because I forgot about them. Questions are asked and, sometimes, not quite answered. The

stories have never been carefully planned” (Doyle, Foreword). The issue of unanswered questions can be noticed quite clearly in *Home to Harlem* and is therefore explored in detail within the next sections. Before, however, turning to the story’s in-depth analysis, a final comment on this collection is provided in order to put additional emphasis on his unique characters, contents and style of writing. Thus, the *New York Times Book Review* claims that the form of the stories “suits his subject -- prosperous, multicultural 21st-century Ireland, reflected in tales about ‘blended worlds’” (Dixler 20).

6.3.2 Plot Summary

The short story *Home to Harlem* deals with the quest of the young male protagonist Declan for his own personal identity. As it is made apparent throughout the whole text, the black Irish boy does not consider himself as a full member of Irish society. According to him, “[y]ou *can* be less Irish. I am” (Doyle 212). Therefore, Declan decides to move to America in order to seek his grandfather, whom his grandmother met when he was stationed in Glasgow during World War Two. However, as the story continues, the readers find out that Declan’s grandmother only knows the former soldier’s last name, as, apart from the protagonist’s initial belief, the two of them had nothing more than a one night stand. Although it is not clearly stated when the story is set, the text offers sufficient clues to answer this question, for instance, when Declan refers to the Iraq war during his first date with Kim. Additionally he mentions that “[t]he ferry stops at the Statue of Liberty. He doesn’t get off. There’s no point. It’s shut, because of Bin Laden” (Doyle 208f). These instances support the claim that the story is supposed to take place in the early 2000s, after September 11 attacks.

Except for the search for his black origins within the large neighbourhood of Harlem, the young Irishman registers at college in order to carry out a groundbreaking research on the influence of the Harlem Renaissance on twentieth-century Irish literature. Before doing so, however, he has to convince his Professor of the relevance of his study. This process turns out to be quite problematic as Declan has definitely no adequate methodological approach, nor a convincing argument for corroborating the appropriateness of his investigation.

As the story evolves, the young man's search for his American-Irish identity develops further, which subsequently has an impact on his academic studies as well. To be more precise, Declan incorporates the quest for his identity into his research by coming up with the new title "*Who the Fuck Are We?*" (Doyle 214).

A second subplot to be highlighted in this brief plot summary is Declan's feelings towards the American girl Kim, whom he first meets when she is in the company of Marc, Declan's roommate in New York. The black Irish boy immediately seems to be fascinated by the way she looks, behaves and laughs and they both arrange to meet in a bar, next to the university. Although, according to Declan's own impression, he completely ruined their date by asking Kim "[w]hat [she] think[s] of the Iraq thing" (Doyle 198), she agrees on meeting again.

Within the short story's final part, Declan finds and meets Franklin J. Powell, a black man who probably is his uncle. However, as Powell's father, who actually was in Glasgow during World War Two, died three years ago, this question is left unanswered. Nevertheless, what is probably of most profound importance is that within the final pages of the story, the readers will recognise a striking development in view of Declan's problematic search for his "real" identity. He in a way rejects his urgent need to become a full member of Irish society, but rather concentrates on his dual, Afro-American and Irish identity.

6.3.3 Characterisation

6.3.3.1 *Declan*

Declan is the black Irish protagonist in Roddy Doyle's short story. By travelling to New York, he tries to find his grandfather and, subsequently, also his personal identity. Throughout the whole text he emphasises his difficulty to become a full member of Irish society, as he obviously does not consider himself as part of the Irish "in-group". In the course of the story, however, a clear development of the character can be discerned. This results in Declan's new interest in examining the mode of how such groups and societies and the ominous "we" are established, which he considers more important than desperately looking for his own personal identity, which, according to his former assumption, has to be an "either-or" question. "It's the parallels he's interested in now, black and Irish –

what they mean, and the literary fight on both sides of the Atlantic. That's what he'll work on: himself" (Doyle 201).

The external characterisation of Declan provides the readers with the most important aspects of the story's protagonist. These aspects, including his Irish and Afro-American origins, as well as his current university studies, help to put emphasis on the short story's underlying major theme. Being of equal importance, the mode of the character's internal description focuses on Declan's often conflicting thoughts and hasty actions. This feature is mostly made apparent when the protagonist is talking to the professor about his field of research or during his first date with Kim, when he starts talking about the Iraq war. "You shouldn't bring up Iraq on your first date with a Yank. You shouldn't. But he did" (Doyle 196).

Another significant aspect to be mentioned in this section is the self-characterisation of Declan. The protagonist in Doyle's story functions as an autodiegetic narrator. This limits the perspective to Declan's own point of view, which means that the reader is not able to gain insights into the other characters' inner lives.

When aiming at carefully analysing the major character of Declan, particular attention is to be put on the issues of character complexity and development. As the protagonist clearly reveals numerous character traits presented throughout the action of the story, he definitely is to be considered a round character. This aspect can be supported when drawing the attention to the various subplots, including Declan's dialogues with the professor, his search for his American ancestors, or the developing relationship with Kim. Moreover, as already highlighted in the previous paragraphs, a strong development of the character becomes apparent towards the end of the story. Both aspects are especially manifest in the following passage: "He's met Franklin Powell. They'll meet again. They like each other. He's meeting the Professor in the morning. And then there'll be Kim. [...] He takes the Ireland cap off. But he changes his mind. He puts it back on. He feels Irish today" (Doyle 210). Particularly the latter sentence emphasises Declan's development in view of his search for his "real" identity, as he finally accepts the Irish part in him.

6.3.3.2 *Minor Characters*

Apart from Declan, *Home to Harlem* comprises many minor characters who are equally important for the story's development. Therefore, this chapter briefly presents the most important character traits and theoretical aspects of the characterisation of Declan's professor at university, his assumed uncle Franklin Powell, Kim, his roommate Marc, as well as his Irish mother and grandmother.

With regard to Declan's search for his Afro-American-Irish identity, which is also mirrored in his academic research, his university professor, mostly referred to as the Professor throughout the story, definitely plays a leading part. By constantly uttering doubts about Declan's intended area of research, namely the analysis of the influence the Harlem Renaissance had on 20th century Irish literature, as well as by arguing: "*Look for yourself, Mister O'Connor*" (Doyle 188), the woman unconsciously initiates the above mentioned turning point and development concerning Declan's quest for his identity. The Professor is introduced explicitly by the protagonist, as, for example, in the following passage: "She's looking at Declan. And she isn't smiling. She's the Professor" (Doyle 182). Furthermore, by mentioning "you being black" (Doyle 184), the Irishman presents additional information concerning the Professor's physical features. In view of the guidelines for character analyses as indicated by Jahn, Declan's female university professor is a rather monodimensional and static character. According to Lethbridge and Mildorf (53), "Minor characters, not surprisingly, often remain mono-dimensional and/or static. This means that the narrative text presents only few or even just one characteristic of such characters (mono-dimensional) and that there is little or no development throughout the narrative (static)". When bearing in mind that the black woman is only encountered in a single scene, this definition applies to her.

The second minor character highlighted in this section is Franklin J. Powell, Declan's supposed relative. Although the character only appears within the second half of the short story, the reader immediately sympathises with him, as also Declan seems to have a liking for him. This assumption is further fortified by the protagonist stating that "[h]e sounds ok; he isn't aggressive – Uncle Franklin. Uncle Frank" (Doyle 199). Franklin Powell is characterised explicitly by the story's protagonist Declan. He, for instance, indicates that "Franklin Powell wears a grey

suit. His hair is grey and cut close to his head. He wears glasses, black frames” (Doyle 206). What is conspicuous about this passage is that it only provides information about rather unimportant physical features, while no references to his skin colour or similarities to the outward appearance of Declan himself are made. The term flat does not fully apply to the character of Frank Powell as he, although appearing entirely static, is presented as rather multi-dimensional. Nevertheless, one significant feature of Doyle’s writing is perfectly brought into effect by this character, namely the aspect of unanswered questions. Thus, it is left to the reader’s interpretation if Powell is indeed Declan’s uncle.

The American girl Kim is an important figure in another subplot of the short story, dealing with her developing love relationship with Declan. The female character is remarkable because she does not fit into the Irish boy’s preconceived notion of American people. “[S]he passed the test; she didn’t say ‘awesome’” (Doyle 192). Apart from being characterised explicitly by Declan, her implicit mode of presentation is worth focussing on. Implicit characterisation is made apparent by her behaviour after their first ruined date. In spite of being offended and frustrated, Kim agrees on a second date with Declan and subsequently reveals to be the perfect counterpart to the Irish boy and his rather weak personality.

In contrast to Kim, Declan’s roommate Marc perfectly represents the cliché of American society and culture as initially assumed by the narrator of the story. This aspect can mainly be encountered by the way he speaks. To be more precise, Marc usually adds the discourse marker ‘man’ to almost every utterance. This is shown in the following example: “I got some milk in, man, Marc tells him” (Doyle 188). Apart from this peculiar linguistic behaviour, Marc is rather characterised explicitly by the protagonist of the story and can definitely be called a flat character, comprising both “the aspect of mono-dimensional and static” (Lethbridge and Mildorf 53).

Declan’s Irish relatives featured in the story, his mother and grandmother, can in a way be seen as the representatives of the boy’s two cultural and national origins. Hence, while his grandmother secretly provides Declan with information about his grandfather, his mother “hated his granny’s stories. [...] Declan still saw the hotel, the alley, his granddad, his granny, no matter what his mother said. – And anyway, said his mother. – Look at yourself. You’re not even black” (Doyle

184). This indicates that both characters are rather mono-dimensional and static. Furthermore, both relatives are characterised implicitly by means of their actions and opinions than by explicit references in the story.

6.3.4 Establishment of National Identity

The central theme of Doyle's short story *Home to Harlem* clearly is a person's quest for national, as well as individual identity. This quest is perfectly mirrored by the protagonist, Declan, who has, due to his black skin colour, never felt completely Irish. The following excerpt provides a significant insight into the boy's perceived lack of belonging to either one culture or another:

He lies back on the bed and gets dug in Langston Hughes. Some of the poems are great, and some are just shite. He leans out, picks his pencil off the floor. He underlines. *America never was America to me*. He's not sure why. Take out *America*, put in *Ireland*. That's how Declan sometimes feels, how he's felt all his life. A great little country, all that shite, but not his. Not really. [...] What about America? Will it be home? He's not sure (Doyle 191).

A few pages later, Declan poses an equally important question which has to be seen in the context of the statement above: "He's too restless for home. Not that the room is home. What is home? Where is it?" (Doyle 194). Exactly this question of not knowing where or what home actually is, cannot solely be encountered with the character of Declan, but is an issue in the minds of migrants in general. This assumption highlights another highly interesting issue, focussing on the interplay of immigration and emigration and the establishment of national identity.

As contemporary scholars of intercultural relations have recently found out, an enormous growth in the "scholarly interest in national identity is particularly notable because it is rooted in the fact that a massive flow of immigrants has blurred national boundaries across many developed democracies" (Ha and Jang 53). Moreover, numerous studies on this specific subject matter reveal the fact that in most cases immigration is closely linked to the collective definition of a nation. To be more precise, the scholars Ha and Jang (53f) argue that a society's perceived anxiety over the entry of migrants into a nation or community, modifies the conception of national identity in turn; makes it more exclusive. Consequently, migrants often face enormous difficulties with regard to becoming full members

of an “in-group”. The very same phenomenon is addressed by Declan when he says: “back then in Ireland, you were Irish or you weren’t one thing or the other. You couldn’t be both; you couldn’t be black” (Doyle 203).

Another academic research, undertaken by the scholars McCrone and Bechhofer, analyses the importance of so called identity markers, meaning “social characteristics presented to others to support a national identity claim and looked to in others, either to attribute national identity, or receive and assess any claims or attributions made” (Kiely et al. 35f.). Hence, their survey demonstrates that although these identity markers can either be accepted or rejected by a community, “people create their national identity for themselves, rather than simply equating it with citizenship” (McCrone and Bechhofer 922). The same process can be encountered in *Home to Harlem*, with Declan rejecting his wish to fully find his American or Irish identity, when he states that “[i]t’s the parallels he’s interested in now, black and Irish” (Doyle 201).

6.3.5 The Harlem Renaissance and its Influence on Irish Literature – Insights into Declan’s Research

One of the main subplots in Roddy Doyle’s short story deals with the protagonist’s developing field of study. Being of great importance for the overall theme of *Home to Harlem*, Declan initially aims at researching the crucial impact the Harlem Renaissance had on 20th century Irish literature. This interest is based on the boy’s difficulty in finding his personal, national and cultural identity. When explaining this case to the Professor, “[h]e tells her about Ireland and about being black and Irish. He tells her about first reading *The Souls of Black Folk*, about the question repeated in the first paragraph of the first chapter: ‘How does it feel to be a problem?’” (Doyle 185). As this subject matter is of profound significance for the overall understanding of the short story, this chapter briefly outlines the more general and theoretical aspects concerning the Harlem Renaissance as a movement and its assumed influence on Irish literature.

The Harlem Renaissance basically denotes a striking period in Afro-American history and culture which occurred in the first half of the 20th century, mainly in the 1920s. In terms of a suitable definition, the period is marked by the

rebirth of African American culture, arts and literature which took place in Harlem, a neighborhood at the north end of New York City. The *Encyclopedia of the Harlem Renaissance* recounts the development of the era as follows:

Much of the confidence that characterized the rhetoric, creativity, and activities associated with the Harlem Renaissance was enabled by contemporary changes in the perception of race and culture. Beginning in the late 19th century, new intellectual insights offered by the fields of anthropology, history, and the sciences brought into question the old racial hierarchy upon which rested much of the ill perception of black people and their cultures. By the Armistice ending World War I, in 1918, a significant cohort of scholars, artists, and social reformers had come to believe that race was an invention and that the world's "races" were not distinctively different in terms of their potential and essential worth. Such views figured into the intellectual cadence of the Harlem Renaissance, giving a new generation of black modernist confidence that black culture and those who contributed to it were of value to world civilization (Aberjhani and West xif.).

When bearing this information in mind, it is not surprising that the short story's black protagonist is interested in the thematic area of African culture and literature and, subsequently, aims at linking this topic to the one of Irish literature. In other words, by trying to explore the possible influence the Harlem Renaissance had on 20th century Irish writing, Declan in a way wants to justify the dualism in view of his own cultural, ethnical and religious origins.

In this context, the protagonist of the story makes an interesting reference to the poet Langston Hughes. As noted in Smith (36): "[o]f the major black writers who first made their appearance during the exciting period of the 1920s [...], Langston Hughes was the most prolific and the most successful". In Roddy Doyle's story, the protagonist clearly seems to identify with Hughes as both share similar feelings towards their "home" nation and culture. By writing "*America was never America to me*" (Doyle 191), the Afro-American poet prompts Declan to reflect on Ireland; if he thinks of it as home, or if America will ever be home to him.

As highlighted in the short story's last chapter, Declan changes his initial research question and his focus of investigation. Hence, by now analysing the question "*Who the Fuck Are We*" (Doyle 214), he is rather interested in the similarities between the Harlem Renaissance and Irish literature, as, in Declan's opinion, both concepts "questioned the same kind of we, here. [He]'ll compare the two" (Doyle 213). What exactly this concept of 'we' refers to, is argued by Declan in a previous chapter:

The book is on the desk, right below his face. *The Autobiography of an ex-Coloured Man*. [...] It was published in 1912, which is perfect, and it's about a black man who can pass for white but decides not to, then changes his mind after he witnesses another black man being burnt alive by angry whites. *A great wave of humiliation and shame swept over me*. That was the shame that the Harlem Renaissance writers had had to face and fight. And the Irish writers too – the *Punch* cartoons, the drunken Paddy, [...] the pictures that the Irish had been given and the shame behind the grinning acceptance of them – this was the shame that Yeats and the lads had taken on and, sometimes, beaten (Dolye 200f.).

As outlined in the following section, these wide-spread prejudicial views and clichés about Ireland and Irish society constitute not only a major part in this specific passage of Doyle's text, but are rather apparent throughout the whole story.

6.3.6 'Awesome' vs. 'grand' - American and Irish encounters in the story

One of the most striking and influential characteristics of Roddy Doyle's writing is his successful exposure of the concepts of identity and otherness and the portrayal of cultural, national or ethnical stereotypes. As a representative example of the author's fiction, the short story *Home to Harlem* clearly presents these prominent features and highlights numerous encounters of what is allegedly "typically" American and Irish. This effect is not only achieved by the presentation of representative stereotypical places, people and behaviour, but also through Doyle's unique use of language. Both aspects are dealt with in detail within this section.

When focusing on the presentation of the differences between American and Irish culture, as perceived by the story's protagonist Declan, numerous instances can be encountered. Thus, a first reference is already made in the first chapter of the story with Declan trying to buy some milk in a supermarket, but "[t]here's about twenty-eight different kinds of milk. What the fuck is 2 per cent? All he wants is white. [...] He chooses a carton with a cow on it; you can't go far wrong with a cow" (Doyle 180f.). It can be argued that this situation highlights one of the probably most profound and widespread contrasts between the Irish and the Americans. While the latter are often linked to numerous dominant features, such as urban, multicultural, or diverse, Ireland is commonly thought of as a

green, rural idyll, mainly admired for its diverse nature. By using the metaphor of milk additional emphasis is put on this essential difference.

Another aspect that becomes manifest repeatedly in the story is the numerous references to the coffeehouse Starbucks. Being one of the most famous American brands in the world, this metaphor is used to create and develop the image of a perceived “typical” American society. According to Crothers (140), “brands like Mc Donald’s, Coca-Cola, Starbucks, and 7-Eleven carry an American identity and an American set of cultural values and practices to the larger world”. In the short story, this circumstance is thoroughly made apparent in the very first page as Declan reviews his first days in America, immediately visiting what he thinks are the most typical American places. In the story, this situation is presented as follows: “He’s been up on the Empire State Building, he’s been zinging around on the subway, he’s been in Starbucks on the corner of Lenox Avenue and 125th Street. [...] He’s walked past the Apollo, he’s bought a T-shirt in the Footlocker” (Doyle 179). However, as the story develops, also the image of Starbucks changes and the way Declan talks about the coffeehouse. Hence, towards the end of the action the protagonist mentions that Franklin Powell wants to meet him at “[a]nother fucking Starbucks. [...] He’s getting a bit sick of Starbucks” (Doyle). This example gives rise to the claim that the image of Starbucks is used to put additional emphasis on the short story’s overall theme, namely Declan’s search for his identity, which changes throughout the action.

An additional stereotypical representation of both the American, and the Irish culture is provided explicitly in the story’s second chapter when Declan talks to the Professor about his studies:

- The Irish and their famous profanity, she says.
- Charming.
- Did you get here on a sporting scholarship? says Declan.
- I beg your pardon? she says.
- The smile is gone.
- Well, says Declan. – You were indulging in a bit of the oul’ stereotype there. The Irish and the profanity, like. So, I kind of thought, you being black and that, you must have got in here on a sporting scholarship. So, was it basketball or the sprinting? (Doyle 184).

As can be clearly noticed, the passage addresses two different clichés: the alleged profanity of the Irish and the sportiness of the black American population. As regards the issue of Irish profanity, another aspect appears to be of great

importance, namely the language used by the Irish speaker, which, in a way, supports the Professor's stereotypical argument. Due to the topic's central role in the whole short story, greater attention needs to be paid to Declan's language use.

Drawing the attention to this specific instance in *Home to Harlem*, another key feature of Roddy Doyle's unique style of writing is made apparent. As stated in White (3): "Doyle succeeds in achieving an unobtrusive literary style by using common, everyday language which includes a great deal of profanity and slang, little descriptions of any sort, and almost no authorial commentary". Thus, when focusing on the short story's protagonist Declan, especially the aspect of profanity and slang are of great significance. To be more precise, the narrator frequently uses expressions, such as "fuck", "for fuck sake", "culchies", "grand", and the informal word "eejit", being an Irish and Scottish word for *idiot*. Equally, also the American characters in *Home to Harlem* stand out due to their language usage and utterances, which can be considered as typical for American speakers of English. Especially Marc often makes use of certain expressions, such as "awesome", or the discourse marker "man" after numerous sentences. Again, both varieties of English and the use of slang expressions, aim at putting additional emphasis on the protagonist's cultural hybridity and quest for his personal identity and result in a great authenticity of the text⁶.

6.3.7 Didactic Potential

As the major focus of this thesis is not solely on the in-depth analysis of the intercultural encounters in the Irish short stories discussed, but is, to the same extent, also focussed on the didactic potential of each story, this chapter considers possible advantages of and limitations for the use of Doyle's short story *Home to Harlem* in an Austrian EFL context. Therefore, special attention is paid to the relevant background information and the story's contextualization. Particularly the sections on the Harlem-Renaissance, the establishment of one's

⁶ Hybridity, in cultural studies, "captures the spirit of the times with its obligatory celebration of cultural difference and fusion, and it resonates with the globalization mantra of unfettered economic exchanges and the supposedly inevitable transformation of all cultures" (Kraidy 1). Prabhu (1) claims that hybridity, which constitutes a big part in contemporary postcolonial studies, "can provide a way out of binary thinking, allow the inscription of the agency of the subaltern, and even permit a restructuring and destabilizing of power".

own personal, national and cultural identity, as well as “typical” encounters between the Americans and the Irish in the story provide great potential for teaching, particularly in view of lively in-class activities.

When focusing on the self-assessment grid provided in the CEFR, the descriptor for the students’ reading ability at level B2 is stated as follows: “I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose” (Council of Europe 27). Apart from conforming to the major aspects presented in the descriptor, *Home to Harlem* discusses several topic areas included in the language domains explored in the previous chapters. Amongst them are, for example, the topics of individual, private or home life, family and friends, social networks, university and teaching staff, and family occasions.

As far as the guidelines of the new SCOR are concerned, it can be noticed that Roddy Doyle’s short story equally addresses a great number of topic areas of the “pool of topics” proposed for the new oral “matura” exam in Austria. These include, for example, the areas of relationships and social networks, habitation and environment, school and education, recreational behavior, tradition and change, communication, individual (future) perspectives, intercultural aspects, growing up and identity, public institutions, and social grouping.

Based on what has been discussed so far, the short story *Home to Harlem* by the Irish author Roddy Doyle critically addresses a great variety of topics which are of relevance for EFL teaching in Austria and, in this context, especially for the guidelines of the new SCOR testing. Due to the text’s richness in presenting different themes, several distinct, relevant and enhancing teaching activities can be designed on the basis of the previous analyses and interpretations. Starting with possible pre-reading activities, the story’s presentation of the difference between “typical” American and “typical” Irish features may provide relevant input for several fruitful in-class exercises. One of these tasks aims at activating the language learners’ prior world knowledge by asking them to create a short presentation or poster on their (preconceived) notions about America and/or Ireland. The students may come up with representative brands or clichés of both nations, functioning as a link for further discussions on the repeated references to Starbucks in the story.

As far as the while-reading phase is concerned, the pupils can be advised to create or expand an already existing reading diary. As Doyle's short story is quite long, it is advisable to break down the text into its different chapters and deal only with one section at a time. Thus, after having read a chapter, the students are instructed to note down any unknown words, as well as any emotions evoked by the text and write questions into their reading diary. The findings are then discussed in class. This process enables a critical and creative reading of the short story already during the actual reading phase. A sample page of this specific exercise is included in the final section of this diploma thesis.

After having read the story, numerous activities can be initiated, which might help not only to trigger a discussion of the text's main issues, but also to advance the students' speaking, writing and listening skills. Concerning this latter aspect, the characters' use of different slangs and accents are a valuable resource for raising the language learners' awareness of some varieties of English. Hence, after having extracted and analysed several language specific utterances and discourse markers from the text, the process of listening to speakers of different varieties of English may strengthen the pupils' knowledge on this topic. As regards possible writing exercises, the writing of a sequel to the story might be particularly interesting as the question of Declan's American descent is left unanswered by the author. Furthermore, the students can be instructed to write an e-mail or a letter by Declan to his mother in which he explains his feelings about the search for his "real" identity and the actual turning point after having met Franklin Powell. Again, exercises proposed are provided in the very last part of this thesis.

6.4 *Keep Well to Seaward* (2013) by Billy O'Callaghan

6.4.1 Preliminary Information

The author of the short story *Keep Well to Seaward*, Billy O'Callaghan was born in Cork in 1974 and has up to now published three short story collections. The most recent one, appearing under the title *The Things We Lose, the Things We Leave Behind*, features, apart from the short story analysed in this thesis, twelve other short stories. In 2010, Billy O'Callaghan received the *Arts Council of Ireland Bursary Award for Literature*, a highly prestigious prize (Billy O'Callaghan, homepage). Moreover, his works of fiction have already appeared in about seventy literary magazines and journals all around the globe. Amongst them are, for instance, the *Kyoto Journal*, the *Los Angeles Review*, the *Verbal Magazine*, or the *Bellevue Literary Review*.

What is probably of greater interest in view of the detailed analysis of the short story *Keep Well to Seaward*, are the numerous parallels that can be drawn between O'Callaghan himself and the protagonist of his story, Billy. Apart from the name and their Irish origin, the protagonist and the author additionally share some other remarkable similarities, as, for example, O'Callaghan's marriage to a woman of Asian descent. The question about whether the Irish writer intended the short story to be partly autobiographical or not, cannot be reliably answered and is thus left to the readers' personal judgement.

Keep Well to Seaward is part of O'Callaghan's latest short story collection which appeared under the title *The Things We Lose, The Things We Leave Behind and Other Stories* and was published in Dublin in 2013. The story, which comprises altogether 34 pages, aims at presenting some highly interesting themes and issues, such as the fate of two star-crossed lovers, the complex subject matter of cultural clashes, as well as different national and cultural identities. Furthermore, O'Callaghan creates a very realistic love story based on some real historical background, as well as authentic geographic references and descriptions. A more detailed summary of the plot is provided in the next chapter.

6.4.2 Plot Summary

In *Keep Well to Seaward*, the protagonist Billy, aged in his late forties, reflects on the time he spent in Taiwan when he was in his mid-twenties, to be more precise, aged 27. The plot covers a time span of about 15-20 years. At the beginning of the action, Billy introduces the readers to his accommodation in Taipei, where he spent most of the nights writing on his new novel. Simultaneously significant insights into the Taiwanese and also the Irish culture are provided. Additionally, Billy gives an account – in a long flashback - of how he met his first “real” love, Mei.

The story begins *in medias res* with Billy describing his dusty, shabby apartment, consisting of “a small, caged window, and at the far end a little kitchenette with a hotplate, two-shelf refrigerator and a cupboard for [his] bowls and pots” (O’Callaghan 141). Moreover, particular attention is put on information about the protagonist. Thus, various influential factors, such as his age or profession – he is working as an author for the Irish newspaper *The Examiner* – are stated explicitly in the course of the first two pages. The most interesting and important information, however, concerns Mei, a Taiwanese woman aged 25. The narrator tells how the two of them spend the afternoons together in the apartment, with “making love, talking just for the sound and soothing of the words” (O’Callaghan 142).

In this introduction relating to the protagonist’s past, he recalls how they got to know each other and, how their love affair started. It was “in a small six-table restaurant, close to the National Taiwan University” (O’Callaghan 143) where they met. While Mei works there as a waitress, Billy chooses the place for his daily breakfast stops. They almost immediately fall in love with each other, although they do not yet engage in a personal conversation, but only talk about the weather.

Nevertheless, after some days have passed, they cannot hold back their true emotions any longer and start spending their free time together, by either wandering through the busy streets of Taipei, or having sex at Billy’s apartment. The story twists when Mei confesses that she is already married to a middle-aged man who suffered a stroke about five years previously and that she spends most of the nights taking care of him. At first, the protagonist of the story is outraged

and feels humiliated because of this violation of his trust and orders Mei to leave the apartment. Then, after about a week, Billy informs the Taiwanese woman about the decision that he will go back to Ireland and he asks her to come with him. She refuses for a reason, she never explicitly states and the two lovers have to say goodbye forever.

The short story ends with some references to Billy's contemporary life back in Ireland, many years after his time in Taiwan. He still thinks a lot about Mei and the exceptional love they have shared and the readers are able to gain some insight into how long and difficult the healing process has been for him.

6.4.3 Characterisation

6.4.3.1 *Billy*

Billy, now middle-aged, is the protagonist of the short story and thinks back at the time he spent in Taiwan when he was 27 years old. Apart from working on a new novel after having already published a very successful short story collection, which "picked up a minor prize and was translated into four languages" (O'Callaghan 2013: 142), the most important information to be gained about the character is that he is falling in love head over heels with Mei, his first real love. Billy can be described as rather egocentric in view of the difference in culture and religion between his own, and the one of Mei. This becomes obvious when taking into account that he believes that a sense of guilt is the only reason for the woman not to accompany him to Ireland, while completely missing out the various moral reasons based on the ideas of Taoism, which are addressed in greater detail in the following chapter.

When taking into account the first of the main aspects to be considered when analysing characters in narratives according to the guidelines presented by Jahn, it can be stated that the protagonist is described both explicitly and implicitly. Billy, for instance, explicitly states what he is doing for a living and how he has achieved fame by publishing a short story collection within the first few pages of the text, while some of his character traits are implicitly revealed by his various attitudes and opinions on his own, as well as about Mei's cultural heritage.

The protagonist's characterisation is explicit as well as implicit and is provided by the narrator protagonist Billy. Thus, it is important for the readers to assess the information they receive about a character critically (Abbott 75f). Billy's account may be subjective, but seems reliable, honest and trustworthy.

The last two aspects to be taken into account are the ones about the character's development and complexity in the story. As Billy is a character who has a number of defining, often conflicting characteristics and clearly undergoes a development throughout the narrative, he can be seen as a multi-dimensional and dynamic character. Especially in the very last part of the short story, with the protagonist thinking back at the time he spent in Taiwan, reveals that Billy has been able to cope with this situation and thus undergone a significant process of maturation.

6.4.3.2 *Mei*

Mei is the second major character in O'Callaghan's short story *Keep Well to Seaward*. She is a 25-year old waitress working in the restaurant where Billy is having his breakfast every day. Only at approximately the middle of the story her secret is revealed to the readers, namely that she is already married to a middle aged man called Wang Chenglei, whom she has to care for after he had suffered a stroke. As Chenglei is no longer able to work, Mei has to quit her university studies of literature and has to work to earn a living. Although her immense love to Billy is honest and very prominent in the text, she also suffers from a deep sense of guilt. At the very end of the story she decides not to forsake her husband and refuses to accompany Billy to Ireland. She stays in Taiwan, taking care of her disabled husband. This decision is mainly based on the religious and cultural principles of the Taoist philosophy. On the spiritual level, the Taoist tradition includes the aspect of morality as well as the concepts of reincarnation and metempsychosis, while carrying several crucial implications for the social life as well. Thus, when deciding to actually leave Taiwan with Billy, Mei would not only lose her "right" of rebirth, but also the possibility of returning to her friends and family and the Taoist community.

Mei is also characterised explicitly as well as implicitly. Thus, her outward appearance is described elaborately at the beginning of the short story, for example when stating that her eyes, “the big wide colour of molasses and [...] her brow knitting slightly, reefing the bone-pale smoothness of her skin” (O’Callaghan 145). In addition to this explicit presentation of character traits there are detailed accounts of the way she behaves and the decisions she makes at the very end of the story that indicate that she is a sensitive, responsible and caring woman scarifying her own happiness to moral duty.

As the character Mei is presented through Billy’s eyes, her portrayal is inevitably subjective. This can be supported by Billy’s statement: “[t]he image [he has] retained of her is likely idealized, and in large part imagined” (O’Callaghan 173f).

When further exploring Mei’s complexity and development, one can say that she is a multi-dimensional and a dynamic character, as she clearly undergoes a change throughout the narrative: from the waitress that falls in love for the first time to the married woman who decides to stay with her disabled husband, scarifying her happiness for moral and religious reasons.

6.4.3.3 *Minor Characters*

Apart from the two “star-crossed lovers” Billy and Mei, O’Callaghan’s *Keep Well to Seaward* solely features two other characters who are only addressed on in passing. These characters are linked to Mei’s past and contemporary life respectively and are relevant in view of the short story’s ending. These are the characters of Wang Chenglei and Ling.

Wang Chenglei is only mentioned in five pages towards the middle of the narrative. He suffered a stroke 14 months after he and Mei got married and is now dependent on nursing care. He is not only paralysed, but also blind and thus completely dependent on his wife Mei. He is introduced by Billy retelling what Mei told him about Chenglei. Therefore an explicit characterisation is applied. Moreover, when bearing in mind that the events concerning the stroke happened prior to the actual story, Chenglei is a mono-dimensional as well as a static character. We also learn from Mei that she never fully loved Chenglei, but married

him because he was gentle and “largely at her mother’s urging” (O’Callaghan 158).

Apart from Wang Chenglei, Ling is the second minor character in the short story and is mentioned when Mei reveals to Billy that her husband’s sister knows every detail of their love affair. Ling has become a very good friend of Mei and she often helps her to care for her husband, who is Ling’s younger brother. Ling is characterized explicitly by Billy via Mei’s account of her. Thus, she provides a figural characterization. Ling is a flat character.

6.4.4 Historical Background

The short story *Keep Well to Seaward* includes several references to historical, political and social events in Ireland and Taiwan in the 20th century. Because of their considerable importance for the understanding of the context, the most striking and relevant instances are discussed in some detail in this chapter. Thus, several textual references to Irish history address the Northern Ireland conflict in the late 20th century. To be more precise, the time span of the “1990s when [...] the problem of Northern Ireland was confronted by the government of Britain and Ireland with sustained determination” (Brown, Preface to the second edition) is critically addressed by O’Callaghan in the text. Thus, the protagonist Billy mentions, for instance, a bombing in London which he gets informed of while reading the newspaper in the restaurant where Mei is working. He reports:

Nearly two weeks into February, a bomb had gone off in London’s Canary Wharf, causing widespread destruction. Casualty figures stood at two dead and some forty injured. The IRA were claiming responsibility, bringing an official end to the ceasefire, which had held, in admittedly tenuous fashion, for nearly eighteen months (O’Callaghan 150).

As it is stated by English (289), “Prime Minister John Major called the Canary Wharf bomb ‘an appalling outrage’, a view echoed by Labour leader Tony Blair who called it a ‘sickening outrage’. Those who had been sceptical regarding the IRA’s ceasefire felt vindicated”. In O’Callaghan’s short story *Keep Well to Seaward* these events as well as Billy’s reaction to them are presented in detail, revealing how important this part of the Irish history is to the author, and subsequently also to the story’s protagonist.

Another event in recent Irish history and the IRA in particular highlighted in the short story, is the Good Friday Agreement. As English (297) claims, “there apparently emerged, on 10 April, the elusive miracle: a seemingly genuine Northern Irish agreement [...] offering ‘a truly historic opportunity for a new beginning’ in Northern Ireland”. Adams (191) states that “[e]ven conflicts that appear to be intractable can eventually be brought to an end”. O’Callaghan aims at drawing the same conclusion within his short story. Hence, the very last pages of *Keep Well to Seaward* do not only address the temporary end of the conflicts in Northern Ireland, but also underline the fact that Billy has now overcome his inner conflict as well.

Despite the many references to Irish history, the short story also features some instances of the history of Taiwan. The first reference is to “the Chinese cruisers amassing in the northern waters, readying their missiles to test and antagonize, the notion of hoping for anything more felt almost blasphemous” (O’Callaghan 143). Moreover, he mentions the “‘One China, One Taiwan’ rhetoric. In what seemed a clear gesture of intimidation, another round of missile testing had been announced by the PRC, scheduled for mid March, just days before Taiwan’s first ever democratic Presidential Election”. (O’Callaghan 151). According to Liu and Hung (chapter 2.2),

The ‘One China’ policy underpinned three principles of national and cultural identity: (1) Taiwanese are Chinese. (2) Taiwan is a part of China. (3) The government of the ROC on Taiwan has to maintain a political system which can represent the whole of China. This official discourse promoted a vision of ‘Chineseness’ based on a highly conservative interpretation of China’s ‘5000-year-old’ history and culture, which constituted the defining inheritance for Chinese on Taiwan just as for their ‘compatriots’ on the mainland. The KMT withdrawal from the mainland was regarded as a national crisis, while the Chinese communists were described as a national enemy who were destroying Chinese tradition and culture.

In the story’s final part, O’Callaghan (167) refers to this conflict once more by writing that “[i]n fact, war didn’t come. The PRC launched their test missiles, simulated air strikes, and carried out their landing exercises on one of the small islets, and for a while the stand-off seemed certain to spill into something more, but the presence of the U.S. Fleet deterred notions of further advance”.

The concept of 'Chineseness' being mentioned in the quote above, as well as Taiwan's traditions and culture are examined in the following section focussing the several (inter)cultural encounters in the short story *Keep Well to Seaward*.

6.4.5 Imagology in O'Callaghan: Aspects of 'Irishness' and 'Chineseness'

Before taking into account the various cultural references in the story *Keep Well to Seaward*, it is important to introduce the concept of imagology first, as this idea will function as a basis for further analyses. According to Beller (7): "Imagology studies the origin and function of characteristics of other countries and peoples, as expressed textually, particularly in the way in which they are presented in works of literature, plays, poems, travel books and essays". In other words, this concept provides, as can be derived by its name, various theories concerning a nation's different public images, based on scientific studies (Beller 13). Furthermore, as far as the definition of the term 'image' in this context is concerned, Beller (4) claims that an image can be described "as the mental silhouette of the other" which "rules our opinion of others and controls our behaviour towards them." In view of O'Callaghan's story, several images of both the Irish and Taiwanese and/or Chinese culture are addressed in the text.

The concept of 'Irishness' is referred to in *Keep Well to Seaward* and based on the fact that both author and protagonist are Irish. Thus, many stereotypical views and clichés are addressed and often supported throughout the whole action of story. This is achieved by either the protagonist, Billy, himself, or the other major character, Mei, wanting to know as much as possible about this allegedly "strange" and mystical nation of Europe. 'Irishness', according to McClinton-Temple (103), within literature, is a concept "shown to be a condition that the authors must negotiate, a process that in many ways resembles the process by which the Irish have assimilated into the mainstream". Thus, examining this claim further, will reveal the Irish heritage that has shaped Billy's behaviour and actions.

When highlighting the literary representation of Ireland and the Irish, McCaw (chapter 1) claims that the Irish are an "unpredictable, stubborn, largely irrational [...] nation". This characterisation perfectly applies to O'Callaghan's *Keep Well to Seaward* as well. For instance, the cliché of the unpredictable Irish is approved

when Billy unexpectedly decides to leave Taiwan and to return back home. When Mei refuses to accompany him to Cork, the protagonist is convinced that her decision is grounded in her feeling of guilt and moral responsibility for her husband Chenglei. “‘You feel guilty’, [he] said. ‘I know, believe me. But you can live with guilt. There are ways. And I’ll help you’”. (O’Callaghan 168). This event in the story supports the cliché of the stubborn, narrow-minded Irishman, as Billy clearly lacks the capacity for empathy. He does not understand why Mei takes this decision, ignorant that Taiwanese society expects her to stay with her husband. This moral attitude towards life is strongly linked to the philosophy of Taoism, which will be outlined in the next section.

However, before dealing with the aspects of Chinese mentality, it is indispensable to focus on the probably strongest connection with Ireland that comes up throughout the short story, namely the weather. This topic is not just a stereotypical view of Ireland, but one of genuine concern: “Some mornings she’d want to talk about Ireland, which she had heard of but only as a place-name and a stereotype, and I’d describe for her our scenery, music and poetry and, always, our weather” (O’Callaghan 146). Another example refers to “the early part of the year in west Cork or Kerry. The wind comes hard enough to lift you out of your shoes, and the rain is so relentless that it causes you to forget what a clear day even looks like” (O’Callaghan 154). The topics of weather and climate are used, especially in the literary field, to put emphasis on the differences between two or more nations. In the preface to *John Bull’s Other Island* (1904), the author George Bernard Shaw explains why the Irish differ from the English. As argued in Boia (69): “Shaw claims that there is no specifically Irish race distinct from the English ‘race’. Economic conditions have something to do with it but the determining factor is climate. An Irish climate ‘stamps an immigrant more deeply and durably in two years [...] than the English climate will in two hundred’”.

When exploring the references to Chinese mentality, tradition and religion within the story, O’Callaghan does not only aim at presenting these aspects, but rather tries to compare and contrast these topics with Ireland. Language is another issue: “the words *wo ai ni*, I love you, whispered against her lips and tongue first in her language and then in my own” (O’Callaghan 142f). This example highlights the protagonist’s constant comparison with regard to both cultures. Moreover, Billy mentions that “Taipei’s foreignness made everything a

wonder. The air was different there, the way it tasted, the way it felt on my skin, the way its heft slowed me down and forced me to look around, to see and hear and notice the city's tumult and its tales" (O'Callaghan 143). In this particular passage, the narrator draws attention again to the weather. However, compared to the one of Ireland, the weather in Taiwan is often hot and having a high degree of air moisture. Thus, Billy keeps "complaining about the heat, which even at that time of year was clear notches above anything [he]'d ever known in Ireland" (O'Callaghan 144). Billy obviously prefers the Irish weather over the Taiwanese one, simply due to the fact that he is rather used to the first one. Several references can be found in the text in which the narrator addresses the weather conditions in Ireland.

Another issue to be taken into consideration in this section is religion, which also entails cultural differences. While the readers of the story are not provided with any information about Billy's attitude towards religion, the text, on the other hand, makes significant and explicit references to Mei's religious beliefs. This is reflected when Mei and Billy "visited the Longshan Temple more than once because although Mei kept no orthodox religion she felt comforted by the thought of prayer" (O'Callaghan 146).

The Longshan Temple, which was originally built in 1738 but has been destroyed and rebuilt several times since then, is one of the most popular and sacred houses of worship in Taiwan. It "is dedicated to the bodhisattva of mercy, Guanyin, though in true Taiwanese style there are over 100 other gods and goddesses worshipped in the rear and side halls" (Lonely Planet, Longshan Temple). Walsh (473) describes the religiously and culturally significant place as follows:

To enter Longshan Buddhist Temple is to enter into the Dharma, the truth of the Buddha's teachings and the cosmic body of the Buddhism. [...] [W]ith incense (scent), chanting (sound), touching and holding, physically and psychically, the religious agent enters a reciprocal space of giving and receiving, an integral component of the process of becoming fully human. [...] Buddhists have long argued that all human beings are diseased, that is, quite literally, in a state of disease. Adding that to the fact that we are all dying, means that Buddhists strive toward a path of salvation that must address both 'this-life' salvation as well as future salvations. [...] Countless practitioners [...] [come to] Longshan Temple, or some other temple, to experience its space, and it is precisely in so doing, knowingly or not, participate in a space of redemption, a space of salvation, a space of strictness and discipline, and a space of healing.

When bearing in mind the spiritual meaning the temple has for Buddhist practitioners and believers, such as Mei, the woman's act of visiting this sacred place together with Billy has to be considered as extraordinarily meaningful. In this context, additional information on Taoism needs to be provided. The term Taoism (or Daoism) refers to "a concept for the regular functioning of nature, such as the course of the seasons or the motions of the celestial bodies. It can also be applied to social and other contexts and then it indicates a seamless and effective process or operation" (Moeller 298). As far as the central topic of this thesis is concerned, the main focus is on the moral values and social practices of this philosophy and how this is manifested in *Keep Well to Seaward*. According to Moeller (302f):

the term Daoism certainly refers as much [...] to a religious tradition as to a philosophical teaching that can be derived from a number of texts associated with such a teaching, it is questionable whether the many practical moral guidelines, prescriptions, and practices that were developed during the history of organized Daoist religion belong to ethical or moral theory in a narrow sense. A substantial part of the moral teachings within Daoist organized religion has been focused on physical aspects, or, simply, on what is good for one's health. The definition of the good in Daoist religion could therefore be described as often having a medical aspect rather than a moral one. Goodness with the respect to the body means physical health; goodness with respect to society means a healthy state.

Both aspects of this definition, the medical characteristics as well as moral features are revealed in O'Callaghan's short story.

Therefore, when focussing on the medical aspect, some interesting instances of "these medical or hygienic concerns, which constitute an important part of Daoist religious ethics" (Moeller 303) can be identified when Billy tells the readers about the first time he is having intercourse with Mei. He was not used to washing his genitals beforehand. In the text, this event is described as follows: "She leaned over the bowl and sluiced handfuls of water between her legs. 'You must wash, too' she said without turning. 'Because of bacteria. I don't want to get sick'" O'Callaghan (148). When bearing the Taoist philosophy and its medical advice in mind, this procedure probably seems less alien to western European readers, who simply are not used to these practices.

Also the issues of religion and ethics are rooted in the tradition of Taoism. For example, the protagonist of the story thinks that the only reason for Mei not

to accompany him to Ireland is that she could not live with the guilt of leaving her disabled husband behind. Against the background of the Taoist philosophy, however, it is more than just guilt. Society and religion rather expect her to stay in Taiwan and not to commit “adultery”. As argued by Moeller (303):

[t]he Daoist canon, a fifteenth-century collection of nearly 5000 texts representing the core teachings of the Daoist religion, contains more than 70 scriptures that are either wholly or in part concerned with moral issues. Often, these texts contain lists of rules, commandments, and prescriptions. The rules regulate all sorts of daily activities, including eating, washing, and motions; the commandments encourage altruistic acts and virtuous behavior; and the prescriptions disallow, for instance, stealing, lying, and sexual misconduct.

Bearing this explanation in mind, it is not at all surprising that the story ends with Billy returning to Ireland alone. If the protagonist had been less stubborn and less narrow-minded he probably would have understood Mei’s decision, but, as O’Callaghan (174) mentions, “[t]hat’s a realization, perhaps even a kind of wisdom, which only comes with time”.

6.4.6 Didactic Potential

When focussing on the didactic potential of O’Callaghan’s masterpiece of short story writing for Austrian EFL teaching, several instances need to be considered and examined. These include an investigation of the relevant sections in the CEFR and the guidelines for the new SCOR, as well as the presentation and critical discussion of appropriate in-class exercises. Before doing so, however, some more basic features of *Keep Well to Seaward* in an educational context have to be highlighted. It has to be considered, for instance, that the short story is, rather long (34pp) and thus definitely takes up more than one or two lessons. One possibility to transform this potential “problem” into more of an advantage is to split up the text into smaller units and to deal subsequently extensively with the story over a longer period of time. Another option is the use of the reading-diary approach.

As regards the short story’s level of difficulty, *Keep Well to Seaward* has a rather rich, but non-specialised vocabulary and is thus, as regards its linguistic

properties, suitable for independent users of English (levels B1 and B2). Nevertheless, when bearing in mind the various cultural, historical and religious encounters presented in the story, an extensive preparation and background information before actually reading it is necessary. A set of proposals for this important step is provided in the second part of this chapter.

When exploring the main sections of the CEFR of relevance for the purposes of this study, one of the major aims of language teaching and learning is described as follows:

The learner of a second or foreign language and culture does not cease to be competent in his or her mother tongue and the associated culture. Nor is the new competence kept entirely separate from the old. The learner does not simply acquire two distinct, unrelated ways of acting and communicating. The language learner becomes **plurilingual** and develops **interculturality**. The linguistic and cultural competences in respect of each language are modified by knowledge of the other and contribute to intercultural awareness, skills and know-how. They enable the individual to develop an enriched, more complex personality and an enhanced capacity for further language learning and greater openness to new cultural experiences (Council of Europe 43).

The topics addressed in the short story under consideration are clearly in line with the goals formulated by the CEFR. Thus, *Keep Well to Seaward* draws on various issues of the personal domain, such as the characters' private lives, individual professions, interpersonal relations, and (love) relationships. In view of the public sphere, O'Callaghan's text addresses several cultural and religious issues and public places. Furthermore, the various references to Billy's passion for literature and his current process of working on a novel, as well as Mei's previous university studies and her job as a waitress can be related to the occupational domain presented in the CEFR.

Concerning the requirements of the new oral SCOR, *Keep Well to Seaward* is a very suitable literary text for preparing the language learners for the new format of "matura" testing. The short story addresses several topics of the "pool of topics" proposed. These include, for example, the issues of relationships and social networks, habitation and environment, health, tradition and change, regional studies, culture, communication, individual future perspectives, intercultural aspects, growing up identity, public institutions and rules and regulations. All of these topics can be implemented into EFL teaching by appropriate pre-, while-, and post-reading activities.

As already discussed in this chapter, O’Callaghan’s short story requires quite extensive background information to the text in order to ensure an understanding of the underlying cultural and religious themes and processes. This knowledge can be acquired by several distinct and creative pre-reading exercises, such as the activation of prior knowledge and the subsequent presentation and investigation into background information. As some of the major events deal with geographical and religious issues, an interdisciplinary approach, for example, is to be preferred. According to Woods (853f.): “Learning that crosses subject boundaries is an important and growing theme in recent [...] literature. [...] There is broad agreement that socialisation into a discipline subtly shapes ways of thinking and orientations to learning and that this can ultimately lead to mutual incomprehension”. Moreover, the discussion of the crucial issues of the story in other subjects than English might yield valuable insights the text’s relevant historical, cultural and ethnical background.

Follow-up activities could include, for example, creative writing exercises, such as the production of a sequel to the story or writing an alternative ending, or presenting what has happened to Billy after he had returned to Ireland. Another creative and practical example of a post-reading activity, which could also enhance the language learners’ oral communication skills, is a simulated in-class press conference. Here, each pupil is given a role card with which they are required to prepare for their role later on. They might adopt the roles of Billy and Mei, but also of Ling, or the cook of the restaurant where Mei is working, or Billy’s neighbour in Taiwan, who hears them talking and quarrelling. The main aim of this activity is to encourage the students to keep the discussion going without the help of the teacher, who is silent during the period allotted for the conference. A more detailed description of the procedure, as well as the actual role cards are provided in the following chapter of the thesis.

7 Teaching Materials

7.1 *An Independent Woman (2002)*

7.1.1 Writing Activities

Writing activity 1: Rewrite Morag Prunty's short story from Pat's point of view. Focus on his thoughts and feelings during, and after his date with Bridie. In a separate paragraph argue what has changed in the story and why.

Writing activity 2: Write an alternative ending to Prunty's short story. (i.e. what would have happened if Pat had not taken elocution sessions with Clarissa Partridge?)

Commentary on the activities:

One of the main objectives of both writing tasks is that they advance the students' writing skills while simultaneously drawing on their creativity. Especially this latter aspect often is highly motivating for language learners. Another advantage of both exercises is that they do not require specific additional material and can thus be easily implemented. Depending on the question of how extensive and detailed the production of a sequel or a whole rewritten story should be the writing activities addressed above require at least 30 minutes each. If there is not enough time to accomplish the task in-class, it can be used as a home work.

7.1.2 Talk Show

Role card 1: You are acting **Bridie** and you have been invited to a talk show to talk about your relationship with Pat. Prepare to answer the following questions:

- How did you react when you saw Pat for the first time?
- Why was it so difficult for you to go on a date with a man of Indian ethnic origin?
- Despite your cultural/national/ethnic differences you are in love with Pat – why?
- What are your future plans?

Role card 2: You are acting **Pat** and you have been invited to a talk show to report about your date and relationship with Bridie. Prepare to answer the following questions:

- How was it to meet Bridie? What did you feel when you first saw her?
- How do you feel about your Indian origin?
- Do you consider integration as important? Why/Why not?
- What are your future plans with Bridie?

Role card 3: You are acting **Sheila**, Bridie's best friend. You have been invited to this talk show to present the story from your point of view. Prepare to answer the following questions:

- How did you persuade Bridie to engage in a blind date?
- What did Bridie tell you about her evening with Pat?
- Would you (personally) go out on a date with a person of ethnic origin? Why? Why not?

Role card 4: You are acting **Sharon**, Bridie's daughter. You have been invited to this talk show to present the story from your point of view: Prepare to answer the following questions:

- How do you feel about your the racial prejudices your mother had before her date with Pat?
- How do you feel about her still existing prejudices/stereotypical thinking?
- Does your mother's relationship with Pat have any effect on your own relationship with him?

Role card 5: You are acting the **barkeeper** at the Orange Grove Pub. You have been invited to this talk show to present the story from your point of view: Prepare to answer the following questions:

- What was Bridie's reaction when she first met Pat at the Pub?
- Which feelings did you have when watching the two of them?
- What do you (personally) think of multiculturalism? Do you consider it as rather positive, or negative? Why?

Commentary on the activity:

The activities presented above are based on the concept of student-centred teaching and gives the pupils the opportunity to practice their speaking skills in general and fluency in particular. The talk show can thus be considered as a valuable resource for preparing the language learners for the requirements of the new oral part of the SCOR. Apart from the use of role cards, no additional materials are required to actually conduct the activity in class. In order to eliminate potential obstacles beforehand, a clear, detailed and comprehensible introduction to the task is indispensable. If some students still seem to be lost for words/ideas during the actual realisation of the activity, the teacher can provide some support. Otherwise it is recommended to "take a back seat" in order to encourage learner autonomy.

7.2 As If There Were Trees (2005)

7.2.1 WebQuest

WebQuest

Ireland's Economy in the 1990s

Task description: Answer the following questions by using the information provided on the websites below

Questions:

- What exactly is “the Celtic Tiger”- period?
- What is the present situation of Ireland’s economy?
- When/Why did Ireland’s economy collapse?
- Which consequences went along with this collapse?

Online resources:

<http://www.askaboutireland.ie/learning-zone/primary-students/subjects/history/history-the-full-story/ireland-in-modern-times/celtic-tiger-years/>
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/10948415/The-mauled-Celtic-Tiger-is-ready-to-roar-again.html>
<http://www.economist.com/node/3261071>
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/may/26/ireland-economic-collapse>

Commentary on the activity:

One of the major aims and objectives of this specific task is to combine EFL teaching with the New Media-approach in language learning. Again, this activity is highly student-centred and advances independent learning as, apart from a detailed and comprehensive introduction by the teacher, the pupils are working autonomously on this task. One possible limitation of this activity is that it is dependent on new media and technology and that thus, access to a computer lab or to laptops is absolutely necessary.

7.2.2 Survey

Task description for teacher: Divide the class into several groups (3-5 pupils each). Each group needs to develop a questionnaire about the issue of multiculturalism in the present Austrian society, by formulating about 12 questions of interest for the overall topic. After the presentation/discussion of

each group's questionnaire, the most successful and promising questions are collected and included in a final document.

As far as the actual interviews are concerned, it is advisable to divide the students into pairs, each pair surveying at least 20 people. As the evaluation of the collected information is rather time consuming, an interdisciplinary approach (with the subjects of computer sciences or mathematics) is suggested. After the data have been analysed, a detailed discussion of the most interesting and relevant findings is highly important and valuable. Try to include the following questions into the in-class discussion:

- Which findings do you consider especially surprising? Why?
- Which previous assumptions have proven true?
- Which significant conclusions can you infer from the collected data?
- What are the most striking/prominent opinions on the overall topic?

Commentary on the activity:

The major aim of this activity is to advance the students' skills of independent learning, decision-making and responsibility. These skills are of profound importance for the requirements of the new SCOR, as many VwAs are based on questionnaire or interview data. One possible limitation of this task is the time and preparation it requires. Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach is highly recommended.

7.3 Home to Harlem (2008)

7.3.1 Reading Diary: Sample Sheet

Home Reading Diary

Name: _____

Calendar week _____

Monday	Summary of what I read:	Title: _____ Pages: _____
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	Unknown words: Emotions evoked:	Reading Minutes:_____
Tuesday	Summary of what I read: Unknown words: Emotions evoked:	Title:_____ Pages:_____ Reading Minutes:_____
Wednesday	Summary of what I read: Unknown words: Emotions evoked:	Title:_____ Pages:_____ Reading Minutes:_____
Thursday	Summary of what I read: Unknown words: Emotions evoked:	Title:_____ Pages:_____ Reading Minutes:_____
Friday	Summary of what I read: Unknown words: Emotions evoked:	Title:_____ Pages:_____ Reading Minutes:_____
Weekend	Summary of what I read: Unknown words: Emotions evoked:	Title:_____ Pages:_____ Reading Minutes:_____

Commentary on the activity:

The activity presented above enables the language learners to advance their different reading skills (i.e. reading for gist, reading for detailed information, etc.). Apart from several copies of the reading diary sample sheet, no additional material is required. Again, this exercise enables the pupils to learn individually and independently. A possible limitation is the factor of student motivation. Due to the task's longevity, some language learners might lose motivation and

endurance. Thus it is extraordinarily important for EFL teachers to effectively and constantly support their students during this process.

7.3.2 Poster

Task description: In groups of 5, create a poster on what you consider as “typically” American. Focus especially on popular brands and lifestyle products. Prepare to present your outcome by considering the following questions:

- Which brands/products did you choose? Why?
- Do you use/buy these products yourselves? Why?/Why not?
- Do you think these brands/products are more popular than for example European ones? Why?

Commentary on activity:

This task is a valuable and creative pre-reading activity, aiming at activating the language learners’ prior/world knowledge about “typical” American brands and products. One of the major aims of this exercise is to make the students aware of their own thinking and opinions on this issue. Apart from the writing material needed for this task, no additional resources are required. Teachers should focus especially on the detailed discussion of the questions stated above, as they function as a link for the further analysis of Doyle’s *Home to Harlem*.

7.4 *Keep Well to Seaward (2013)*

7.4.1 Writing Activities

Writing activity 1: Produce a sequel to O’Callaghan’s story. What has happened to Billy after he had returned to Ireland? What has happened to Mei and Chenglei?

Writing activity 2: Write an alternative ending to O’Callaghan’s short story. (i.e. what would have happened if Mei had accompanied Billy to Ireland?)

Commentary on the activity:

The major aim of the writing tasks included in this subsection is that they not only advance the students’ writing skills, but also their creativity, which can often be highly motivating for language students. Additionally, both exercises do not require specific additional material and are thus easily realisable. Depending on the question of how extensive and detailed the production of a sequel or a whole rewritten story should be, the writing activities presented above require at least 30 minutes each. If there is not enough time to accomplish the task in-class, it can be used as a home work activity.

7.4.2 Role Play

Role card 1: You are acting **Mei** and you have been invited to this talk show in 2016 to chat about your past and present day life. Prepare to answer the following questions:

- What is your present-day life like?
- When thinking about your love “affair” with Billy: What/How did you feel back then? What/How do you feel now?
- How did you feel after Billy left Taiwan?
- What are your future plans?

Role card 2: You are acting **Billy** and you have been invited to this talk show in 2016 to chat about your past and present day life. Prepare to answer the following questions:

- What is your present-day life like?
- When thinking about your love “affair” with Mei: What/How did you feel back then? What/How do you feel now?
- How did you feel after leaving Taiwan?
- What are your future plans?

Role card 3: You are acting **Ling**, Wang Chenglei's sister. You have been invited to this talk show in 2016 to present the story from your point of view. Prepare to answer the following questions:

- What did Mei tell you about her love with Billy?
- Do you think it was "real" love?
- What is your present life like?

Role card 4: You are acting the **cook** who used to work in the same restaurant as Mei in Taiwan. You have been invited to this talk show to present the story from your point of view: Prepare to answer the following question:

- Did you ever watch Mei and Billy chat in the restaurant? What were your impressions of watching both of them?
- Did Mei ever tell you something about her private life? If so, what?

Role card 5: You are acting a **scholar** of the academic field of Chinese culture, tradition and religion. You have been invited to this talk show to present several significant aspects of Taiwanese culture and Taoism:

- Can you briefly explain the tradition of Taoism? What does it mainly emphasize?
- How does Taoism differ from Catholic values/beliefs?
- In what way is Mei influenced by Taoism as regards her final decision?

Commentary on the activity:

This exercise is again based on the concept of student-centred teaching and gives the pupils the opportunity to practice their speaking skills as well as fluency. Additionally, the task is a valuable and authentic resource for preparing the language learners for the requirements of the new oral part of the SCOR. Apart from the above included role cards, no additional material is required to actually conduct the activity in class. Nevertheless, a clear, detailed and comprehensible introduction of the task is indispensable in order to obviate any misconceptions beforehand. If some students still seem to be lost for words/ideas during the actual realisation of the activity, the teacher can provide some support. Otherwise it is recommended to "take a back seat" in order to initiate learner autonomy.

8 Conclusion

This thesis has shown that the issues of multi- and interculturality are frequently and critically addressed in (Irish) literature and can be successfully incorporated in EFL teaching in Austria.

One of the major aims of this thesis has been to provide its readers with critical and conceptual analyses of four contemporary Irish short stories giving insights into issues of migration, cultural diversity and interculturality. Additionally it has been shown that these topics can very easily and creatively be addressed in (Austrian) EFL teaching by making use of several authentic and valuable resources. The representation of intercultural encounters has been explored in the short stories *An Independent Woman* (2002) by Morag Prunty, Colum McCann's *As If There Were Trees* (2005), Roddy Doyle's *Home to Harlem* (2008) and Billy O' Callaghan's *Keep Well to Seaward* (2013). Although the close reading of these primary texts has shown numerous significant similarities, the stories present the overall issues of interculturality and migration from different points of view. While in the texts of Morag Prunty and Colum McCann the protagonist is native Irish/British, the main characters in *Home to Harlem* and *Keep Well to Seaward* find themselves in a foreign country and are directly confronted with prejudiced and/or xenophobic thinking. Especially Declan, the black Irish protagonist in Roddy Doyle's text, experiences the difficulty of becoming a part of a nation or society, other than one's "native" one. McCann, on the other hand, provides stunning insights into the hostility and fear of migrants in Ireland, as perceived by the local Irish people.

Although the close examination of the four Irish short stories selected provide meaningful insights into the lives of migrants in different cultural contexts of contemporary society and thus aim at making the readers reflect on these issues, a lot more has to be done in order to eliminate or, at least, sharply minimize prejudicial and xenophobic thinking. This thesis has demonstrated that the themes of cultural, religious and ethnic diversity, migration, and interculturality can successfully be addressed in EFL teaching by making use of different authentic and creative in-class activities. Based on what has been discussed in the chapters focussing on the didactic potential of the major issues addressed in the texts, a possible suggestion for further progress would be to draw on the

topics of multi- and interculturality in other school subjects as well. Additionally, greater academic attention needs to be drawn on the didactic potential of these topics in teaching in Austria in order to support a future development marked by tolerance and acceptance of the ethnically “other”.

9 List of Abbreviations

AHS	Secondary school of higher education (Allgemeinbildene Höhere Schule)
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English Language Teaching
IRA	Irish Republican Army
SCOR	Standardized Competence-Oriented Reifeprüfung
VwA	Vorwissenschaftliche Arbeit

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12 English Abstract

The issues of cultural heterogeneity and interculturality are of great importance in everyday-life today as well as in the teaching of English as a foreign language. Therefore, more research needs to be carried out exploring how to successfully deal with this highly important and controversial topic in class. The aim of this thesis is to present and explore various intercultural encounters described in contemporary Irish literature by analysing four representative Irish short stories. The works in question are: *An Independent Woman* (2002) by Morag Prunty, Colum McCann's *As If There Were Trees* (2005), Roddy Doyle's *Home to Harlem* (2008), and Billy O'Callaghan's *Keep Well to Seaward* (2013). In the introductory chapters of this thesis, important theoretical aspects relating to the concept of interculturality and the topic of (Irish) short stories are outlined. As regards the methodological approach applied in the main body, the primary sources are investigated on both the story level and the discourse level. Apart from each literary sample's detailed investigation, useful guidelines and practical teaching materials for practical use in the (Austrian) EFL classroom are provided.

13 German Abstract

Kulturelle, religiöse, und ethnische Heterogenität, sowie das damit verbundene Konzept der Interkulturalität sind aktuelle Themenfelder, welche gegenwärtig fest in der Gesellschaft und im schulischen Alltag verankert sind. Aufgrund dieser Brisanz ist ein verstärktes akademisches Interesse diesbezüglich von enormer Wichtigkeit. Die vorliegende wissenschaftliche Arbeit beschäftigt sich daher eingehend mit dieser Thematik. Als Textgrundlage dienen vier irische Kurzgeschichten: *An Independent Woman* (2002) von Morag Prunty, Colum McCanns *As If There Were Trees* (2005), Roddy Doyle's *Home to Harlem* (2008), sowie Billy O'Callaghans *Keep Well to Seaward* (2013). Zunächst bieten die einleitenden Kapitel dieser Diplomarbeit einen Überblick über wichtige theoretische Aspekte in Bezug auf das Konzept der Interkulturalität selbst, sowie des Themenfeldes der (irischen) Kurzgeschichte. Der Hauptteil enthält detaillierte Analysen der ausgewählten Texte in Hinblick auf deren inhaltlichen und stilistischen Ebenen. Zudem bietet diese wissenschaftliche Abhandlung praktische Beispiele und Richtlinien für die Verwendung der oben genannten Kurzgeschichten im Englischunterricht an österreichischen AHS.