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„Teaching Cecelia Ahern’s Contemporary Short  
Stories in the Austrian EFL Classroom“

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## **DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY**

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

Hiermit bestätige ich diese Arbeit nach bestem Wissen und Gewissen selbstständig verfasst und die Regeln der guten wissenschaftlichen Praxis eingehalten zu haben. Bei meiner Ehr'!

Stefanie Pruckner

## **HINWEIS**

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Diese Diplomarbeit hat nachgewiesen, dass die betreffende Kandidatin befähigt ist, wissenschaftliche Themen selbstständig sowie inhaltlich und methodisch vertretbar zu bearbeiten. Da die Korrekturen des Beurteilenden nicht eingetragen sind und das Gutachten nicht beiliegt, ist daher nicht erkenntlich, mit welcher Note diese Arbeit abgeschlossen wurde. Das Spektrum reicht von sehr gut bis genügend. Es wird gebeten, diesen Hinweis bei der Lektüre zu beachten.

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## PREFACE

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When I started thinking about the topic of my diploma thesis I knew from the beginning that I wanted to write something related to teaching. As I want to become a teacher it seemed to be the right choice. After some consideration, I decided to write about the role and the potential of literature for teaching in the English language classroom. The difficult part that followed was finding suitable literary works for the practical application and illustration in my thesis. I decided to focus on short stories as they can be introduced more easily in the classroom compared to novels because of their shortness. I browsed the internet for suitable short stories which might have potential for the language learning classroom and went to the library several times. One day I came across the short story collection by Cecelia Ahern, which had been published in 2010. Cecelia Ahern's fiction had already been part of my Matura at grammar school. I had chosen five of her books for my oral exam and had analyzed them in terms of plot and characters. I had chosen *PS: I Love You*, *Where Rainbows End*, *Thanks for the Memories*, *A Place Called Here* and *If You Could See Me Now* for my paper. In general, it can be said that I have always loved her books as well as the film adaptation of *PS: I Love You*. With that background in mind, I downloaded the e-book and immediately started reading Cecelia Ahern's short story collection. I felt the same enthusiasm for her stories as I had felt for her novels when I was younger, as they deal with similar themes and topics, and, therefore, I decided to pick two of her stories for the detailed analysis in my thesis. As I had been very interested in her novels and had read a lot of them at the age of 15-18, I thought that students at grammar school might be interested in them as well. In short, it can be said that my own reading preferences when I was younger have influenced the choice of texts for the diploma thesis at hand. The other reason why I have chosen these short stories in particular is that they have a lot of potential and benefits for the Austrian English language classroom in view of the language development, the personal growth or the cultural enrichment of the students.

Despite these positive aspects of Cecilia Ahern's fictional creations it should not be forgotten that her fiction is part of 'popular literature'. Her fictions have been dismissed by literary scholars as "chick-lit". Furthermore, her literature has been

created for the mass audience and not specifically for teaching. For these reasons, it is important to not only teach Cecilia Ahern's stories but to teach them in comparison to canonical short stories. The students should be aware of the difference between light fiction (like the stories by Cecilia Ahern) and classic, canonical literature, as there are differences in terms of depth, characterization, setting etc. Teaching Cecilia Ahern's short stories is definitely valuable for learning but it should always be kept in mind that it is popular literature and it should not be the only literary material used at school.

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## 1. Introduction

"Literature adds to reality, it does not simply describe it. It enriches the necessary competencies that daily life requires and provides; and in this respect, it irrigates the deserts that our lives have already become." C.S. Lewis (qtd. in Holmer)

This quote by C.S. Lewis describes perfectly well the benefits of reading literature for our lives. It claims that reading literature can have positive effects on the readers. In this diploma thesis the attempt is made to provide further arguments why teaching literature, especially contemporary literature, is to be commended for the Austrian EFL (=English foreign language) classroom. Two short stories by Cecelia Ahern will be analyzed in order to illustrate how literature can be linked successfully to the requirements of the "New Matura" in Austria and also to show how such stories can be integrated into classroom teaching. The following questions are to be answered within this thesis:

- ❖ Which role does teaching literature have in today's English language classrooms?
- ❖ What are the benefits of teaching literature in the foreign language classroom?
- ❖ Which methodological approaches and theories to teaching literature exist and which of them are preferable?
- ❖ What are the advantages of teaching 'short stories' over texts from other genres?
- ❖ What are the pedagogic potentials of Cecelia Ahern's short stories in particular?
- ❖ How can the teaching of literature be linked with the requirements of the "New Matura" in Austria?
- ❖ How can the short stories by Cecelia Ahern be integrated successfully into the foreign language learning classroom?

In order to answer these questions, the thesis is divided into seven chapters. The first chapter serves as an introduction to the thesis. The second one deals with the role of literature in EFL as well as different methodological approaches and theories to teaching literature.



The third chapter provides reasons and arguments why teaching 'short stories' is preferable to novels and other long texts. In addition, it is explained how short stories could be implemented in the Austrian grammar school system. Furthermore, the advantages of dealing with 'contemporary' stories are laid out and those advantages are illustrated by Cecelia Ahern's short stories. Two of her stories are analyzed as regards themes and their pedagogic potential.

Chapter four establishes the important relationship between teaching literature and the requirements of the "New Matura" in Austria. General information is provided on the "New Matura" and its requirements. In addition, the themes of the individual stories by Cecelia Ahern discussed are linked to the topics of communication for the "New Matura". It is shown how the stories offer possibilities for discussions and speaking practice regarding the final exam. Furthermore, the stories are also considered in view of potential topics for the so called VWA ("Vorwissenschaftliche Arbeit") or "pre-academic paper".

The fifth chapter provides information on basic principles of teaching. The principles of a CLT classroom are elaborated and it is explained which criteria the lesson plans of chapter six need to fulfill. Furthermore, it is explained which methodological approach is going to be used predominantly for the lesson plans.

Chapter six finally presents the concrete lesson plans. In this chapter it is shown how the short stories by Cecelia Ahern could be taught successfully at Austrian grammar schools. Tasks are presented which agree with the requirements of student-centered teaching and communicative language teaching. In this chapter activities for the story *The Calling* are presented. In addition to the lesson plans for *The Calling* some activities which could be practiced when reading *Next Stop: Table for Two* are mentioned briefly in a subchapter as well. Chapter seven, finally, provides the general 'conclusion' of the thesis.

## **2. Teaching Literature in the EFL Classroom**

After the introduction to this diploma thesis, this chapter focuses on finding answers to the questions of *Why teach literature in the EFL (English foreign language) classroom?*, *What are the benefits of teaching literature?* and *How can literature be integrated into the classroom?* Literature seems to play a minor role in the English lessons of Austrian grammar schools today (Sage, qtd. in Khatib, Ranjbar and Fath'hi 12). However, that was not always the case. There have been times when literature teaching was excluded completely from the syllabus (Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan 201). Therefore, the role of literature in EFL and its development over time is considered in the first subchapter (2.1.) below. Furthermore, arguments in favor of teaching literature are presented in chapter 2.2. The last two subchapters will focus on different approaches (2.3.) and different theories (2.4.) of teaching literature at school.

### **2.1. The Role of Literature in EFL**

At the time when the grammar translation method was propagated, i.e. around 1914, literature teaching was one of the main focuses of language classes (Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan 201, Hall 53). The name of the method already reveals that the main purpose was to translate texts from English into the mother language or the other way round. Therefore, literary texts were seen as a valuable resource for learning (201). Literature provided students with the necessary input needed for translation practice (201). Nevertheless, the grammar translation method lost its appeal over the years and with it literary texts lost their dominant position in the classroom because it was recognized that other methods cause a quicker language learning process and produce better outcomes (201). The periods of structuralism and the audiolingual method followed, a time in which literature lost its centre position in teaching completely and had no room in the classroom any more (Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan 201). In addition to the elimination of literature in classrooms due to structuralism and the audiolingual method, the focus of English teaching was mainly on language proficiency, form and correctness, whereas literature was considered inadequate to reach those goals (Bagherkazemi and Alemi 1). All the reasons stated so far would have been enough to ban literature from the classroom, but there are even more. Classic literature was considered too

difficult to be introduced in the English foreign language classroom. The reason is that scholars and pedagogues assumed that teaching classic literature would only be possible if using the mother tongue to discuss it (Brusch 12). It was claimed that not using the target language is not helpful in a foreign language learning classroom. Therefore, it was decided to omit the study of literary texts completely (12). Bagherkazemi and Alemi's (1) argument is related to canonical literature. They argue that literary texts sometimes use non-standard English (especially classic ones) and that they are culturally charged, which makes them difficult for students to understand (1). As a consequence, teaching literature was considered inappropriate for a long time (Brusch 12). Another reason for the omission of literary texts at school was the influence of linguists, who wanted a strict separation of 'the study of language' and 'literature' (13). In the 1970s the approach which started to become dominant is CLT (communicative language teaching) (Thaler 31). What is interesting is that still at the beginnings of CLT "literature was neglected and more attention was paid to dialogues and conversations which were more practical and visible in the real world situation" (Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan 201). The main reasons why literature was excluded are best summarized by Widdowson:

Literature was dismissed as irrelevant because it seemed not to be practical, because it seemed not to offer good models for language learners, because it seemed not to be down-to-earth and to relate to the everyday world which language teaching is supposed to prepare people for. (Widdowson 34)

In the 1980s however, the topic of literature in the classroom and its benefits gained increasing interest and many articles were written at that time about how literature can be introduced successfully into the classroom (Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan 201) (e.g. Collie and Slater, Hill, Lazar, Carter and Walker). Researchers of that field began to realize that there are many potentials of literature in connection to language improvement and the language acquisition process of the students (Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan 202). Mangelsdorf, for example, states that "[r]eading as a major component of both first and second language acquisition, positively influences speaking, listening, and writing skills" (116). Bredella (vii) adds that literature has a great potential for advancing

intercultural understanding. (More about the advantages of teaching literature can be found in chapter 2.2.).

Today, teaching literature in the classroom has a higher prestige again (Sage, qtd. in Khatib, Ranjbar and Fat'hi 12) and there are numerous current articles and books dealing with positive sides of teaching literature (e.g. Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan; Khatib, Ranjbar and Fat'hi; Savvidou; Bagherkazemi and Alemi). Carter (1) claims that: “[the] past five years have witnessed a veritable explosion of publications [...] and seminars devoted to the teaching of literature”. Although varieties of CLT approaches neglected literature in the beginning as well, they also helped to restore literature in the classroom. The focus of CLT is on acquiring the English language through meaningful communication and negotiation (Thaler 31) and after reading a text there is a lot to be discussed and communicated about. Furthermore, group work is suitable for the exchange of information (Gajdusek 229). So it can be said that “[l]iterature can provide those communicative situations [...], always providing that texts in good, modern English are chosen” (Hill 11). Communication can, therefore, be part of literature teaching if contemporary texts- like the short stories by Cecelia Ahern- are taught. Besides communication and negotiation another aim of CLT is to improve all four language skills, namely reading, listening, writing and speaking (Hedge 60). What is also interesting is that all of these skills can be successfully integrated and improved when teaching literature. (How all of the four skills can be included is shown in chapter 6). Furthermore, CLT strives to include authentic material and “real language” in language teaching (Hall 55). As literary texts are always produced for a ‘real audience’ they are an ideal authentic material (Hall 55, Legutke 91). Therefore, it can be said that the role of literature improved because many of the principles of the CLT approach are compatible with literature, or as Van (2) expresses it: “the activities that one can apply with literature lessons easily conform to the student-centred and interactive tenets of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)”.

Summing up, the role of literature at school has developed from a period in which it was the main resource, to a time in which it was completely omitted, to

a stage in which literature has won a more positive prestige again (Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan 201). From the 1980s onwards more and more researchers realized the potential literary texts have for learning a language (Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan 201). It was found out that literature can have positive effects on the language acquisition process of students (201). Furthermore, the fact that literature teaching is in line with CLT helped restoring it in the classroom (Van 2). In addition, literature teaching provides a welcome variation in class (Zoreda and Vivaldo-Lima, qtd. in Bagherkazemi and Alemi 3). (Further positive arguments concerning teaching literature in the EFL classroom are provided in the next subchapter, which focuses on the advantages argued by researchers in this field).

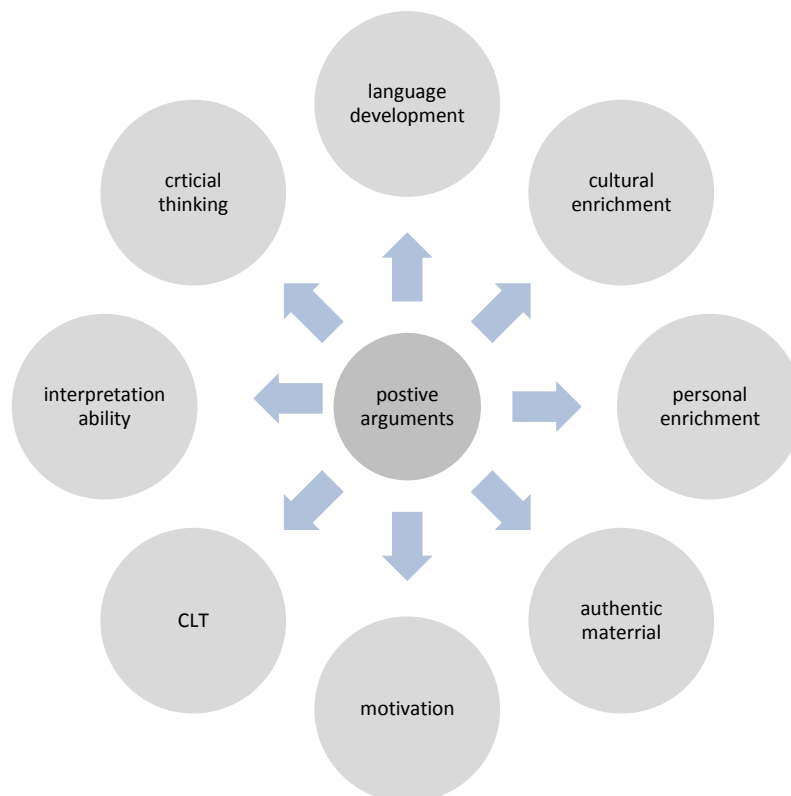
## **2.2. Eight Arguments for Teaching Literature**

In the last chapter about the role of literature some benefits of teaching literature have already been mentioned briefly, like the argument that it is in line with CLT, that it is authentic material and that it has positive effects on the language acquisition process of students. In this subchapter a detailed analysis of the positive arguments is provided. Generally speaking there are numerous arguments why teaching literature is beneficial for students. Many researchers have already covered this topic (see for example Van; Bagherkazemi and Alemi; Thaler; Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan; Nünning) and they discuss a large number of advantages in their articles. To give but one concrete example for the benefits mentioned by a researcher who deals with this topic, Van (2) sums up the main potentials of teaching literature at school in the following argument:

Structuring lessons around the reading of literature introduces a profound range of vocabulary, dialogues, and prose. In addition to developing students' English language skills, teaching literature also appeals to their imagination, develops cultural awareness, and encourages critical thinking about plots, themes, and characters. Most importantly, the activities that one can apply with literature lessons easily conform to the student-centered and interactive tenets of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).  
(Van 2)

As can be seen from this quote, not only the language can be improved, but there are a number of other beneficial aspects for students concerning more

general abilities like the creative use of the imagination and critical thinking (2). Schwarz agrees that teaching literature has a potential besides language improvement and he argues that studying literature “helps us understand both ourselves and the world beyond ourselves” (Schwarz 38). Many of the researchers who studied in this field refer to similar positive arguments; some mention additional ones or leave others out. In figure 1 eight positive arguments which have been covered most often in secondary literature are elaborated and discussed in the paragraphs which follow.



**Figure 1:** Benefits of teaching literature in the EFL classroom (Thaler 23)

To start with, all the researchers of that field agree that teaching literature can have positive effects on the foreign language proficiency of students (see Collie and Slater; Bagherkazemi and Alemi; Lazar; Thaler; Carter and Walker; and Hill). Collie and Slater (4), for example, state that the knowledge of vocabulary is increased as well as students’ grammatical awareness. Why is it that literature can have influence on vocabulary and grammar without actually focusing on it explicitly? Collie and Slater (5) claim that “literature provides a

rich context in which individual lexical or syntactical items are made more memorable". Hill (7) argues in a quite similar way saying that the meaning of words is learned if we encounter them in a meaningful context. It inevitably enhances the learning process of the students if one focused specifically on vocabulary and grammar issues in one of the lessons, but even without that they might acquire things due to the context that is provided by the literary text itself (7). Bagherkazemi and Alemi (4) agree with both Collie and Slater and Hill that vocabulary and grammar knowledge is improved due to the context provided by the literary text. In addition to vocabulary and grammar, students also get familiar with features of different writing styles when reading literature (Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan 203). They may encounter different language structures, linking devices and other stylistic features which make a text coherent and cohesive. This can have a positive influence on the students' own writing skills as well (203). Furthermore, texts encourage students to speak about what they have just read (Collie and Slater 5). Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan argue that "having the students freely reflect on the events" of a story "and having them critically comment is [...] facilitative for advancing speaking proficiency" (203). Therefore, it can be said that all four language skills, namely reading, writing, speaking, and listening can be improved (as mentioned in chapter 2.1.) (Bagherkazemi and Alemi 4). All in all, reading "supports language learning, as literary texts are genuine samples of a wide range of styles and text types at all levels of difficulty" (Thaler 23).

The second argument stated by researchers of the field is that reading caters for cultural enrichment of the students (see for example Nünning 14). English novels or short stories are often set in countries where the English language is spoken. Students can, therefore, learn a lot about the culture of the target country (Collie and Slater 4). Khatib, Ranjbar and Fat'hi argue:

Literature is considered as a means to introduce students to certain aspects of the target culture and to increase their understanding of verbal/ nonverbal aspects of communication in the country within which that language is spoken. (Khatib, Ranjbar and Fat'hi 13)

Learners do not only learn a lot about other cultures but literature also helps students to "overcome negative attitudes, if any, toward the target culture",

according to Bagherkazemi and Alemi (3). Markmann (66) claims that foreign language classes can bring social differences and experiences to the minds of students. McKay (531) agrees and states that literature can help to overcome cultural gaps and misunderstandings. In other words, with the help of literature students can improve their knowledge about and attitude towards different cultures (531). They can learn to be more tolerant and understanding, which seems to be especially important in today's world (McKay 531).

Thirdly, personal enrichment is often mentioned in current articles dealing with the teaching of literature in the EFL classroom (e.g. Thaler 23). Schwarz (38), for example, argues that reading fictional works "increases our political and moral awareness [...] and often deepen[s] our historical knowledge". Furthermore, literary texts might encourage students to think critically about the text, which results in students who self-confidently form and also state their own opinion (Lazar 19). In addition, literature is full of emotions and feelings students might have to deal with themselves in real life (Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan 203). When learners read literature they are informed how the characters deal with their feelings and problems. As a result, students get to know different coping strategies of how to manage and control them. Therefore, it can be said that reading literature improves the emotional intelligence of students (Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan 203). As a summary to this paragraph, the view of Thaler (24) on the personal enrichment of students in connection to teaching literature is particularly appropriate:

Learners may [...] profit from books as an individual, as they often touch on themes to which they can bring an individual response from their own experiences. They can open up new horizons, pose vital questions, offer different views of life, provide (positive or negative) role models, sketch possible answers to personally relevant issues. Thaler (24)

In addition to the positive arguments stated so far, Collie and Slater (3) and Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan (202) add that literature is a valuable teaching material as it is authentic material. The use of authentic material is one of the priorities of today's language teaching approach CLT (Hall 55). What makes literature authentic? Basically the fact that literary texts have predominantly not been created for school and teaching as such, but for people in the 'real world'



who are interested in literature or want to expand their knowledge about certain topics (Gilmore 98, qtd. in Morrow 13). Therefore, it can be said that when reading literature “learners are [...] exposed to language that is as genuine and undistorted as can be managed in the classroom context” (Collie and Slater 3). Through those genuine texts students can discover the English language and its usage and discourse as it is used outside the language classroom as well. Although material created for pedagogic purposes is valuable as well for certain aims to reach, students are often more interested in reading authentic material because they feel part of the target culture more easily and, consequently, they are more motivated to read or learn as well (Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan 202). This statement about motivation leads over perfectly to the next paragraph.

Another argument which stresses the benefits of teaching literature is the motivational value of it (Thaler 23). Hill (8) argues that motivation is “perhaps the most important justification for including literature on the syllabus”. Literature is motivating because it is authentic material and provides a meaningful context (Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan 202). Furthermore, students are especially motivated when reading a literary text which complies with their personal interests (Van 6). An exciting story can encourage students to continue reading although they might not understand every word. As long as a story or book arouses interest students will be motivated to read on (Hill 8). Even though they do not understand every detail, they still understand the main plot. The positive aspect of that is that students develop, without consciously knowing it, important reading strategies (Nünning 22) and vocabulary guessing strategies (Lazar 18). Summing up, Thaler wrote in his article that “a literary text means a welcome change from the everyday classroom routine, raising interest and suspense” (24) and consequently motivation.

Furthermore, Bagherkazemi and Alemi (3) argue in their article that teaching literature is in line with communicative language teaching (CLT). CLT is the favored current approach to teaching, targeting student-centered activities and learning through meaningful communication and negotiation (Thaler 31). Bagherkazemi and Alemi claim that in CLT “learning is facilitated through

authentic communication and active involvement” and that “literature can be particularly useful as it provides opportunities for student-centered activities and collaborative group work” (3). The fact that teaching literature complies with the requirements of CLT is another reason why it should be included in the syllabus. The agreement between literature teaching and the current CLT approach could also be seen as one component why the role of teaching literature has become more important after the 1980s (see chapter 2.1.).

Another beneficial aspect of teaching literature is that interpretative abilities of students can be improved (Thaler 23). Lazar (19), for example, argues that literature is particularly suitable to develop a student’s ability of interpretation because literary texts often have multiple meanings which need to be explored. Thaler (24) agrees and states that more than one interpretation can be developed from only one literary text. Therefore, students have to engage with the texts and learn how to read between the lines. According to Lazar (19) the “learner is actively involved in ‘teasing out’ the unstated implications and assumptions of the text”. As a consequence, the interpretative abilities of the students can be improved.

The last argument that is presented in this subchapter is, for example, mentioned in articles by Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan (203), Bagherkazemi and Alemi (3) and Van (2). It is about the ability of critical thinking. With the help of literature students can learn to think in a critical way about what is presented to them. They can think critically about the plot, characters or the themes of a story or book and they should be able to present their own point of view (Van 2). As for the teacher it is important to allow “students to form their own judgement” about texts (Cook 151). When reading and working with literary texts in more detail at school and if the teacher allows for personal response of the students, their critical thinking can definitely be enhanced (Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan 203). Over and beyond this, Hedge (197) argues that it is important for students to know that writers often try to persuade their readers with a certain writing style. It is crucial that students learn how to read critically. Zafeiriadou (4) agrees and argues that it is important that students “become critical readers of literary texts and not passive accumulators of whatever is

being taught to them". This competence is not only important at school but will help the students a lot in their later studies or jobs as well.

Concluding this subchapter it can be said that teaching literature has indeed many advantages. It can provide a welcome alternation in the classroom and it also has a huge amount of didactic potential (Lazar 24). Teaching literature should be included in the syllabus of grammar schools because literary texts are authentic material, they are motivating, they allow for critical thinking and interpretation (Thaler 23). In addition, teaching literature can even fulfill the requirements of the current CLT approach (Thaler 23 ff.). To conclude this chapter, a quotation is presented which supports the teaching of literature in a very convincing way:

Within the classroom itself, the use of literary texts is often a particularly successful way of promoting activities where students need to share their feelings and opinions, such as discussions and group work. This is because literature is very rich in multiple levels of meaning. Focusing on a task which demands that students express their own personal responses to these multiple levels of meaning can only serve to accelerate the student's acquisition of language. (Lazar 17)

### **2.3. Approaches to Teaching Literature**

Several reasons were discussed in the previous chapter why teaching literature is beneficial for the English language classroom. In the present chapter different approaches of how literature can be integrated in the classroom are discussed. This chapter is split into two subchapters. The first one deals with three dated, but still very popular models by Carter and Long from 1992, and the second subchapter deals with six very recent approaches suggested by Van in 2009. All of these approaches are introduced in some detail below. The models developed by Carter and Long and Van are the ones that are most often referred to in current articles about approaches to teaching literature. There are other models by Maley and by Amer, but to consider all these approaches in this thesis is not possible due to limited space. Therefore, only the most popular models by Carter and Long, and Van have been chosen for in-depth discussion.

### **2.3.1. Three Models by Carter and Long**

The three main approaches to teaching literature by Carter and Long are the models which are mentioned most often in secondary literature. Each of the models has a different aim but Carter and Long (2) argue that they are not completely independent of each other. Although they all have different aims, Carter and Long claim the following:

The three models are not of course mutually exclusive and should preferably be viewed as tendencies; but they do represent distinct models which are embraced by teachers as reasons or purposes for the teaching of literature and they are related to specific pedagogic practices. (Carter and Long 2)

It can be said that even though the models date from 1992, they are still relevant for today's teaching and they are also widely accepted. Savvidou, Bagherkazemi and Alemi as well as Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan include the three models in their recent articles and state that they are suitable approaches to teaching literature. Lazar discusses models in his article, which are very similar to those of Carter and Long. The only difference is the name of two models. The differences and similarities between Carter and Long's models and Lazar's models will be discussed below as well.

The first pedagogic approach to teaching literature discussed by Carter and Long (2) is the "cultural model". They claim that "teaching literature within a cultural model enables students to understand and appreciate cultures and ideologies different from their own in time and space" (2). This model should, therefore, help students to understand different cultures and they should learn to accept differences in culture, geography, politics, race etc. (Lazar 24). Lazar calls his model (with the same purpose and aim) differently, namely "content approach" (24). Like the cultural model of Carter and Long, the content model of Lazar has the aim of examining the "history and characteristics of literary movement; the social, political and historical background to a text" (Lazar 35). The only difference is the name: "content model". This name is due to the focus on literature as the content of a lesson at school. As the students have to acquire specific information about the texts, like the historical/social/political background or facts about literary movements, this approach is said to be more

teacher-centered (Carter and Long 8). (What teacher-centered teaching means and how it is done is explained in more detail in chapter 2.4.).

The second approach by Carter and Long (and also Lazar) is the “language-based model”. As the name indicates, it aims at improving the language competences of the students and is, therefore, usually learner-centered (9) (for a detailed explanation of learner-centeredness see chapter 2.4.). This approach is sometimes considered as being the most important one for classroom-teaching, especially when it comes to justifying teaching literature. The reason why it is an important approach for teaching literature is the fact that teaching literature facilitates language acquisition, and it is therefore a valuable and beneficial part of teaching (Carter and Long 2). Lazar (27) agrees and argues that literature in the classroom will “help the students in achieving their main aim- which is to improve their knowledge of, and proficiency in, English”. The downside of this approach is that the analysis of the literary text itself is not the main concern. The texts only serve as resources of language items like vocabulary, register, style etc. (Carter and Long 4). The positive aspects of this approach are that students can learn the vocabulary that appears in the literary texts, they can get to know different styles and structures and learn something about the register that is appropriate for different text types (Carter and Long 2). Furthermore, students are introduced to a more elaborate and creative language compared to simplified pedagogic texts (2).

Thirdly, the last model by Carter and Long is called the “personal growth model” (3). Lazar (39) writes about a similar model, which he calls the “personal enrichment model”. Both approaches focus on the development or personal growth of the students themselves with the help of literature. As the focus is on the improvement of the knowledge or competences of students, it is termed student-centered (Carter and Long 9). The aim is that students should take something with them, from the literature they have read, into the world after school (3). Students can gain knowledge from literature which they might need in the future; they can learn a lot about themselves as well as about their surrounding culture (Carter and Long 3). Furthermore, they can learn a lot about their own emotions and they learn to form their own opinions about texts (Lazar

42). According to Carter and Long (3), the personal growth of students can be seen in “a lasting pleasure in reading and a deep satisfaction in a continuing growth of understanding”. Summing up, the personal growth model involves the whole person, it tries to incorporate feelings and emotions of students and it tries to develop students’ identities and encourages creativity (Williams and Burden, qtd. in Bagherkazemi and Alemi 6). In order to be able to achieve all these goals it is important to choose literary texts students can relate to and in which they can “participate imaginatively” (Carter and Long 3).

All in all, it can be said that these three models describe how literature can be integrated in a lesson at school in an effective way. If it is taught in a reasonable way and with a specific aim in mind literature teaching can be very successful. However, what teachers need to keep in mind is that the current CLT approach asks for student-centered activities. Therefore, the language-based or personal-growth models seem more appropriate than the cultural model. Those three models should, however, not be seen as completely independent of each other, quite on the contrary, when teaching one should consider all three of those models and find a good synthesis of all of them (Carter and Long 2). The next chapter focuses on the more recent approaches by Van.

### **2.3.2. Six Models by Van**

This subchapter also concerns approaches to teaching literature. In comparison to the subchapter above, very recent models by Van are reviewed. Although the approaches by Van from 2009 are quite recent, several articles can be found in which these models are discussed already (for example two articles of 2010 by Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan and Bagherkazemi and Alemi). Van’s approaches are often mentioned in addition to Carter and Long’s models because his approaches are more recent and also more detailed. Van distinguishes between six different ones.

The first pedagogic approach for teaching literature suggested by Van (3) is called “new criticism”. According to Van (3) each literary text has a specific meaning, which is independent of the reader or the author. Therefore, students should learn “to discover the one correct meaning by a close reading and analysis of formal elements such as rhyme, meter, imagery, and theme” (Van

3). Even the social or political background of students should be suspended so that only the literary work itself is in the centre (3). The disadvantage of this approach is that the lessons would only focus on such “literary devices” as rhyme, themes, characters or symbolism as mentioned above, leaving out other important issues (3). For example it “excludes looking at the connection between the text and the reader’s experiences” (Van 3), which seems to be especially interesting at school.

Van’s second approach is “structuralism” (4). In this approach subjective interpretations are not welcome either. The aim is to “approach literary texts scientifically and to use [...] knowledge of structures and themes to place the work into a meaningful hierarchical system” (Van 4). For the interpretation of literary texts students should focus exclusively on themes and structures of the text (4). The disadvantage of this approach is of course the lack of personal interpretation by the individual students and the excessive focus on linguistics. As a consequence, this model does not generate personal growth or improve language skills significantly (Van 4). Even Van himself admits that this model is not suitable for school:

Structuralism [...] is less relevant for the teaching of literature because the EFL teachers and learners possess inadequate skills and knowledge to approach the text scientifically, which makes the study of the process fruitless and results in a lack of motivation for reading literature. (Van 4)

“Stylistics” is another approach discussed in this article by Van (4). This approach focuses on making different language styles of different genres accessible for students (4). They should learn to distinguish between different language styles, genres and registers (4). Poems, for example, differ from short stories, brochures, drama or other texts in terms of language use. Students learn how differently language can be used and how powerful it is in expressing things for different purposes (4). This approach is partly suitable for the EFL classroom because it fulfills a pedagogic aim, which is “to highlight the aesthetic value of literature and provide access to the meaning by exploring the language and form of the literary text with a focus on meaning” (Van 5). Students enjoy reading literature if they are able to grasp the meaning of the language of different text types (5).

So far the approaches discussed by Van have focused largely on the scholarly literary analysis, the themes, the form and the style of literary texts. It could be objected that the approaches above are not particularly valuable for teaching literature at school, although positive sides have been stated before. To mention some positive aspects of those approaches again: students can get familiar with different text types, styles and registers (5), they can learn something about rhyme (3) or other textual elements. It is questionable, however, if such a scholarly analysis should be at the forefront of teaching literature at school. The next three approaches mentioned in the following paragraphs seem to be more relevant for teaching literature at school.

One of the approaches by Van, which seems to be particularly relevant for teaching literature at school, is called the “reader-response approach” (5). It could be compared to the “personal-growth model” of Carter and Long or also to the “personal-response approach” of Nünning (64). The reader-response approach is in line with the communicative language teaching approach and the reader himself/herself is in the centre of attention (Van 5). In this model both personal interpretations and the reader’s personal background are significant. The reader should be active and use his/her personal experiences and opinions for the interpretation of a literary text (Van 5, Nünning 64). Each individual brings a different background and different experiences to the classroom. Therefore, their interpretations of texts will necessarily differ (Van 6). The reader-response approach allows differences between readers. Students should activate their background knowledge, experiences and feelings to develop their own interpretations of a text (6). According to Van (6) “[t]he Reader-Response approach makes an important contribution to learning by demystifying literature and connecting it to individual experience.” For this approach it is important to activate students’ background knowledge before working with the text. Pre-reading activities can activate and motivate the students (6) (for examples see chapter 6).

The fifth approach is called the “language-based approach” (Van 7). This one is very similar to the language-based model by Carter and Long (and also Lazar). All of these approaches aim at enhancing the language proficiency of the



students and are thus relevant for classroom teaching (7). An argument why this approach is suitable for school can also be found in Van's article:

[T]his approach meets students' needs in learning a language: students communicate in English to improve their language competence; they develop the necessary skills of working in groups; and they become active learners while teachers support and guide them in the learning process. (Van 7)

In addition to the positive aspects of the approach mentioned in the quote, it is also in line with CLT and the activities are typical of a CLT classroom setting (Van 7). Activities for both language-based lessons as well as CLT focused lessons could be brainstorming, rewriting, role-playing and exchange of opinions (7). Therefore, it can be said that all four language skills can be included and developed with the tasks of this approach. The main aim of this approach is improving student's "awareness of the language of literature" (Van 7). Students should become more conscious of the language that is used in literary texts and become familiar with it (7). The only aspect that could be criticized when referring to this approach is that literature only serves as a resource for teaching the English language (Van 7, see chapter 2.3.1.).

The last approach by Van is called "critical literacy" (7). The main aim of this approach is to "facilitate[s] students' critical awareness about the role of language in producing, maintaining, and changing social relations and power" (Van 8). Students should become aware that the language of literary texts is powerful and that authors can influence the way the readers perceive their texts (8). This approach is appropriate for school because it is important that students develop critical thinking competences. In other words, students need to know that they do not have to accept the writer's view and students should learn that texts are often coined by the country's culture, or social, political and religious situation (8).

To sum up, Van's six approaches are more complex and specific than the three models by Carter and Long. Two of their approaches are similar but Van refers to many additional approaches in more detail. However, it remains to be questioned if all of Van's approaches can be integrated in literature lessons at school. Some of the approaches might not work on their own, but in

combination with each other (e.g. combination of stylistics and language-based approach). Teachers again need to find a good synthesis between the approaches. Van himself argues that “[a]lthough several approaches have positive aspects, it is also apparent that [...] the Reader-Response and Language-Based approaches are well suited for teaching learners of English” (8). This quote is interesting because those two models are the ones which are most similar to the models by Carter and Long. Therefore, it can be said that the fact that Van’s approaches are more recent than Carter and Long’s, does not mean that the latter are not valuable anymore. On the contrary, Carter and Long’s approaches are still a good and appreciated basis for teaching literature at school.

When explaining the different approaches by Carter and Long it has been mentioned already which models are more teacher-centered and which ones are more student-centered. In the following subchapter these two options and a third one will be considered in some detail.

#### **2.4. Different Theories of Teaching Literature**

According to Collie and Slater (7) there are many different ways of teaching literature at school. Or as Nünning (50) argues: “Der Lehrkraft fallen beim Einsatz literarischer Texte im Fremdsprachenunterricht ganz unterschiedliche Aufgaben zu.“ Some teachers still think they have to impart all of the information to students, which is quite an outdated conception (Collie and Slater 7). In those lessons students do not speak a lot in the target language (8). Furthermore, students often simply adopt the view that is presented by the teacher without thinking about it themselves. Other teachers, however, take a more modern path and allow their students’ proposals and their own opinion. In other words, those teachers want active students who participate and work themselves. Those two viewpoints of teachers can be grouped into two different theories: the teacher-centered theory and the student-centered theory. Furthermore, Beach et al. include a more recent theory “based on socio-cultural learning theory that posits that learning is primarily social” (8). These three theories are discussed in more detail in the following three subchapters.

#### **2.4.1. Student-Centered Theory**

The consideration of the individuality and emotionality of students as well as the demand of more student-centeredness has led to a reconsideration of traditional teaching methods (Nünning 62). What are the advantages of student-centered classroom settings and activities? First of all, literary texts have a lot of potential for CLT tasks in the classroom, like role-playing, discussions, creative writing or other pair or group work (Collie and Slater 8). These tasks foster active involvement and interest of students (Beach et al. 7). Collie and Slater (8) agree, claiming that students get engaged in this kind of tasks and learn a lot from them. Furthermore, with student-centered tasks students can develop their own response to literature and express their own opinion (9). In order to be able to present their own ideas they also have to use the target language, which has a positive influence on the language acquisition process as well (8). Summing up, the main aim of the student-centered theory is “to let the student derive the benefits of communicative and other activities for language improvement within the context of suitable works of literature” (Collie and Slater 10). The role of the teacher in a student-centered lesson is more or less impulse generator or negotiator between the text and the students (Nünning 50).

#### **2.4.2. Teacher-Centered Theory**

After reading the paragraph above one could assume that learner-centered approaches always achieve better outcomes. It needs to be said, however, that “one problem with this theory is that it leaves the responsibility for learning up to the student” (Beach et al. 7). Consequently, if students are lazy or not motivated they will not learn a lot in student-centered lessons. Furthermore, teacher-centered teaching is often necessary for providing input (Lazar 38). The teacher needs to provide the students with sufficient background information so that they can understand the text at hand (38). Furthermore, it might be interesting for students to learn about different literary genres and their typical characteristics. Or the literary style might be of interest. In those cases teachers are needed who teach those issues to their students (Collie and Slater 7), which will result in teacher-centered lessons. When teachers introduce the historical background, literary theories or typical characteristics of literary genres, there is a specific name for this approach, namely transmission theory (Beach et al. 7).

What is excluded from this theory is the personal interpretation of texts (7). The transmission theory is sometimes beneficial for introducing a literary work and providing information but as soon as students have read the text they should be allowed to work with the text themselves (7). It can be said that through the transmission theory the students should only be “provide[d] [...] with some analytical tools with which they can find a ‘way-in’ to texts for themselves” (Carter and Long 7). Students should not just learn what teachers present but they should be able to interpret a text on their own in the end (Beach et al. 7).

### **2.4.3. Socio-Cultural Learning Theory**

This third theory is a very recent one described by Beach et al. (8 f.). As the name of the theory already reveals, it is about social learning and cooperation (8). It has been developed on the assumption that people or students learn through social interaction and participation (7). During their whole lives people acquire practices which are important for social communication or other purposes in real life. These practices can only be learned through participation in the social world where these practices are needed in (7). Relating the theory to the classroom setting it means that “[a]s a literature teacher, you are socializing students into what could be called a literary community of practice” (Beach et al. 8) and “[i]n this community of practice, students assume the identities of careful readers who acquire various practices involved in interpreting and producing literature” (8). Through this social community of literature learning students should become motivated to engage with literature and the interpretation of texts (8). Students are all part of the same community (restricted to the classroom) with the same aim in mind (8).

To sum up, the social-cultural learning theory should be kept in mind when teaching literature. When establishing a community for literature learning students might be more motivated and engaged (Beach et al. 8). Furthermore, teachers need to find a balance between teacher-centered and student-centered theories. However, according to recent research the larger part of a lesson should be preserved for the students and should, therefore, focus on student-centered activities (Showalter 35). The reason is that after all, students profit more from a lesson if they can work with the language and use it

themselves (Collie and Slater 8). Teachers should be regarded as a help for the students if needed, but they should not be in the center. Bagherkazemi and Alemi (3) claim that teachers in the literature classroom are only “facilitators, guides and active planners”, whereas students should be “active and autonomous participants” (3).

After the background information given in this chapter about the role of literature in the EFL classroom, the benefits of teaching literature and different approaches and theories to teaching literature, the next chapter will focus on the question: *Should one teach Cecelia Ahern's contemporary short stories? What are the reasons for teaching her stories?*

### **3. Teaching Cecelia Ahern's Contemporary Short Stories**

The third chapter of this thesis provides information on short stories in general, the role of literature in the Austrian school system and the benefits of teaching (contemporary English) short stories. Furthermore, a link between the benefits of teaching literature and the stories by Cecelia Ahern, which have been chosen for the analysis of this paper, is established. The first subchapter (3.1.) serves to introduce the reader to some general characteristics of short stories and gives information on how the genre of short stories functions in a school classroom. Subchapter 3.2. focuses on facts about Austrian grammar schools and it is explained how teaching literature, or short stories in particular, would fit into this certain school setting. The last subchapter (3.3.) discusses several reasons why teaching 'contemporary' short stories is particularly beneficial for students. For the practical application the two stories *Next Stop: Table for Two* and *The Calling* are analyzed in terms of pedagogic potentials and themes.

#### **3.1. Teaching Short Stories in General**

Before the connection between short stories and their benefits for teaching is drawn, it is necessary to briefly define what a short story actually is. If one browses the internet for definitions of the short story genre, the information is provided that a short story basically consists of five main elements. First of all, the setting which serves to describe the location and the time the action is set in (see the online article on the *Ellsa Website*). Furthermore, there are characters

and a plot, which describe the actions and events that happen in the story as well as the relationships between the different characters (see *Ellsa Website*). Additionally, there is always a conflict, which can appear in a variety of possible ways in different stories (see *Ellsa*). Possibilities for the conflict are the following: “the main character may struggle against another important character, against the forces of nature, against society, or even against something inside himself or herself (feelings, emotions, illness)” (see *Ellsa*). Finally, there are always themes in stories, which are recurrent ideas (see *Ellsa*). All of these elements are, however, also part of novels. So what is a short story and what makes it specific?

First of all, it needs to be said that there is no consistent definition of what a short story actually is (Thaler 61). There are, however, some literary authors who tried to develop some rules or definitions for this genre. The first of them was Edgar Allan Poe (qtd. in Ahrens 13). He conceptualized basic rules for the short story genre already in 1842 (Shaw 9). Poe’s first basic principle is the “unity of effect or impression” of a story (Poe 7). This unity of effect is, however, only “preserved in productions whose perusal [can] be completed at one sitting” (Poe 7). The second main principle is, therefore, that one should be able to read a short story at “one sitting”. This principle implies that short stories are rather brief (much shorter than novels) (Thaler 91). Thirdly, the “unity of action” is another principle and ascertains that a short story “centres around one incident” (Werlich, qtd. in Thaler 91). However, not all of the characteristics developed by Poe are still true for all of the modern, contemporary stories (Thaler 91, Drewery 5). According to Thaler (91) “not all short stories fit Poe’s [...] definitions as the genre itself has gone through a long development”. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century new types of short stories have been developed. For example, the formula or magazine story which “was a product of commercialization”, or the slice-of-life story, which focuses on a certain part of the main character’s life at which he or she is in crisis (95). Another 20<sup>th</sup> century invention is the factual short story, which is “blending factual reality and fictional creation” (Thaler 95). In addition to those different types of stories, the perspectives from which the stories are told have changed as well. So called “women’s stories, post-colonial stories” and minority stories were introduced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (95). In general, it can be

said that the short story form differs depending on the period in which it has been produced (Shaw 20). The stories by Cecelia Ahern do not follow all of the principles of Poe's theory. They can be placed within the genre of the slice-of-life stories because all of her narratives focus on a specific part of a character's life, when he or she is in crisis. As can be seen above, there are many different types of short stories and there is no single definition (Head 2). Therefore, in the next paragraph some more general characteristics are discussed, which are at the same time characteristics which make the short story genre particularly beneficial for school.

Thaler claims that the short story has a unique position for teaching because "of its long-standing curricular importance" (91). Collie and Slater (196 f.) agree and claim that short stories are perfect material for teaching. They mention several reasons why short stories are particularly beneficial and suitable. First of all they claim that "[t]heir practical length means they can usually be read entirely within one or two lessons" or for homework (196). Short stories are always more motivating for students, as they are not as overwhelming as other more complex texts. Poems, for example, are difficult to comprehend due to the "figurative language" (Pardede 17). Secondly, "the length of novel[s] will make it difficult [...] to finish" (17). According to Pardede (17) it would be theoretically possible to read a drama in class but it is impossible to act it out in such big English groups. With short stories however, students feel that they can succeed in finishing the text, which is a positive feeling and a motivational factor (17). Collie and Slater claim that "[t]here is no doubt that the sheer length of some works is daunting" (11). Students feel more confident about doing or finishing their homework if they need to read a short story because they anticipate the feeling of achievement, which motivates them (Collie and Slater 196). Another positive aspect of short stories is that teachers can introduce their students to a broader variety of different stories due to their shortness and, consequently, it is more probable to appeal to more students' interests (196). Although short stories are said to be less complex than novels, both of these genres belong to narratives (Meyer 60). Narratives always have a discourse level and a story level. Discourse describes the way how a story is told, by whom and from which perspective (60). The story level encompasses what is narrated- the content of

the narrative (60). Both the perspective of narration as well as the story content can be analyzed at school and the analysis of the plot might be easier when dealing with short stories compared to longer texts. According to Meyer another advantage of short stories for school is that they often “concentrate on one character, action, place and time, and select a particular moment of crisis, reversal and insight” (61). Therefore, it can be said that short stories are easier to follow for students as there is usually only a single plot and a restricted number of characters they have to deal with (Thaler 91). In other words, the plot is organized around one single setting and a short period of time (91), which makes it easier for students not to miss information. Another typical characteristic of short stories is that they often have neither a concrete beginning nor a concrete end (Bender, qtd. in Kilchenmann 11). The open ending invites students to be imaginative and creative (Thaler 56). They could write their own ending to the story or imagine what could happen next (56). Such creative writing tasks are beneficial because, according to Thaler (56), they “can serve a lot of linguistic, communicative, affective and social purposes”. In addition to the creative writing tasks, short stories offer a great variety of other possible activities and tasks which could be done in the “pre-reading stage”, the “while-reading” or the “post-reading phase” (see lesson plans in chapter 6 for examples). As the short stories are shorter than novels, students need less reading time and, therefore, more time is left for those communicative tasks accompanying the reading, which is positive for a CLT classroom.

Short stories are similar to orally related stories because of the “small size, flexible subject matter, style and form” (Meyer 63). What is, however, different to oral narratives is that short stories ask for in depth reading because there are several details or images within the story which make it less explicit (63). Meyer claims that short stories “compensate for brevity by being ambiguous, allusive and suggestive” (63). Shaw (12) agrees and argues that short stories create a picture of the events happening instead of mentioning them all discursively. Exactly these characteristics of short stories, that they are ambiguous and suggestive (Meyer 63), make them especially adequate for school as well because students can develop their interpretative ability and critical thinking as



they have to read in depth (Lazar 19). They can learn to focus on meaning between the lines and to express their own opinion (19). Another reason why reading short stories at school is beneficial is the fact that reading strategies or skills like making inferences, getting the main idea or guessing strategies are promoted (see online article *Understanding and Teaching Short Stories at Secondary Level*). Furthermore, according to Pardede (16) general knowledge of text features or features typical for the genre might be acquired, which can have positive effects on students' writing style and their written production in general:

Learners are encouraged to familiarize themselves with different language uses, forms or conventions. Such exposure is essential for the learners especially for their language development. Thus, they can appreciate the richness and variety of the language and become more sensitive to the features of it. (Pardede 16)

What makes short stories adequate for school additionally is that they are written in prose and are restricted in length. According to Kilchenmann (10) a short story consists of no more than 2000 to 30000 word. That can, however, be viewed critically because in secondary literature one can find different figures how long short stories usually are. Other than that, 30000 words might be too long for a short story. Furthermore, the number of words of a literary text is definitely not the most important criteria.

Summing up, it can be said that there are some typical characteristics of short stories, which appear in almost any literary period, namely: shortness, simple plot, restricted number of characters, the low number of places mentioned and the short period of time the story deals with (Thaler 61). Exactly these characteristics make short stories especially suitable for school. The following list sums up the main reasons mentioned by Collie and Slater (196) and Pardede (14 ff.) why short stories are a particularly suitable teaching material for school:

- ❖ Practical length
- ❖ More suitable when set as home tasks
- ❖ Feeling of achievement/ end of a whole work
- ❖ Greater variety possible

- ❖ Input for further activities
- ❖ Students can respond to the text
- ❖ Improving student's writing
- ❖ Enhancing all four language skills

Although teaching short stories bears so many potentials, there are also some possible problems or drawbacks teachers need to keep in mind. Lazar (76) focuses on the problems and in his article he presents a mindmap that summarizes the main difficulties students might encounter with short stories. In this thesis, the problems mentioned by Lazar are presented in the following table:

Problems	Explanation for Problem
<b>Motivation</b>	Lack of confidence Content of stories uninteresting Short stories not relevant to passing exams in English Don't read much in own language
<b>Comprehension</b>	Following the plot Understanding the characters Understanding vocabulary Understanding the role of the narrator
<b>Understanding the cultural background to the story</b>	
<b>Appreciating the style</b>	
<b>Inadequate reading strategies</b>	Tendency to focus on every world rather than general meaning
<b>Making interpretations</b>	Confidence to make own interpretations Coping with ambiguity

**Table 1:** Anticipating student problems with short stories (Lazar 76)

As it can be seen in the table above, Lazar mentions problems with motivation, comprehension, style, reading strategies and problems with interpretations by students (76). Many of these students' problems can, however, be overcome or at least reduced, if contemporary stories are chosen. For example, the difficulty students have, according to Lazar (76), with understanding the cultural background to the story might not be as grave if contemporary stories are

taught, as they deal with current issues. Although there might still be a small cultural gap, students will be able to cope with a story that is set in the present dealing with well-known issues. Furthermore, the style of contemporary stories is directly relevant to the students' own written production. Therefore, the argument by Lazar (76) that students have problems with appreciating the style, is not true of contemporary stories. About the difficulties with comprehending the plot or understanding the characters, it can be said that this will be much easier for students if the story is set in the present or near-past. If students can relate to the plot, the characters and the themes of the story, they will be able to comprehend the story satisfactorily. More about the benefits of contemporary stories can be found in subchapter 3.3. Another problem mentioned by Lazar (76) is that short stories are perceived as not relevant to passing exams in English. This argument is not valid anymore, as many of the themes of short stories (if chosen wisely) are appropriate for the oral part of the "New Matura", as will be illustrated by two of Cecelia Ahern's stories in chapter 4. If teachers attend to the themes of the stories during their lessons, it will be very advantageous for the students' performance at the Matura. Furthermore, Lazar (76) claims that students might have difficulties because they lack important reading strategies. However, as mentioned above, these are developed while reading and, therefore, teaching a short story would be a perfect chance to practice different reading strategies. Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan also claim that reading "is good for practicing reading subskills including skimming, scanning, and finding the main ideas" (203). In addition, it can be argued that teachers are responsible for their students to learn how to read longer texts without focusing on every single word (Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan 202). Furthermore, it is important for students to learn that they need not understand every word (202). Those are key strategies or abilities for different kinds of reading purposes and should be taught anyway. Finally, the lack of confidence of students to make their own interpretations, as mentioned by Lazar (76), should be addressed briefly: It might indeed be a question of confidence if students make good interpretations of texts. But what else can offer better opportunities for interpretations than literary texts? If teachers encourage students and create a good classroom atmosphere in which students feel safe and self-confident, literature can be a valuable tool for students to make their

first own interpretations. The reason is that literature can be interpreted in different and personal ways (Lazar 19). As long as students justify their interpretation teachers should support them (Thaler 54) because “each learner’s interpretation has validity within limits” (Khatib, Ranjbar and Fat’hi 14).

Summing up, it can be said that if teachers choose the stories wisely and provide enough help and support to the students as well as encourage them and create a classroom setting where the students feel comfortable, the advantages of teaching short stories definitely overrule the problems students might encounter. Therefore, in order to end this subchapter on a positive note, it is concluded with two quotations which emphasize the positive sides of teaching short stories.

Students find the short story one of the most satisfying of all literary forms, and teachers agree that stories often provide more challenge and hold students’ interests better than works from many other genres. (Duke 62)

One reason why the short story has been a popular text type in many classrooms for a long time now may be that due to its brevity and literary aesthetics it serves as a bridge between simpler coursebook texts and full-length literature [...]. (Thaler 91)

### **3.2. Teaching Short Stories in Austrian Grammar Schools**

After introducing the short story genre and its characteristics as well as describing its benefits and advantages for the classroom, it is now time to discuss the specific classroom setting in which the stories could be taught. This diploma thesis focuses on teaching stories in the Austrian EFL classroom and, therefore, it needs to be made clear which EFL classroom is meant exactly and which school type is suitable. Generally speaking, I would only teach literature at grammar schools because at vocational schools literature is not appreciated, as the focus at those schools is not so much on general education as in the AHS. The focus at vocational schools is more on English skills and vocabulary which is necessary for the future jobs of the students, as stated in the syllabus of tourist schools for example: “The main criteria for the selection of the actual course content are its positive effect on the ability to communicate [and] its *applicability in a professional context* [emphasis added]” (see BMUKK, *Lehrplan*

*höhere Lehranstalt für Tourismus*). Literature is however, not excluded completely from grammar school syllabuses. The syllabus for upper grade AHS says:

Zur Erlangung eines möglichst umfassenden lexikalischen Repertoires sind verschiedenste Themenbereiche zu bearbeiten (wie zB Sprache und ihre Anwendungsmöglichkeiten; [...]; Kunst in ihren Ausdrucksformen *Literatur* [emphasis added], Musik, bildende Künste). (BMUKK, *Lehrplan der AHS-Oberstufe, Lebende Fremdsprache 4*)

However brief, literature is mentioned in the AHS Lehrplan and, therefore, this chapter focuses only on the situation of Austrian grammar schools. In the following paragraphs it is elaborated which role short stories could play in this specific school setting. Following questions need to be clarified: How big are the groups teachers have to deal with at the AHS in English or literature lessons? What does that mean for literature teaching?

The answer to the question about the number of students has always been a topic of discussion. There have been a lot of debates how big language groups should be and what the maximum number should be (see online article *Der Standard*). Before 2011 the maximum number of students for foreign language learning lessons was 29: If there were 30 or more students in one class, it was divided into two groups. However, if the class consisted of fewer than 30 students, the teacher had to cope with up to 29 students, which is of course a very large number for just one English group (see *Der Standard*). This situation caused concern and, consequently, the system was changed in 2011. Only one of the regulations stayed the same, namely that if there are more than 30 students per class, they must be divided into two English groups. In addition to that basic rule a new one has been introduced which demands that if there are fewer than 30 students, groups should be formed across classes (see *Der Standard*). Thus, if there are two classes with more than 48 students, they will be divided into three groups. Three classes with more than 72 students will be divided into five groups (*Der Standard*). As a consequence to the new specification, the average number of students in one English group should be smaller than before, which is very positive and crucial for a language learning classroom. Pardede (17) argues that “objections are always raised against the

use of literature in public schools due to overcrowded classes". This situation should have changed for the better.

In literature lessons at school English groups should not exceed the number of 15 students. Groups between 12 to 15 students would be ideal for literature lessons because literary texts should be looked at in detail, allowing for students' imagination, interpretation, opinion and critical thinking, which is only possible if the groups are not too big. Another possibility for teaching the stories would be elective courses, as those groups are always very small. For my lesson plans of chapter 6, I assume to have 12-15 students in my group.

Having clarified the type of school literature could be taught at and the ideal size of the English group, the following questions need to be considered in detail as well before choosing a text for reading at school: How old are the students? What do the students already know? What level do the students have? What are the students interested in? Why is the text relevant to students? How difficult or easy is the language of the text? How much background information do the students need in order to be able to understand the text? Lazar (56) lists following criteria a teacher should keep in mind when choosing a text:

<p><b>Checklist for choosing literary texts</b></p> <p><b>TYPE OF COURSE</b> Level of students Students' reasons for learning English Kind of English required Length/intensity of course</p> <p><b>TYPE OF STUDENTS</b> Age Intellectual maturity Emotional understanding Interests/Hobbies Cultural background Linguistic proficiency Literary background</p> <p><b>OTHER TEXT-RELATED FACTORS</b> Availability of texts Length of text Exploitability Fit with syllabus</p>
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**Table 2:** List of criteria for text-selection (Lazar 56)

The first criteria for text-selection under the heading 'type of course' and 'type of students' are about the English level the students have and about the age of the students. Therefore, these two aspects need to be considered in detail in this paragraph. As the texts by Cecelia Ahern have already been selected for this thesis, there is now time to explain which level and age of students they are adequate for. To start with, I would suggest that the stories would be suitable for students of fifth or sixth grade of grammar schools, who are aged 15 to 16. This age group seems to be suitable because the language of the stories is not too difficult and it is manageable for fifth or sixth grade students. Collie and Slater argue that "the sooner learners can start to enjoy literature in their new language, the better" (2), so teaching literature right from the beginning of fifth grade is indeed appropriate. Although there might be some vocabulary or grammatical issues the teacher may have to focus on and explain during the lesson, I believe that students of fifth or sixth grade will be able to understand the stories by Cecelia Ahern.

The language level of the students is another crucial point to have a look at. Usually, the English level of fifth or sixth grade students of grammar schools is B1. According to the European Language Portfolio students of that level should have the following reading competences (which are formulated in first-person):

Ich kann längere, relative einfache literarische Texte ohne größere Schwierigkeiten verstehen, wenn ich mit dem Thema vertraut bin (z.B. vereinfachte Werkausgaben, moderne Unterhaltungsliteratur). Ich kann Informationen in verschiedenen längeren Texten oder Textteilen finden, die ich brauche, um eine bestimmte Aufgabe zu lösen. (Abuja et al. 34)

This quote makes clear that students of fifth or sixth class should be able to understand relatively simple short stories if the topics are familiar. This description suits perfectly for the stories by Cecelia Ahern because the language of her stories is relatively simple and the topics are most likely familiar to students. Some of the themes of the stories, which students may be able to relate to, are: first love, relationships, mother-daughter relationship, beauty and other issues of growing up. More information on the themes or topics of two particular stories can be found in the subchapters 3.3.1. and 3.3.3. below. In addition, the stories by Cecelia Ahern can be used to talk about broader social

topics in class, which seem to be relevant in today's people's lives, like for instance gender mainstreaming, depression, stress or fashion. Furthermore, students can learn something about the target culture from the stories, which is the Irish culture in this particular case.

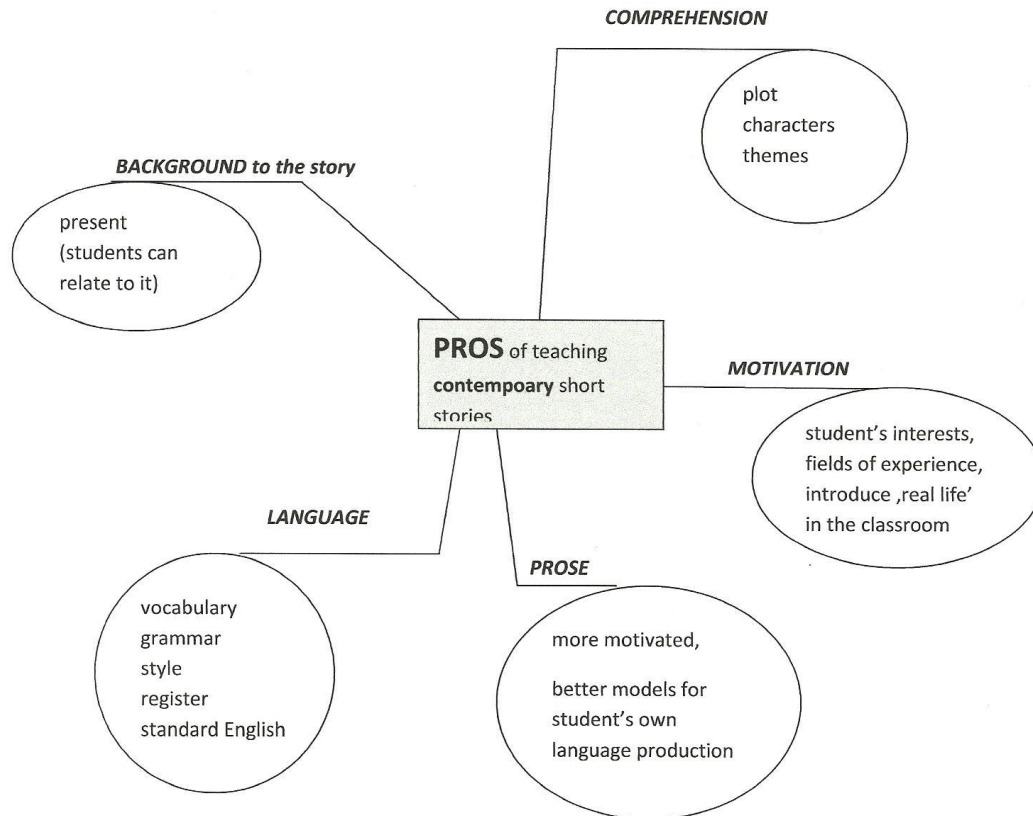
Summing up, I believe that the stories are suitable for 15 to 16 year old students of fifth or sixth grade with the reading level B1. The reason is that the students are already able to cope with the stories concerning both the language as well as the themes. In contrast to literary classics, which I would only teach in highly advanced classes, the language is not as complex and students do not need a lot of background information in order to understand the main concepts of the contemporary stories by Cecelia Ahern. More about the advantages or benefits of teaching Cecelia Ahern's stories in the Austrian classroom can be found in the next subchapter.

### **3.3. Benefits of Teaching Contemporary Short Stories (Illustrated by Cecelia Ahern's Stories)**

In chapter 3.1. advantages of the short story genre for teaching in general have been outlined and also some problems students might encounter have been discussed. In connection to those problems it has been mentioned that many of them can be bypassed if contemporary short stories are taught, as they have lots of advantages. Therefore, in this chapter the focus is now on emphasizing the positive sides of teaching 'contemporary' stories in particular. First of all, some basic information on the benefits and potentials of contemporary stories is given in the paragraphs below. After those paragraphs subchapters follow in which those benefits of contemporary stories are illustrated by two specific short stories by Cecelia Ahern.

To start with, the following mindmap provides a short overview of the advantages of 'contemporary' short stories:





**Figure 2:** Pros of teaching contemporary short stories

First of all, as can be seen in figure 2 above, contemporary short stories are especially suitable and advantageous because students do not need a lot of background information in order to understand the gist of the story. Van argues that “things that make literature difficult are the historical, social, and political references that add complexity for non-English speakers” (3). In contrast to classic literature, which is set in the past, contemporary stories are concerned with current issues. Classic literature is set in the past when society had different rules and beliefs and it is probably more difficult for students to relate to the past or to the people living in those times (3). Students would need a lot of information about the country and the people of that particular century in which the story is set (Carter and Long 142). The background information, however, is crucial for students in order to fully understand a classic story (142). Contemporary stories, however, are very often concerned with the last few years or even the present. Therefore, students might find it easier to understand the stories and relate to them because they know society’s rules, values and

beliefs of the present time (Khatib, Ranjbar and Fat'hi 14). This argument is emphasized by one statement by Schwarz who said that “[w]hen reading as well as teaching a text, we need to situate it in the political and historical context; we need [to] situate a text within the author’s life and values and the time in which he wrote” (39) and that is certainly easier with contemporary stories. Cecelia Ahern’s narratives deal with the present or at least with this century and they are concerned with very general topics. Therefore, students do not need a lot of background information in order to be able to grasp the main content of the stories. Although the short stories by Cecelia Ahern are not related to the country or culture of the students in the Austrian EFL classroom themselves, as they deal with Ireland, students will not have problems understanding the texts as they do not focus on a particular historical or political event of the country. It can also be seen as an advantage that the stories are set in a country of the target language as students can learn to identify with the English speaking nation (Pardede 16) and they can, in the case of Cecelia Ahern’s stories, learn a lot about Irishness and Irish identity when reading the stories (e.g. see next chapter about the theme of singing and story-telling). As it was stated in chapter 2.2., cultural enrichment is one of the benefits of teaching literature at school.

A crucial part of the text selection process (no matter if choosing classic stories or contemporary ones) is to have a look at the content of the stories (Carter and Long 144). As Lazar already mentioned in his article, the motivation of students might be missing if the content of the stories is uninteresting to them (76). Turner argues that “a wise teacher [...] utilizes as far as possible the interests which students already have” (45). Collie and Slater agree with Turner and claim the following: “[i]t is important to choose books [...] which are relevant to the life experiences, emotions, or dreams of the learner” (6). As dreams and life experiences have been different in other times and centuries, it is wise to choose contemporary stories because students’ identification with characters, their understanding of the plot and the themes of the story is better. Reading is more exciting for students if they can sympathize with the feelings of the characters and the themes of modern, contemporary stories are often related to young adult’s problems or affairs (Khatib, Ranjbar and Fat'hi 14). Therefore, it

can be said that Lazar's (76) worries that students have problems following the plot or understanding the characters can be reduced if the teacher opts for contemporary stories. The *Every Year* collection by Cecelia Ahern fulfills the requirement demanded by Turner and Collie and Slater because many of the stories deal with themes students can relate to emotionally, for instance, adolescence, love, loneliness or relationships. Cecelia Ahern's stories often focus, at least to some extent, on love and Hall argues that it is "intrinsically motivating to talk about death, life, love and the like, larger themes which otherwise escape (purportedly) 'communicative' syllabuses" (57). Therefore, it can be assumed that Cecelia Ahern's contemporary stories are able to establish a personal and emotional connection between students and the texts as students can identify with the issues of the stories as well as with the problems or troubles of the characters (Beach et al. 92). And the big advantage of this is that "[if] it is meaningful and enjoyable, reading is more likely to have a lasting and beneficial effect upon the learners' linguistic and cultural knowledge" (Collie and Slater 6).

Besides the fact that teachers need to introduce less background information when teaching 'contemporary' stories and that students can better relate to them, there is another advantage. The motivation of students is higher when reading contemporary stories (Beach et al. 159). As it was stated in chapter 2.2., the most important aspect when choosing literature for class is still the question of motivation and thus contemporary stories should be chosen. If students are not motivated to read, they will not become engaged with the text and, as a consequence, they will not be interested in interpreting a text in detail either. Or as Pardede (18) argues: "[if] students will not understand [the] [...] sentences and words, they will get bored and not read the text". According to Carter and Long (6) "[the] motivation may not always be best encouraged by classic, canonical literary texts" (6). Although teachers might provide interesting activities and support, the motivation of students will most always be higher when teaching contemporary literature (Khatib, Ranjbar and Fat'hi 14). Also Beach et al. argue that contemporary works might have "some inherent appeal to [...] students" and, consequently, are more engaging and motivating (159). Summing up, the fear that classic books or short stories from the literary canon

could put off students from reading literature is sometimes the reason for choosing contemporary, popular stories for school (Beach et al. 159). The stories by Cecelia Ahern have been chosen for this paper because her stories are popular, contemporary stories, she is a bestseller writer (see Ahern's Home Page) and students might know her or some of her works, which might be an additional motivational aspect. Furthermore, the fact that many of the themes or topics of her stories are familiar or relevant to students makes the stories more interesting for students as well. This thesis deals with contemporary stories from only one author because as Thaler argues, author-based reading is an approach which "offers something to appeal to everybody's tastes" (95).

Another important argument in favor of teaching contemporary literature, as Hill states, is the modern use of language:

If teachers restrict their study of literature to nineteenth century novels and Shakespeare's plays then it is certain that the language will be largely irrelevant to the needs of most students. If, however, they use good modern prose as the basis for their course, or works by local authors in English, then much of the language will have value for the students. (Hill 12)

Relating to the quotation, it can be said that the problem mentioned by Lazar (76) that students have difficulties appreciating the style of short stories does not exist when teaching contemporary ones as they feature a language style which is directly relevant to the students' language learning process and, therefore, very appropriate (Hill 10 ff.). Cecelia Ahern's stories are written in modern prose and students can model their language production on the stories (as has already been stated in this chapter). Collie and Slater also argue that the language of contemporary stories is more typical of the language of daily life compared to classic literature (6). Hill agrees and claims that contemporary literature "does provide examples of language in use" (11). According to Hill it is crucial that "any material given to the students should provide a model or pattern on which [...] [students] could base their own production of the language" (10). For this purpose the contemporary stories by Cecelia Ahern seem to be perfect because vocabulary, style and register agree with the writing requirements of students (Collie and Slater 6). Carter and Long argue that "modern literature is closer to the patterns, idiom and discourse style of the

language which the student has acquired as language learner” (143) and, therefore, it is suitable and profitable for their language acquisition process (Carter and Long 143). Students can adopt the style and vocabulary of contemporary stories and improve their own writings as a consequence. What needs to be kept in mind, however, is that “it is better to choose for teaching literary texts which are not too far beyond the students’ normal reading comprehension” (Carter and Long 5) because otherwise they will not be able to adopt vocabulary or style. Therefore, it can be said that the style of most classic literature would definitely be too complex for students and the language would be less relevant to them. Nevertheless, Carter and Long (142) state that there are some canonical texts which should be covered in advanced classes but contemporary texts should definitely be included as well.

Furthermore, the question *Why teach contemporary short stories?* is linked to the question of which criteria there are for the selection of texts at school. Carter and Long discuss criteria for text selection in their article (141 ff.). Similar to the paragraphs above, Carter and Long (141 ff.) also discuss the importance of motivation and the background information that would be needed for some texts. Furthermore, in their article they also mention the language of literary texts in terms of difficulty and style (143). Additionally, as a criterion for text selection they mention general availability of the primary text (141). Especially if a text is to be taught at school in groups of up to 15 students, it needs to be easily available. Teachers can either purchase copies for all the students or they need to make sure that the text is easily available and also affordable for the school (Carter and Long 141, Nünning 49). With the contemporary short stories by Cecelia Ahern this problem is non-existent as her stories are available as e-book. Another criterion literature should fulfill if taught at school is that “the texts provide a representative selection, however small, of the literature as a whole” (Carter and Long 142). Literature as a whole means literature from different periods and centuries and English speaking nations (including British, American, Australian, African and other texts) (142). The short story collection *Every Year* is a contemporary one but in order to create a full representation of literature in the classroom also modern, popular fiction should be taught. Those short stories by Cecelia Ahern should of course not be the

only selected texts presented at school, because there is need to cover classics as well (Carter and Long 142), but they could be a good choice for integrating contemporary, popular British/Anglophone literature.

The following table sums up the didactic potentials of contemporary short stories, illustrated by examples of Cecelia Ahern's stories:

Didactic Potentials	
<b>Written in prose/modern English</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→easy to read and understand</li> <li>→students are able to follow the plot</li> <li>→students appreciate the style</li> <li>→model for student's language production</li> </ul>
<b>Down-to-earth issues</b>	→students can relate to the topics like friendship, family, love, growing up, beauty
<b>Protagonists</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→students can identify with the protagonists of the short stories, can relate problems of characters to their own,</li> <li>→students empathize with the characters</li> </ul>
<b>Wide range of vocabulary</b>	→but majority of the vocabulary easy to understand, standard English
<b>Culture</b>	→students can learn something about Irish culture and behavior/ target culture of the language learning classroom
<b>British contemporary literature</b>	→not a lot of background information needed before reading because contemporary issues, students can understand
<b>Motivation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→content of stories interesting</li> <li>→stories introduce 'real-life' into the classroom</li> </ul>

**Table 3:** Didactic potential of contemporary stories

To conclude, in this chapter general advantages of teaching contemporary stories have been analyzed and discussed and a relation has been established between the advantages of short stories in the classroom in general and

Cecelia Ahern's narratives. In the next subchapters the most important themes of two stories by Cecelia Ahern are analyzed in order to show the possible connection between the themes and the students and what potential that might have for literature lessons. Furthermore, it is presented how exactly those two stories fulfill the pedagogic requirements, which have been explained in chapter 2.2. With the help of the thematic analysis and the fulfillment of the pedagogic requirements it is tried to present good reasons why especially these particular short stories by Cecelia Ahern would be beneficial teaching material in Austrian grammar schools.

### **3.3.1. Themes in *Next Stop: Table for Two***

In this subchapter it is now shown which themes the story *Next Stop: Table for Two* contains and it is explained why and in how far the themes are relevant to students. The story basically is about a young woman who works as a waitress in a restaurant on Valentine's Day. She sees all the couples happily in love while she is lonely (Ahern 32 ff.). The question to be answered here is the following: Why can students relate to the themes and the characters of the story? It is important to clarify the connection between the students and the themes as the connection to students' interests is a crucial component of teaching literature because the aim is to "motivate the students to read by relating the themes and topics depicted in a literary text to his or her personal experience" (Carter and Long 9). Van agrees and reports the following in his article: "I also recognize a positive change in my students' attitude towards literature when I connect the material with their lives" (6). If students are motivated and positively surprised how fascinating and relevant literature can be to their own lives, they will start reading and might even continue after school (Van 6). Therefore, in this section it is shown how the themes of *Next Stop: Table for Two* can be related to the students' personal experiences and interests.

To start with, the most important theme of the story is love and man- woman relationships. There are couples everywhere in the story who are kissing, holding hands and making gifts to their beloved ones (Ahern, *Next Stop: Table for Two* 32 ff.). In the story it is claimed that there are "[a]ll different kinds of

love: new love, old love, stolen love, couples sitting in silence, others unable to keep their hands off each other, some in serious conversation, some laughing loudly” (Ahern 42). The main character Lucy has had relationships before but she claims that she has never been truly in love. Two 16-year-old teenagers who have their first, at some stages embarrassing, date are part of the story as well (Ahern 39 f.). It might be interesting for students to read about young love and relationships as they are at the same age as those young characters.

Secondly, Valentine’s Day is an important topic in the story and it is related to the theme of love as well. Teachers could talk about this day in connection to the Austrian as well as the Irish culture. This topic bears a lot of potential for intercultural learning as Valentine’s Day goes back to Celtic spirituality (see online source *All Saints Parish*). Several legends exist about this special day. The first legend is that a priest named Valentine existed who performed marriages for couples against the will of the emperor (see *All Saints Parish*). Therefore, he was sentenced to death. Before he had to die “he [fell] in love with the beautiful jailer’s daughter” and “the night before he was beheaded, he [sent] a note of affection to her, [...] The note [was] signed ‘From Your Valentine’” (see *All Saints Parish*). That is the reason why people write notes of affection on February the 14th till today. Secondly, it is claimed that Valentine’s Day derived from a Christian festival when people celebrated the “goddess of women and marriage” on the 14<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> of February (*All Saints Parish*). Thirdly, another reason why this day is celebrated and associated with love till today might be the fact that “[m]id-February was often the beginning of Spring, so ‘spring fever’ was certainly stirring up romantic feelings in humans as well as birds” (*All Saints Parish*). Therefore, February in general or the 14<sup>th</sup> of February in particular became the special day of love and romance when people could show their affection (*All Saints Parish*). Valentine’s Day still plays an important role in Ireland and is a traditional festival. Only later it also became popular in Austria, but more or less only to make profit (e.g. people buy flowers, gifts). Therefore, students can be encouraged to find similarities and differences between the story and how Valentine’s Day is celebrated in their home country (e.g. going to a restaurant, making gifts, Valentine’s cards etc.). When discussing this cultural topic at school, it can definitely be said that “[l]iterary



texts increase foreign language learners' insight into the country and the people whose language is being learnt" (Pardede 16). Summing up, students can relate to the theme of love, relationships and Valentine's Day as these are issues they have to deal with in their own lives as well.

Another theme in this particular short story is loneliness. Although Lucy, the main character, is always surrounded by people she still feels lonely because she does not have a partner but always sees other people happily in love, sitting on the train or coming to the restaurant where Lucy works at (Ahern 32 ff.). She is, therefore, constantly confronted with her feelings. In the story the emotions of Lucy are described in the following way: "[s]he understood how it felt being surrounded by crowds of people every day, never physically being alone but all the time feeling it" (Ahern 33). Loneliness is a feeling most students will have encountered at some point in their lives as well and they might therefore be able to relate to that topic.

A minor theme, which appears right in the beginning of the story, is public transport. The main character goes to work by train every day and describes it as monotonous and boring (Ahern 32). Although at the first glance one has the feeling that this theme is not particularly relevant to students, there are still a few things which could be discussed. First of all, many students might have to take public transport to school and might as well be fed up with it. Furthermore, students could talk about the different experiences they have had with public transport or they could discuss the public transport facilities in their home areas, if there are any. A classroom activity could be to find advantages and disadvantages of public transport in cities. Furthermore, the public transport system of Dublin can be introduced and discussed or compared to the one in Austria.

Finally, the last theme of the short story, which seems to be important to point out, is good luck. Lucy mentions that she believes in love but the more she thinks about it, the more she is of the opinion that "love is only for lucky ones" (Ahern 36). Students can definitely relate to the theme of having good luck. It can be discussed with the students what they associate with luck and if they agree with Lucy that finding true love has something to do with luck. What

people perceive as being lucky is culturally dependent. In developing countries it means something different compared to rich countries or people who live there. That subject can also be discussed by students. Most certainly all of the students will have to say something on this topic, as it is part of their every-day lives.

Summing up, the story *Next Stop: Table for Two* is particularly suitable for the Austrian grammar schools as it fulfills the following requirements by McKay:

Frequently, the theme of such literature deals with the problem of personal growth and development. Furthermore, most literature for young adults tends to be relatively short, and the characters usually limited to a small cast of characters with a young adult as the central character. (McKay 532)

All of the requirements of McKay are fulfilled by the story, except that the main character of the chosen short story is not exactly a young adult anymore as she is in her thirties. However, it can be said that although Lucy is not 15 or 16 anymore, which would be the age of the target students, she experiences exactly what the target students might experience themselves: first love, relationships, fear of being alone, and jealousy of other couples. Furthermore, two 16-year-olds are part of the story as well, with whom the students could identify. Therefore, it can be said that the fact that students can relate to the themes and that the pedagogic requirements (e.g. language development, CLT etc.) can be fulfilled (see next subchapter), makes the story *Next Stop: Table for Two* beneficial and profitable for the fifth or sixth grade of Austrian grammar schools.

### **3.3.2. Pedagogic Potential of *Next Stop: Table for Two***

In this subchapter the positive aspects of contemporary stories are illustrated by the short story *Next Stop: Table for Two* and it is argued why this story is particularly adequate for teaching. For the analysis of the pedagogically valuable aspects of the story, a connection between the advantages of teaching literature, which have been discussed in chapter 2.2., and the story *Next Stop: Table for Two* is drawn. The positive effects literature can have for students, which have been mentioned above, are the following: reading literature can enhance language development and it can cater for cultural or personal

enrichment (Thaler 23). Furthermore, reading interesting, contemporary literature has a motivational value, critical thinking is enhanced and interpretation ability is fostered (23). Another advantage of teaching literature is that it bears a lot of possibilities for activities suitable for a CLT classroom (Van 2). Some activities which would be possible for this specific story are mentioned below as well. The particular suitability of the story *Next Stop: Table for Two* for teaching is analyzed in the following paragraphs. What needs to be said, however, is that not all aspects of the story can be analyzed in detail. The most striking issues, which seem to be especially beneficial for students, are analyzed. These issues which are chosen should serve as examples of the many possibilities the short story offers.

Language Development: First of all, the writing style of this literary text is relevant for the students' own writing. They can learn a lot from this modern prose text and might profit from some language issues of the text. Although it is assumed that most of the students will be able to fully understand the gist of the text, it can be said that the story *Next Stop: Table for Two* contains some new vocabulary. Students of the fifth or sixth grade might not be familiar with the following words for example: *jerking awake, to rattle, blurring, the booth*, et cetera (Ahern, *Next Stop: Table for Two* 32 ff.). Furthermore, there are some colloquial expressions in the direct speech parts of the story, which students might see for the first time. Students can get familiar with colloquial expressions like: "I told ya to book it, ya eejit" (Ahern 40). Those expressions might be interesting for students as they know that this kind of language is used outside school and is, therefore, authentic. In addition, the story could be used in a fifth grade to revise the past simple tense, as the story line is written in that tense. Moreover, the story can also be used to introduce collocations. There are many of them in the story and learning such grammar issues within a context is much more motivating and students might remember them more easily. Collocations that can be found in the story are for instance: *fall asleep, keep open, keep head down, make your way* (Ahern 32 ff.).

Cultural Enrichment: As the story is set in Ireland, Dublin to be more precise, students can learn something about this country and also the Irish people when

reading the story. Teachers might pick out some striking issues of the story which are typical for Ireland or interesting to know about this country. One issue that could be talked about at school in connection with the story is the public transport system of Dublin as the main character goes to work by train every day (Ahern 32). In connection to the public transport system the main sights of Dublin could be introduced and discussed because some important streets and restaurants are named (e.g. Grafton Street, Bewley's Café, Westbury Hotel, Stephen Green Shopping Centre) (Ahern 32 ff.). Another topic for discussion might be the public holidays of Ireland, or other important days of the year. In the story Valentine's Day is a topic, which could be dealt with at school. In addition the names of the people (e.g. McCullough, O'Hanlon etc) referred to might be discussed and teachers could relate these names to the Gaelic origin of the Irish nation. The students could be taught something about Irish history, which would definitely be a step towards cultural enrichment. Summing up, it can be said that there is a considerable number of points for discussions about Ireland and Irish people (e.g. names, traditions), which can foster students' cultural understanding of Ireland.

Personal Enrichment: In chapter 2.2. it was argued that emotional enrichment can be seen as one essential part of personal growth of the students (Khatib, Rezaei and Derakhshan 203). This aspect is relevant when discussing this story because students might be able to identify with the main character and might sympathize with her emotions and feelings. Lucy, the main character, feels lonely and jealous of all the happy couples (Ahern 32 ff.). Students might have experienced the feeling of loneliness themselves. Furthermore, students of 15 or 16 years might be in love or looking for a partner as well. Therefore, they will be able to relate to the main character's feelings and, consequently, they might be able to learn something about their own feelings as well. In other words, the story can provide "possible answers to personally relevant issues" (Thaler 24).

Motivational Value: First of all the short story *Next Stop: Table for Two* is an authentic text because as Gilmore (98, qtd. in Morrow 13) argues: "An authentic text is a stretch of real language, produced by a real speaker or writer for a real audience". Authentic material always bears a higher motivational value because

it has not been produced for school but for a 'real audience' as mentioned in the quote by Morrow. Furthermore, the fact that *Next Stop: Table for Two* is a 'short' story might be motivating as well due to its shortness, the restricted number of characters or the simple plot. In addition, reading literature is a welcome variation from traditional teaching (Thaler 24). What is specifically motivating about this specific story is that it deals with issues relevant for students and their personal lives. As it could be seen in the preceding subchapter, there are many themes in the story students can relate to. Students at the age of 15 or 16 might have their first relationships as well or fall in love for the first time. It is of course interesting for them to read about these topics which are relevant for themselves.

Critical Thinking and Interpretation Skills: In Lazar's article it is claimed that "literature is a particularly good source for developing student's abilities to infer meaning and to make interpretations" (Widdowson, qtd. in Lazar 19). The reason is that literature can be interpreted in different subjective ways. Students can develop their own interpretations of the plot or the behavior of characters. Many meanings of a text are implicated and not directly stated (Lazar 19). Students should learn to be able to discover these deeper meanings. In the case of *Next Stop: Table for Two*, the feelings or the behavior of the main character could be interpreted, for example. Students might come up with different interpretations why the main character is still alone, why she feels lonely or why she is trying to find a partner. In addition, the text could be read critically by the students. They could think about the author's role in the presentation of the main character. How does Cecelia Ahern convey the picture that Lucy is unhappy? Which words are used to express the unhappiness and loneliness? These are questions students could reflect on critically. The main aim of such a focus is to develop students' critical reading abilities and interpretation abilities so that they do not just accept what is presented to them but also think about it themselves and create their own opinion (Zafeiriadou 4). According to Pardede (21) students "become more creative since they are faced with their own point of view, that/those of the main character(s) of the story and those of their peers". Oster (qtd. in Pardede 21) claims that "this process leads to critical thinking".

Benefits for CLT: As could be seen in the previous subchapter about the themes of the stories, they bear a lot of potential for students' communication, interaction and also group work. Many of the themes are relevant for the students and discussions could be planned where students should speak about personal experiences related to topics of the story. Moreover, role plays could be organized in which one student would have to take on the personality of Lucy and another student the personality of the male guest in the end of the story. Furthermore, the story bears a lot of potential for writing tasks. First of all, students could write an inner monologue about what Lucy feels and what her wishes and dreams are. Secondly, students could write their own conclusion to the story, as there is an open end. They could write down what they think might happen to Lucy and the man in the future. Thirdly, listening comprehensions as well as reading comprehensions could provide additional information on topics like love, relationships or Irishness, which are all part of the story. Therefore, it can be said that a significant number of activities are possible which are suitable for a CLT classroom setting.

### **3.3.3. Themes in *The Calling***

The short story that is focused on in the following theme analysis is called *The Calling*. The reason why a second story is analyzed is that the aim is to show that more of Cecelia Ahern's stories are beneficial for students, not only *Next Stop: Table for Two*. Concisely summarized, the story is about a young girl who has to stand her controlling mother who tries to force her into being someone the girl does not want to be. The girl tells stories about her life before she finally can break free with her true love (Ahern, *The Calling* 49ff.).

The first theme which needs to be addressed is the mother-daughter relationship described in the story. In *The Calling* the reader is informed that Margaret's mother forced her into being very feminine and beautiful so that Mags would find a man. Mags however, did not want to wear so much make-up, neither did she want to marry a dirty man (Ahern 61). She and her mother did not have a good relationship because her mother never cared about Mags' feelings and she was never interested in what her daughter wanted. A lot of female as well as male students can identify with the girl as they might have

had different experiences with their parents. Especially 15 to 16 year old students, who are in the middle of puberty, might have some trouble or misunderstandings with their parents, which makes it easy for them to relate to the difficult relationship between the main character and her mother in the story.

Secondly, gender is an important theme in the story. Mags' mother took one hour each Friday and Sunday to lay make-up on her daughter's face, while the sons could sleep in (Ahern 52-53). In the story Margaret often expresses that she feels that being a man is better. One quotation from the story that can lead to discussions about the gender topic is the following:

She would be ordered to sit still, afraid to move a muscle in case she felt the sharp sting of the back of the brush against her flesh, which inevitably caused her cheeks to turn rosy. It was a vicious circle. So she sat tight, hands on lap, back straight ('A man wouldn't want a wife with bad posture now, would he, Margaret?') while her five brothers could remain in bed for the extra hour. Mags often felt like questioning her mother on why it was that men didn't need to make the same effort for women. (Ahern 54)

Students could be asked to discuss this quotation in groups of three or four students and present their own point of view. I believe that this topic is interesting for students of that age as they develop into men and women and especially during that time of change they might be interested in the biological as well as social differences between men and women.

Apart from that, some themes which are part of the story can be said to be typically Irish or show typical features of Irishness. For example, Catholicism is highly valued in Ireland (Enright xv) as well as in the story by the main characters (Ahern 49 ff.). Students could compare the value of religion in the story or in Ireland to the importance of religion in their own lives or in the lives of Austrian people in general. Another Irish feature is big families as the family "is the fundamental (perhaps the only) unit of Irish culture" (Enright xv). Furthermore, dancing and singing are important indicators of Irish culture and this theme appears in the story as well: "listening to his stories and listening to his songs" (Ahern 59). In addition, some stereotypes about Irish people appear in the story. One example is that fathers are used to drinking in the pub in their leisure time. Students could be asked to think critically about this issue. They

could be asked the following questions: Where does this stereotype come from? When thinking about Irish people (especially men) does pub-crawling and excessive drinking cross your mind as well? Why is that so? Which stereotypes are there about Austrian people? Those questions could be the basis for discussions at school and students could get involved and could be made more aware of stereotypes which are presented in texts. Generally speaking, students can learn a lot about Ireland and the people living in Ireland when reading this story.

The fourth theme I want to discuss is fashion and beauty. Mags had to sit for an hour each time her mother wanted to put make-up on her face (Ahern 52-53). The issue of what is beautiful and attractive depends on the culture and the time people live in. Beauty meant something different 100 years ago compared to what is considered beautiful today. It also means something different in Africa compared to European countries. Students can definitely relate to the topic of fashion and beauty, and express their point of view. Several activities could be done at school in order to broach this topic. The only thing that has to be kept in mind when dealing with such a topic is that the boys in the classroom will not be as interested, and need to be involved.

The last theme in the story which seems to be relevant to students' lives is friendship. The story is about the friendship between Mags and Agatha and also between Mags and her husband (Ahern 49 ff.). Friendship is presented as something important in the story. The friendship of Mags and Agatha is more important than the house they are living in: "She moved in with her friend Agatha O'Reilly from school to a dark, dingy bedsit in the heart of the city. It was dirty and grotty, noisy and smelly and within days it felt like home to Mags" (Ahern 67). Although Mags did not like their place, she felt at home due to her dear friend Agatha. Each and every student can relate to the topic of friendship and can share personal experiences.

By way of recapitulation, it can be said that although the short story is told by an over seventy year old woman in the beginning, it focuses on the life and problems of a young girl at the age of twenty years. Students can analyze the problems of Margaret and relate them to their own lives. The young people in



class can discuss the relationship between Mags and her mother and think about their own relationship to their parents. Furthermore, especially the themes friendship, beauty, love, families and gender make the story particularly suitable for students at the age of 15 to 16 of an Austrian grammar school.

#### **3.3.4. Pedagogic Potential of *The Calling***

In the following paragraphs the story *The Calling* is also analyzed in terms of pedagogical issues. Although some of them are similar to the potentials of *Next Stop: Table for Two*, it will be tried to present other angles and benefits of this story.

Language Development: Like in *Next Stop: Table for Two* there are a few words which might be new to students as well. For example, words like *grumble*, *swat*, *blotched* or *brace* (Ahern 49 ff.). Although most of the story is written in standard English, there are again some colloquialisms, especially in the direct speech parts of the story, for instance:

It's me deaf ear you're sittin' beside. [...] What's wrong wit ya? [...]  
Oh Jaysus, sorry, Mags. [...] I didn't realize it was you that done it.  
(Ahern, *The Calling* 49-52.)

Although such colloquial sentences should not serve as a model for the language production of the students, it might be interesting to have a look at these authentic phrases. Furthermore, the past simple tense or the past perfect tense could be introduced or revised at school when reading this story. Teaching grammar is usually successful if a suitable context is provided or, as Hedge argues, “[c]ommunicative language teaching sets out to involve learners in purposeful tasks which are embedded in meaningful contexts” (71). As the story provides a meaningful context, the following paragraph from the story could be picked as an example for teaching the use of past perfect tense:

He *had been* [emphasis added] like an excited child himself when he found out about the pregnancy. He *had picked* [emphasis added] her up and danced her around the living room of their new home, then quickly put her down again with worry, afraid of hurting her and the baby. They *had finally managed* [emphasis added] to gather the money together to buy their first home in a new housing estate of brand-new three-bedroom homes in Cabra, Dublin. They *had spent* [emphasis added] the first few years of their married life working all the hours under the sun to help pay for the house, and now they would have an addition. (Ahern 74)

What students can learn from the story *The Calling* additionally, is how linking words are used successfully in a written text (e.g. while, but, as, as though, so, etc.). The teacher might introduce other linking devices in one of the lessons in addition to those appearing in the short story. It is important for students to remember some of those linking words because they are very crucial for the cohesion and coherence of written texts. Therefore, if students remember some of those words, they can improve their own writings.

Cultural Enrichment: From the story *The Calling* students can learn a lot about Ireland, Irish culture and Irish people. There are a few themes in the story which are typically Irish as it was already mentioned above. Just to mention one example: one of the themes which can be said to be specifically Irish is that concerning “big families”. The family in the story consists of mother, father and six children (Ahern 49 ff.). The question which needs to be considered is *Why are big families typically Irish?* The answer is that children have always been seen as a blessing in Irish history. Already in the Irish constitution families are explicitly stated to be most important:

The State recognizes the family as the natural primary and fundamental unit group of Society, and as a moral institution possessing inalienable and imprescriptible rights, antecedent and superior to all positive law. (*Irish constitution*, Article 41, 1.1.)

The birth rate in Ireland is still higher compared to most other European countries:

If we exclude the Republic of Cyprus, with the largest ideal family size in each age group, the Northern European countries have the highest ideals, and within this group, Ireland has the highest levels, showing ideals of more than 3 children for the oldest people. (Testa 9)

At school students could get to know something about the Irish history and about times when children were needed to help their parents and at which times big families have become a problem (e.g. Irish famine). If students grasp the importance of families in Ireland and familiarize themselves with facts about the Irish famine, they can find out a lot about the Irish history. After learning about those historical issues students might understand Irish patriotism, or Irish culture in general, a bit better.

Secondly, religion seems to play an important role in the main protagonist's family of the story. They go to church every Sunday and the main characters pray to God many times, for instance in this part: "Mags threw her eyes up again and mumbled questioningly to the Good Lord" (Ahern, *The Calling* 49). Furthermore, they talk about God: "Ah, yes, but our Lord does want young Margaret to find a suitor so she doesn't grow old a shamed woman. And unless the Lord requires her to be a nun there is no need for her to be without a man" (Ahern 56). Students can learn that religion plays an important role in Ireland. Religion and the importance of God are also mentioned in the Irish constitution (*Irish Constitution*, amendment of 1995). The teacher might teach some historical facts about the church of Ireland as well.

Thirdly, there are names in the story which do have a Celtic background (e.g. O'Reilly) (Ahern 60). Teachers could establish a relationship to the Celtic heritage of the Irish nation and explain it to their students. Or teachers could talk about famous places or sights of Dublin as the story is set in Ireland. To learn something about the Celtic background or Dublin will definitely have a positive influence on the students' cultural understanding of Ireland as well.

Personal Enrichment: The personal enrichment of students can be seen in the identification of the students with the main character. Similar to *Next Stop: Table for Two*, students can again establish an emotional relationship to the protagonist. They can empathize with Margaret and her obligatory beauty sessions. Furthermore, students can present their own opinion and share their thoughts. In addition, if the teacher provides some background information students can improve their knowledge about Ireland and the Irish culture (big families, religion, marriage, etc.) or Dublin.

Critical Thinking and Interpretation Ability: As stated in chapter 2, literary texts often have deeper meanings which students need to explore (Thaler 24). When reading *The Calling* only on the surface, one may not recognize the gender topic, but it can be identified when doing a close reading of the short story. Teachers could encourage students to think critically about this topic. The following quotation from the story could be a matter of discussion at school: “Mags had sometimes wished, while sitting for her mother, that she had been born a man. There were few or no rules, fewer expectations” (Ahern 54). In addition, students are invited to think critically about the beauty ideal that is conveyed in the story. They should form their own opinion about these topics.

Benefits for CLT: Similar to the story above, a broad variety of speaking activities and discussions are also suggested by this story. There are many topics which can be viewed critically and students can argue their own point of view (gender, families, beauty etc.). Furthermore, a number of post-reading activities are possible, as the story invites to do further investigations about general topics like gender, fashion, beauty or mother-daughter relationships. Writing prompts can be given as well. For example, students could write an inner monologue of Mags and her feelings. Or students could write a letter from Mags to her mother, when she is living abroad, telling her about her new life.

### **3.4. Résumé**

Summing up, I want to come back to the title of this third chapter, which is *Teaching Cecelia Ahern's contemporary short stories*, and to clarify what has actually been found out about the advantages of teaching contemporary stories and Cecelia Ahern's stories in particular. First of all, contemporary stories are preferable because students are better motivated to read them than historically dated ones. Furthermore, the comprehension of the plot as well as the characters is usually easier and the language is more familiar and understandable for students compared to traditional classic or canonical literature. *Next Stop: Table for Two* and *The Calling* are adequate because these stories are good examples of the genre (information about the short story genre has been provided in subchapter 3.1.). These stories fulfill the typical genre conventions as they “concentrate on one character, action, place and

time, and select a particular moment of crisis, reversal and insight” (Meyer 61). Both stories consist of a simple plot and a limited number of characters. Another argument why these stories are especially suitable is that the students can relate to the themes of the stories as they deal with love, relationship, family life, beauty and issues of growing-up. Additionally, the stories offer a broad variety of topics for discussions or interpretations, like gender-related issues or discussions about beauty ideals in *The Calling*, public transport or love in *Next Stop: Table for Two* or culture related topics in both stories. Furthermore, Cecelia Ahern’s stories are written in conversational prose and as a consequence the language is easy to comprehend for students and the writing style of the author is relevant to students’ own writing as well. Moreover, Cecelia Ahern is a bestseller author (see Ahern’s Home Page), which might increase the motivation of the students to read fictional works by her.

After these subchapters it should have become clear why short stories are especially suitable teaching material and how they could be introduced in the Austrian grammar school setting. Furthermore, it has been shown why contemporary stories in particular bear a lot of potential for the classroom. These benefits of contemporary stories have been illustrated by the stories *Next Stop: Table for Two* and *The Calling*. In addition, ideas have already been provided for potential tasks for teaching these stories in a CLT classroom. To conclude this chapter a quotation by Thaler is presented. In this quote he mentions several criteria a good short story should fulfill and he gives the following advice when selecting a text for school: “In general, look for a well-placed plot, personally relevant content, well-delineated characters, authentic endings, thought-provoking ideas, emotional appeal” (Thaler 63). It has been shown in this chapter that these criteria are fulfilled by Cecelia Ahern’s stories. In the next chapter possibilities are presented how those short stories could not only be included in teaching but how the themes of the stories, which have been analyzed in this chapter, could be adopted for exam questions and topics for the “New Matura” in Austria.

## **4. Cecelia Ahern's Short Stories and the "New Matura" in Austria**

In this fourth chapter it will be shown how the two stories by Cecelia Ahern (which have been analyzed in chapter 3 above) could be used successfully for the requirements of the "New Matura" in Austria. To begin with, I want to present a quotation by Nünning, which agrees perfectly with my intention of combining a modern, contemporary story with the "New Matura":

Über den Kanon nachzudenken und für eine größere Vielfalt bzw. Offenheit im Bereich der Textauswahl für den fremdsprachlichen Literaturunterricht zu plädieren, mag in Zeiten von Zentralabitur, Bildungsstandards und Kerncurricula müßig erscheinen. Doch gerade vor dem Hintergrund dieser Entwicklungen darf die Kanonfrage [...] nicht aus den Augen verloren werden. [...] Es werden nicht [...] konkrete Titel festgelegt, sondern vielmehr Inhalte und/oder Kompetenzen vorgegeben, die durch die Beschäftigung mit Literatur im Fremdsprachenunterricht behandelt bzw. erworben werden sollen, so dass es noch genug Freiheiten in der Wahl der Texte gibt. (Nünning 40)

This chapter consists of three subchapters. In the first one, some general information is given on the Matura and its new requirements. With the introduction of the "New Matura" or "Zentralmatura" at the AHS as well as the BHS there will be a few changes concerning the task design of the final exam (see BIFIE, *Standardisierte*). These changes are explained in the first subchapter. The second subchapter links the themes of the stories (see chapter 3) to the topics for communication of the "New Matura" in order to show how the stories could serve as valuable input for the oral part of the examination. It is shown that the short stories address a lot of themes which are relevant. The third subchapter provides general information on the so called "pre-academic paper" students have to write for the "New Matura" and it is explained how Cecelia Ahern's stories could be chosen as a topic.

### **4.1. General Information about the "New Matura"**

In this subchapter general information is provided on the "New Matura" in Austria, which makes a few changes necessary in the future. According to the BIFIE, there will be a few developments concerning the Austrian Matura of both the AHS as well as the BHS because modernization and improvement of the

Austrian education system is aspired (see BIFIE, *Standardisierte*). Some schools have already made pilot projects with the system of the “New Matura”, but officially the standardized Matura exams will be introduced at the AHS in 2014/15 and at the BHS in 2015/16. The overall target of the standardized competence oriented Matura is to improve the quality of Austrian schools (BIFIE, *Standardisierte*). It should guarantee fine transparency and comparability of standards between schools as well as exam requirements. Furthermore, objectivity and fairness in terms of evaluation are priorities (BIFIE, *Standardisierte*). In addition, with the “New Matura” it should be possible to make reliable statements about the actual skills and the proficiency of students. Another aim is the comparability of degrees of students all over Europe (BIFIE, *Standardisierte*).

In order to make the “New Matura” standards easy to compare between different schools and school types, it has been decided that the Austrian Matura should consist of three main compulsory parts (see BIFIE, *Standardisierte*):

1. First of all, students are required to write a “pre-academic paper” at the AHS or a “diploma thesis” at the BHS. Students of the BHS can work in a team. Both students of the AHS and BHS need to present their papers at the Matura.
2. Secondly, students need to take three or four written exams of which the following exams are standardized: German, Croatian, Slovenian, Hungarian, Mathematics (AHS) and Applied Mathematics (BHS), English, French, Italian, Spanish, Greek and Latin.
3. The last demand is that students have to take two or three oral exams. The topics students should be able to talk about at the English Matura are the following:

1. Relationships and social networks	13. Art and culture
2. Living and surroundings / environment	14. Media
3. Fashion and trends	15. Communication
4. Alimentation, health and social covering	16. Nature and environment
5. Sports	17. Modern technology
6. School and education	18. Personal future / plans
7. Working environment	19. Intercultural aspects
8. Leisure time (activities, hobbies, interests etc.)	20. Growing up and finding identity (including role models, national identity etc.)
9. Consumer society	21. Politics and institutions of public life
10. Tradition and change	22. The globalised world
11. Transport and tourism	23. Social groupings (minority groups, marginal groups)
12. Cultural aspects	24. Rules, laws, regulations (crime, freedom etc.)

**Table 4:** Communication topics for the “New Matura” in Austria (recommendations of the CEFR) (BMUKK, *Die Kompetenzorientierte 14*, translated into English)

For each of these themes there are several subcategories, for example, topic 8 “leisure time” (Jindra 2):

- 8.1. free time
- 8.2. hobbies and interests
- 8.3. radio, TV, computer
- 8.4. cinema, theatre, concert
- 8.5. exhibitions, museum
- 8.6. mental and artistic activity
- 8.7. sports
- 8.8. press

These twenty-four communication topics from the table above have been developed with the help of the Common European Frame of Reference (CEFR, see Abuja et al.). In general, the CEFR defines important criteria for language learning in the classroom. Its aim is to enable students to deal with daily routine situations communicatively and socially acceptable (for more information see BIFIE, *Kompetenzen*). In this particular case, the CEFR provided helpful information on what students should be able to do in the English language for the “New Matura” and, consequently, the list with the communication topics has been compiled (BMUKK, *Die Kompetenzorientierte*). To come back to the list of topics for communication, it can be said that the topics are quite general. They can be seen as umbrella terms because each of them has several, more



detailed subcategories (Jindra 2). The aim of the Matura is that each and every student should be able to speak quite fluently about these twenty-four topics. The topics can be discussed from different viewpoints and different angles in the lessons at school in order to practice speaking about them. It is useful to discuss texts within the lessons which deal with one or more of these communication topics, in order to provide students with possibilities to practice. That is exactly where Cecelia Ahern's stories come in. Her contemporary stories deal with themes which can be combined with the communication topics recommended by the CEFR. Subchapter 4.2. examines the relevance of Cecelia Ahern's stories for the "New Matura" in more detail. In addition to the relevance for the oral Matura, the short stories could also be used as potential topics or subject matter for the "pre-academic paper" the students have to write. (Subchapter 4.3. provides information on the "pre-academic paper" and explains in what form the short stories could be chosen as a topic for this paper).

#### **4.2. Themes in Ahern's Short Stories and Topics for the "New Matura"**

In chapter 4.1. above, it has been stated that the stories by Cecelia Ahern can be used at the oral Matura. Each short story of the *Every Year* collection is concerned with themes which agree at least to a certain extent with one or the other topic for communication of the "New Matura". In this subchapter possibilities are presented how the themes of the short stories (analyzed in chapter 3) could be relevant for the oral part of the "New Matura" and concrete examples are provided. Before actual examples are presented, it is necessary to clarify the format of the new, standardized oral exam. As regards the oral part of the "New Matura" it is important to know that the format of the questions is always the same. Each task should consist of two parts of the same value (BMUKK, *Die Kompetenzorientierte* 15). The first part is a monologue where students have to talk about one or two pictures dealing with one of the topics of communication (see table in chapter 4.1.) (15). Three bullet points are given which students should deal with during their spoken performance (15). The second part consists of a discussion between the candidate and an interlocutor (15). The task is to speak about a given topic (from the table in 4.1.). Five bullet

points are provided and the task should always be result-oriented (15). Often the result that is aimed for is that the two speakers decide on three of the five bullet points till the end of the oral exam (see examples provided by the BMUKK, *Die Kompetenzorientierte* 31). Furthermore, it is important that all of the tasks go beyond a mere reproduction of knowledge. A transfer of the things which have been learned to a concrete context should be made possible by the task and problem solving should be part of every speaking prompt (15). Only if these aims are achieved it can be said that the tasks are competence-oriented, which is the main target. In the following paragraphs the themes of the stories will be presented again and it will be shown how they are connected to the topics of communication. Furthermore, possible tasks for the “New Matura” are finally presented, which deal with issues which appear in the short stories by Cecelia Ahern. For all of the tasks which are proposed in this thesis, the typical format of the oral exam has been maintained with the competence-orientation constantly in mind. The examples provided by the BMUKK (BMUKK, *Die Kompetenzorientierte*) served as a model for the designing of the tasks.

First of all, the themes of the story *Next Stop: Table for Two* are compared to the communication topics. It was argued in chapter 3.3.2. that the most striking theme of the story is love, i.e. man-woman love-relationships. The main character Lucy is very lonely and is upset at Valentine’s Day that she is the only one who is without a date (Ahern 32 ff.). This theme is related to topic 1 of the oral Matura, which is ‘relationships and social networks’ and also topic 12 ‘cultural aspects’ as the origins of Valentine’s Day and the Irish tradition could be discussed. Concerning topic 1, the teacher can encourage students to talk about the importance of a serious relationship and true love. Students can discuss this issue and provide their own opinion. It could also be discussed if friendship or finding true love is more important for perfect happiness. The short story can, therefore, be seen as a valuable input for discussions about the topic of relationships and social networks of the “New Matura”. In order to provide an example how this discussion about the importance of love compared to relationships with friends could be realized at the Matura, an example of such a task has been conceived:

Topic: „**Beziehungen und soziale Netzwerke**“- Relationships and Social Networks

**I. Individual long turn<sup>1</sup>**



Compare and contrast the pictures.

Discuss how important love and family is and how important friends are.

Present your ideas on how friends could be a compensation for family.

**II. Paired activity**

The MyFamily organization wants to find out how Austrian people feel about their relationships to their partners. According to you, what are the most important things for a stable relationship between men and women?

Discuss the following options:

Trust

Loyalty

Independence

Fun

Support

Decide which of the things mentioned above are most important for a good wife-husband (girlfriend/boyfriend) relationship. Are there any additional things you want to mention?

Photo 1: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Happy\\_family\\_\(1\).jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Happy_family_(1).jpg) ("Happy Family", Date: 16 March 2012, by Catherine Scott)

Photo 2: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dillonpeopleparty.jpg> ("Dillonpeopleparty", Date: 1 January 2011, by Dillonb90)

<sup>1</sup> The term 'individual long turn' is a didactical English term used for international English examinations. The term could be explained by or compared with a longer elaboration on a topic or a picture by a student or person in general. According to staff members of BIFIE the German translation for the term is 'monologischer Teil' (e-mail from BIFIE see Appendix).

Furthermore, the story *Next Stop: Table for Two* is somehow related to topic 20, which is 'growing up and finding identity'. Although the main character Lucy is already around thirty years old, she should be grown-up by that time, she is still single and has not found her true self and is unhappy with her state of being. It can be said that she feels incomplete and is still searching for her true identity and, maybe, she is only able to find it after having found her true love. The topic of identity could be discussed in class as well and it could also be part of the "New Matura". Students might discuss what the most important issues for a person's identity are, is it their job, their partner, their hobbies, their appearance, their character or other things?

Finally, topic 11 'transport and tourism' can be discussed within the classroom on the basis of this story as well. The reason why the topic of communication is relevant here is that the main character goes to work by train every day and she complains about this fact (Ahern, *Next Stop: Table for Two* 32). At school students could discuss the advantages and drawbacks of public transport and commuter trains. Moreover, teachers could talk about the public transport system of Dublin, as this is referred to in the story as well. Students can also share personal experiences they have had with public transport or the people using it. Furthermore, they can talk about the public transport system in their home area. The way this theme of the story might be implemented for the "New Matura" can be seen in the following task:

Topic: **“Transport und Tourismus”- Transport and Tourism**

**I. Individual long turn**



- Compare and contrast the two pictures.
- Evaluate the public transport system in your area.
- Suggest improvements for the public transport system in your area.

**II. Paired activity**

Your school is looking for a British partner school for a student exchange program. You have to prepare a presentation to promote your area as a desirable destination.

Discuss the following ideas:

- tourist attractions
- public transport system
- leisure and sports facilities
- art and culture
- shopping facilities

Decide which of these proposals you would include in a presentation. Agree on three.

Photo 1: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:EMT\\_Castrasua\\_Iveco\\_Irsibus\\_146.JPG](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:EMT_Castrasua_Iveco_Irsibus_146.JPG)  
 (“EMT Castrasua Iveco Irsibus 146”, Date: 29 June 2011, by Braniff747SP)

Photo 2: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BAB\\_659\\_traffic\\_jam\\_100\\_2386.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:BAB_659_traffic_jam_100_2386.jpg) (“BAB 659 Traffic Jam 100 2386”, Date: 9 December 2005, by LosHawlos)

When establishing a link between the story *The Calling* and the topics of communication for the “New Matura” it can be said that it could be linked to five different topics, namely 1 ‘relationships and social networks’, 3 ‘fashion and trends’, 8 ‘leisure time’, 10 ‘tradition and change’ and 18 ‘personal future/plans’. Consequently, the story has a lot of potential for the English language classroom with regard to the “New Matura”. The topic ‘relationships and social networks’ is relevant because the reader is informed repeatedly about the relationship between the main character Margaret and her friend Agatha. Secondly, the rather strained relationship between Mags and her mother is described. Thirdly, the love relationship between Margaret and her husband is an issue in the story (Ahern 49 ff.). All of the students have had relationships to different kinds of people and they can definitely relate to this topic and contribute a lot to a discussion about it.

Furthermore, topic 3 ‘fashion and trends’ on the list for the “New Matura” is addressed in this story as well, as beauty and fashion is an important theme, especially in the parts of the story when Margaret’s mother puts a lot of make-up on Mags’ face in order to make her more attractive to men (Ahern 49 ff.). In class diverse ideals of beauty which have developed over time could be discussed and students can be encouraged to present their own ideas of what is beautiful. Another issue that could be dealt with in relation to beauty and fashion is the topic of school uniforms. This topic is broached in many English school books and can be included when dealing with the fashion topic. The pros and cons of school uniforms could be discussed, for instance.

Topic number 18 ‘personal future/plans’ can be discussed on the basis of the story because the main character had very different plans for her future than her parents. Talking about and dealing with this issue could lead to a discussion about the students’ own plans for their future. Another topic of communication related to the story is number 10 ‘tradition and change’. What could be discussed are the roles of the women in the story. A lesson at school could focus on the role of women in society in the past compared to the present. The focus of that lesson could be on the changes that have occurred over time and what was traditionally thought to be typically feminine or women’s work. The

change from the notion of 'women behind the stove' or 'angel in the house' to the 'working mother', which has happened over time could be dealt with. Moreover, gender mainstreaming issues could be discussed as well. To provide an example how the discussion about the women of the story and their statements (e.g. "men didn't need to make the same effort for women" in Ahern 54) could be realized in the oral exam, the following task has been created, which is concerned with gender roles and gender equality:

Topic: **"Tradition und Wandel" - Tradition and Change**

### **I. Individual long turn**



- ☒ Compare and contrast the pictures.
- ☒ Discuss how the role of women has changed over time.
- ☒ Explain why gender equality is important.

### **II. Paired activity**

It is tried to establish gender equality in all areas of Western society. Several areas are discussed which should be made equal for men and women.

Discuss the following areas:

- ☒ Sports/Money
- ☒ High positions in jobs/Money
- ☒ Religion



☒ Education/Universities

☒ Language

Decide which of these issues or areas should be worked on immediately. Agree on three.

(BMUKK, *Die Kompetenzorientierte*)

Photo 1: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Van\\_Gogh\\_-\\_B%C3%A4uerin\\_am\\_Herd\\_sitzend.jpeg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Van_Gogh_-_B%C3%A4uerin_am_Herd_sitzend.jpeg) („Van Goth: Bäuerin am Herd sitzend“, Date: June 1985)

Photo 2: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Woman\\_working\\_at\\_desk.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Woman_working_at_desk.jpg) (“Woman working at desk“, Date: 22 February 2010, Source:

<http://flickr.com/phoos/highwaysagency/6021680441/sizes/l/>, by: Highways Agency)

The final theme related to the story *The Calling* concerned with one of the topics for the oral Matura, is ‘leisure time activities and hobbies’. This theme is addressed when the main character spends her leisure time playing Bingo together with her friend (Ahern 49 ff.). Students could talk about the hobbies and activities they like doing in their leisure time. If they have discussed this topic in detail at school the following task should be no problem at the oral exam of the English Matura:

Topic: **“Hobbys und Interessen”- Leisure time (activities, hobbies, interests etc.)**

### I. Individual long turn



☒ Compare and contrast the pictures.

☒ Speak about your favorite hobbies or leisure time activities.

☒ Say if you have enough time to practice your favorite leisure time activities after school.



## II. Paired activity

You want to do sports together with your friends. Discuss which of the following outdoor activities you would prefer. What are advantages or disadvantages of the activities?

Discuss the following ideas:

- Volleyball
- Inline skating
- Swimming
- Hiking
- Cycling

Decide which activities you would like to do most and say why. Agree on three of the activities you would like to do with your friends.

Photo 1: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bingo\\_\(4579844255\).jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bingo_(4579844255).jpg) ("Bingo", Date: 30 April 2010, by istolethety from Hong Kong)

Photo 2: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tough\\_return,\\_365.35.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Tough_return,_365.35.jpg) ("Tough Return", Date: 9 February 2008, by Steve McFarland)

Summing up, it can be claimed that it does make sense to teach these short stories in the Austrian EFL classroom as they may provide a lot of valuable input for speaking practice with regard to the "New Matura" as well as a range of subjects and topics for essays and discussions. As shown in the example tasks in the boxes above, the themes of the stories are directly relevant for the requirements of the oral examination at the "New Matura". It is beneficial for students if short stories are discussed at school which deal with themes that agree with the communication topics because when speaking about them in class, students do automatically practice for the oral exam. Literature is, therefore, a profitable way of introducing and dealing with topics for the oral examination at school within a meaningful context. Students can practice speaking about the relevant topics with an interesting story in mind, which will be much more interesting. Finally, it can be said that teaching literature makes sense as it provides helpful materials for practicing for the oral exam. A choice of concrete activities that might be planned for the classroom in order to discuss the relevant themes of the stories in view of the "New Matura" is given in the lesson plans in chapter 6.

### **4.3. Ahern's Short Stories and the "Pre-Academic Paper"**

After having discussed the value of the short stories for the oral examination of the "New Matura" in Austria, this subchapter focuses on another new requirement of the "New Matura", namely the "pre-academic paper". In this chapter it will be considered how short stories in general and Cecelia Ahern's stories in particular could effectively be used in view of the "pre-academic paper". First of all, it is essential to provide some general information on the "pre-academic paper" as this is one of the new demands of the "New Matura". Students of both AHS and BHS are required to write a paper for their Matura from 2014/15 onwards (BIFIE, *Standardisierte*). As already mentioned in chapter 3, literature teaching is more suitable in grammar schools compared to vocational schools and, therefore, the focus of this subchapter is concerned with the "pre-academic paper" of the AHS.

The "pre-academic paper" has to be written autonomously by each student outside of teaching time (§34 Abs. 3 Z 1 SchUG, in BMUKK, *Vorwissenschaftliche Arbeit*). For the final exam students have to hand in their paper as well as present and discuss it. In the AHS students have to produce a "pre-academic paper" encompassing about 40, 000 to 60, 000 characters (including space characters and abstract; excluding foreword and the table of contents) (see information on BMUKK, *Vorwissenschaftliche Arbeit* 5). That would be about 20 to 25 pages Din A4 (or 6,400- 8,500 words).

What is the aim of the "pre-academic paper" and why has it been introduced? The "pre-academic paper" should demonstrate that students are prepared for starting an academic study at a university or polytechnic ("Fachhochschule") (5). Therefore, at the time of the final exam students should write a paper and prove that they are able to do research on a given topic, to search for suitable sources, to quote correctly, to make interpretations, to work systemically, methodologically and with reference to secondary literature and to be able to develop an argument (BMUKK, *Vorwissenschaftliche Arbeit* 5). The paper should demonstrate that the student has acquired the following (non subject-specific) competences (20):

- ❖ Learning and working techniques (research, citation, excerption, structure...)
- ❖ Ability to formulate a relevant question
- ❖ Critical usage of sources
- ❖ Autonomy and accuracy in thinking and working
- ❖ Objectivity in the analysis
- ❖ Logical, critical, joined-up thinking
- ❖ Traceable argumentation
- ❖ Semantic and idiomatic correctness
- ❖ Working on texts meeting formal and content criteria

The topics for the papers are chosen by students themselves, but in agreement with their supervisor (BIFIE, *Standardisierte*). If the supervisor agrees, the paper can be written in one of the foreign languages the student is learning (BMUKK, *Vorwissenschaftliche Arbeit* 14). Students can choose their topic of interest but it should be somehow linked to the educational goal of their specific school type (BMUKK, *Vorwissenschaftliche Arbeit* 5). In the AHS, the topics can either be creative, sportive, scientific or about a language (including linguistics or literature) (6). That is where the stories by Cecelia Ahern come in. If literature teaching is part of teaching in class, which it should be at grammar schools, students are free to choose a literary topic for their “pre-academic paper” (6). If the students have dealt with short stories within the classroom, they know how to work with a literary text. One option is to choose the short stories by Cecelia Ahern as primary texts for the “pre-academic paper”. Students could write an introduction about the author and then analyze the plot of selected stories, and provide a contextualized reading. The short story collection *Every Year* would be suitable as the stories are quite easy to understand and to analyze, compared to other stories or books which are more complex and deal with difficult or historically dated issues. Furthermore, the language and the style of Cecelia Ahern’s stories are not too difficult for learners of English. The stories are written in conversational prose and, therefore, students are able to cope with this task.

When students have decided on a topic for their “pre-academic paper” and found a teacher who is going to supervise it, students need to decide on one (or more) specific research question(s) for their topic. Research questions should be as concrete as possible and should be manageable within the given

resources (finance, methods, sources) and time-frame (BMUKK, *Vorwissenschaftliche Arbeit* 6). The topic can either be formulated in terms of a hypothesis, or a research question (6). If a student chooses the short story collection by Cecelia Ahern and focuses on the content-level and the characters or the language (discourse-level) of selected stories, a potential hypothesis for a paper would be the following: *Analyzing Cecelia Ahern's short stories: plot, characters, language*. In the guidelines by the BMUKK about the "pre-academic paper" an example for a concrete research question is given; "die Frage [...] nach der Aktualität eines literarischen Werks für die Lebensrealität am Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts" (BMUKK, *Vorwissenschaftliche Arbeit* 8). If a student wants to focus on the themes of the stories and elaborate on how the themes can be viewed to be relevant in today's world and society, this research question could be adapted to Cecelia Ahern's stories. The following research question could be posed: *How do the contemporary short stories by Cecelia Ahern relate to the reality of life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?* If this research question is chosen, students could, for example, focus on the story *The Calling* and write about the relevance of gender as presented in the story and relate it to the 21<sup>st</sup> century western society. Or they could choose the theme of beauty of the same story and write about the beauty ideal of today compared to ideals of beauty in the past and consider which problems have arisen because of such new beauty ideals (e.g. anorexic youth). Another idea would be to read the short story *Twenty-four Minutes* and discuss the mental state of the main character and relate it to such issues as stress, depression or mental illnesses, which seem to have increasing relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It is very interesting to investigate the different possibilities of using short stories like the ones by Cecelia Ahern for the purpose of writing a "pre-academic paper". Besides recommending the analysis of literature for the paper, teachers should integrate literature in their own lessons as well. If literature has been dealt with repeatedly at school, students will be more interested and they might also feel more confident in choosing a literary topic for their paper. How one of the stories by Cecelia Ahern could be taught at school in detail is shown in chapter 6. Before the actual lesson plans are presented, some basic principles

of teaching and some general information about the lesson plans are provided in the following chapter.

## **5. Planning to Teach Ahern's Short Stories**

The preceding chapter focused on possible exam questions, which could be developed in connection to the short stories by Cecelia Ahern for the “New Matura” in Austria. This chapter does not focus directly on the Matura anymore, but deals with teaching the stories at school. Before presenting detailed lesson plans in chapter 6, this chapter provides some basic information on crucial things to consider when planning lessons about the stories. This chapter is divided into two subchapters. The first one (5.1.) focuses on basic principles of teaching. As the name indicates, the subchapter is on pedagogic basics that need to be fulfilled or kept in mind when creating good, successful lesson plans. The second subchapter (5.2.) provides some general information on the lesson plans which are presented in chapter 6. This subchapter is more specifically dealing with the approach that is going to be the basis for the lesson plans of chapter 6 and, in addition, it is also explained which activities need to be included in the lesson plans in order to make them adequate for a CLT classroom (e.g. presentation of communicative tasks, integration of all four language skills etc.). The aim is to present good, challenging and interesting lesson plans in chapter 6, which meet with the requirements of communicative language teaching and, therefore, this chapter focuses on the preparations necessary.

### **5.1. Basic Principles of Teaching**

As stated above, this chapter focuses on the basic requirements which need to be fulfilled by each good lesson plan. First of all, according to Hedge (205), teachers need to establish certain goals for the teaching of reading in the classroom. Such goals could include the following: ability of reading a range of texts in English, ability of using different reading strategies, improving language competence, ability of interpretation, ability of critical reading and the capacity “to develop awareness of [the] structure of written texts in English and to be able to make use of, e.g., rhetorical structure, discourse features, and cohesive devices in comprehending texts” (205). Goals should always be a priority in

teaching and the best method to reach the goals one wants to achieve is to plan lessons well. That is of course also true of literature lessons. Thaler argues the following:

[...] a literature unit should have a clear structure. One approach is based on pre-while-, and post-reading activities [...]. A similar way of structuring a reading lesson is the global-to-detail approach, which proceeds from a global comprehension of the text to a more detailed one and may end in a deeper understanding. (Thaler 54)

For the lesson plans of chapter 6 it has been decided to stick with the pre-while-post structure. This structure is also dealt with in Hedge (210 ff.), Lazar (83 ff.) and Nünning (71 ff.). According to Nünning this three-phase-model helps to master the complexity of the reading procedure: “das Drei-Phasen-Modell [versucht] der Komplexität des Lesevorgangs gerecht zu werden und Lernende Schritt für Schritt im Textverstehen zu schulen” (Nünning 71). Each of the three parts aims at a certain goal (Lazar 83 ff.). While the first part (the pre-reading) focuses more on the motivation of the students and the background information which needs to be provided, the second part (the while-reading) focuses on reading strategies, the plot and the characters (Lazar 84-85). The last phase (the post-reading) often aims at enabling students to make their own interpretations of texts (86). Moreover, the post-reading tasks can also focus on language-specific issues or particular themes of the literary text, which would be interesting to discuss (86). Several activities could be planned in order to reach the goals of each phase. In the following paragraphs those three stages and their possible activities are described in some detail.

### Pre-Reading Phase

The first lesson about a literary text should always consist of adequate activities for the so-called pre-reading stage. One of the aims of the pre-reading phase is that students get familiar with the topic of the text they are supposed to read (Lazar 84). Teachers should raise the interest of students at that stage (Hedge 210). Secondly, students should get familiar with the cultural and historical background of the text before they start reading (Lazar 84). Thirdly, teachers can also introduce some genre specific information in the pre-reading phase in order to prepare their students for the analysis of the text at a later stage (84).

Hedge (210) lists several main targets of the pre-reading stage. She is of the opinion that in the pre-reading phase teachers should enable students to “establish a reason for reading; express an attitude about the topic; review their own experiences in relation to the topic; activate existing cultural knowledge; and become familiar with some of the language in the text” (210). The aim of the pre-reading stage basically is to activate background knowledge and to increase the motivation of the students (Lazar 84). Now that the aim and the goal of that stage have been analyzed theoretically, some possible activities for the classroom are presented in the next paragraph.

A broad range of activities is possible in the pre-reading phase. First of all, brainstorming is one of the activities used a lot in connection to pre-reading (Maley, qtd. in Bagherkazemi and Alemi 9). It helps students to activate existing knowledge and to attune to the topic of the story. Presenting pictures which show something relevant or related to the story is another possibility (Lazar 84). Furthermore, teachers can provide learners with two different texts of two different genres (e.g. poem, short story, novel) in order to make students aware of the differences and typical characteristics of each genre (see Maley, qtd. in Bagherkazemi and Alemi 9, or Lazar 84). In addition, Hedge (210) states that questions could be posed which are connected to the topic of the text students are going to read. Another possibility is to provide students with statements and ask them to agree or disagree with them and to discuss them (Lazar 84). In addition, quizzes could be prepared to activate students' knowledge or vocabulary (Hedge 210). Quizzes can have a great potential concerning motivation. In the pre-reading stage students could also be provided with necessary vocabulary which they might need to fully understand the text they have to read (210). Furthermore, Lazar adds activities like introducing the title of the story and asking the students to elaborate what they think it suggests or what the story might be about (84). Moreover, students could be asked to predict the story content from only three or four words from any page of the literary text (Lazar 84). How these pre-reading activities can be put into practice is shown in chapter 6.

To sum up, the main target of the pre-reading stage is to activate useful knowledge and language proficiency students have already acquired (Hedge 210). The activation of knowledge and language (e.g. vocabulary) helps students to understand the text more easily (210). Additionally, Thaler (48) states that “it is important to provide the necessary background information to the reader to facilitate understanding”. To raise interest is an important aspect as well, as motivation plays a crucial role when reading literature (as has been stated in chapter 2.2. already).

### While-Reading Phase

The second phase of the three-stage procedure is the while-reading. The main aims of while-reading activities were listed, among others, by Lazar (85). He claims that while-reading should help students to understand the plot, the characters, the vocabulary, the language and the style of the text (85). Therefore, it can be said that this phase is all about “leading learners to engage in and understand the text” (Maley, qtd. in Bagherkazemi and Alemi 9). While-reading activities should always be set when students are still reading the text or in-between the first and the second reading. According to Bagherkazemi and Alemi (9) and Gajdusek (29), activities should be set which demand students to pay attention to the point of view from which the story is told, the setting and the characters of the story. The students are kept attentive and active through the activities of the while-reading phase (Hedge 210).

While reading a story, activities could be set which require the students to identify the point of view from which the story is told (Gajdusek 29). What is crucial is that students always need to defend their opinion. Furthermore, students might be asked to write down all of the characters while reading the text and add their characteristics, the relationships and conflicts between them (Bagherkazemi and Alemi 9). Additionally, they could record the place where the story is set and they could note down when the story might be set approximately and explain why they think so. Moreover, while reading students can find answers to the questions posed in the pre-reading stage or teachers could provide a chart where students have to fill in specific information of the text while reading (Hedge 210).



The general goal of while-reading activities is to achieve that reading becomes an interactive process (Hedge 210). Therefore, it can be said that while-reading activities “aim to encourage learners to be active as they read” (210).

### Post-Reading Phase

The last stage which should help students to grasp the text is the post-reading phase. The main aim of post-reading activities is to “engage in parallel activities which extend the theme and allow learners to voice their own opinion, feelings and thoughts” (Maley, qtd. in Bagherkazemi and Alemi 9). First of all, there is almost always a discussing activity because it is very beneficial if students discuss what they have read (Lazar 86). Moreover, while-reading tasks can be compared and discussed in this phase. Furthermore, activities could be provided which deal with the themes of the story (Lazar 86). In this phase students are allowed to interpret the story line and the characters (86). Or they could be asked to write personal endings to the literary text or to write inner-monologues of the characters, for example (86).

Lazar (86) and Hedge (211) mention several concrete activities which could be planned for the post-reading phase. Lazar (86) lists the following issues for post-reading activities: “[i]nterpretation of the main themes of the story [...] [h]elping students to understand the narrative point of view [...] [w]riting activities [...] [d]iscussion”. So first of all, a possible activity would be to conduct a debate about the text in which students present their own opinion and thoughts (86). It is a very important part of the post-reading stage to allow for the students’ personal opinion (86). Students are welcome to share their thoughts about the text and engage with each other (Hedge 211). Furthermore, students can also do role-plays and slip into the role of the main characters and empathize with them (Lazar 86). Additionally, teachers could choose certain parts of the literary text where a specific grammatical issue appears (e.g. tenses, conditional, collocations) and focus on it during a lesson. This aside, a lesson could focus on the language of the text in more detail, concerning register, vocabulary or style (Hedge 211). In addition, Bagherkazemi and Alemi (10) mention that student writing is an important part of the post-reading stage. Literary texts can serve as input for creative writing (Thaler 56). For instance,

students could invent their own ending to the story, write inner-monologues or letters to one of the characters (57). Apart from the discussion and the writing activities, which have been mentioned by Hedge, Thaler and Bagherkazemi, Lazar suggests more complex activities. He includes tasks which ask students for an interpretation, or a close reading of the text. One specific task Lazar (86) mentions is to ask “students to note down any lexical areas which might take on a symbolic meaning in the story”. Concerning the comprehension of the narrative point of view, Lazar suggests writing a character description of the narrator (86). Such tasks might be quite challenging for some students; nevertheless, those tasks are useful for practicing how to analyze literature in detail.

Summing up, the post reading phase can focus on quite complex tasks. The main aim is to go into more detail with the text, concerning the language, the themes, the plot or the characters of the story (Thaler 52). Students should be encouraged to express their own opinion and feel free to interpret the text.

### Summary of the Activities of the Three Stages

Finally, a table from Thaler (52) is presented, which contains the main activities which could be planned for the phases of the three-stage procedure. A selection of those tasks can be found in the concrete lesson plans of chapter 6.

Pre-Reading Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Predicting from title, cover, chapter headings, pictures</li><li>• Information on author, date of publication</li><li>• Introduction to plot, topic, main characters, key words</li><li>• Brainstorming, heartstorming, opinion poll</li><li>• Upside down comprehension</li><li>• Writing a short text (on key word, key passage, first sentence)</li><li>• Provocative statement, vote a quote, pyramid discussion</li><li>• Visual media</li><li>• Acoustic impulse</li></ul>
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While-Reading Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening (CD, teacher's voice)</li> <li>• Checking against predictions, guiding questions</li> <li>• Completing charts, grids, flow charts, profiles</li> <li>• Visualizing, drawing</li> <li>• Stopping at key points and reflecting</li> </ul>
Post-Reading Stage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detailed comprehension</li> <li>• Close analysis</li> <li>• Text production</li> <li>• Imagining, changing</li> <li>• Visual, auditory, scenic transformation</li> </ul>

**Table 5:** Summary of the activities of the reading stages (Thaler 52)

## 5.2. General Information about the Concrete Lesson Plans

First of all, it will be tried to clarify which models and approaches or theories (which have been presented in chapter 2) are going to be used for the lesson plans in chapter 6. As it has been stated by Zafeiriadou (3), the personal growth model is “an attempt to bridge the gap” between the language and the cultural model. As the personal growth model seems to be positioned somewhere in the middle, it seems to be the right choice for my lesson plans. What makes this model particularly interesting for teaching is that it “highlights the need of the student’s personal engagement with the reading of literary texts” (3-4). It can be said that it is aimed at students who are active, participating, interested and engaged (which a good lesson plan should make possible) (4). With the personal growth model it is also possible to plan sections in which students are free to interpret the literary text. Teaching literature is not about finding one correct answer but about personal reactions to a text, and it is interesting to see how students perceive literary texts (4). These arguments are what make the personal growth model very interesting for teaching. Furthermore, this approach seems to be beneficial for a CLT classroom as students need to be active and communicative. What is more, the personal growth model suggests a student-centered classroom setting, which is also preferred in CLT.

Zafeiriadou (4) claims that “using literature as a resource or the knowledge of literature suggests a less academic though no less serious approach”. When using the personal growth model as the basis for a lesson plan, literature is sometimes used as a resource for discussions and for writing prompts. As Zafeiriadou (4) argues that is not necessarily negative, because a beneficial lesson does not always have to focus on close literary analysis but it can also use literature as a resource and literary texts can also be seen as input for further activities. If students are able to understand the text and communicate about it, the aim of a CLT classroom is fulfilled (4).

Zafeiriadou (4) further argues that “the approach to be used is a blend of Carter and Long’s (1991) personal growth model and [...] learner-centred approach.” I basically agree with this statement. However, some of the activities of my lesson plans are somewhere between the approaches. A vocabulary task will be developed about the literary text, which is typical of the language-based approach. In the language-based approach “texts are exploited for the teaching of vocabulary or structures or language manipulation” (Zafeiriadou 3). Furthermore, there will be activities in my lesson plans which focus on the Irish culture. Those activities will agree with the cultural model. Therefore, it can be said that although I basically focus on the personal-growth model and the student-centered theory, there are aspects in my lesson plans which are more closely related to the language-based and the cultural model. However, according to Carter and Long (2), the best option is to find a compromise between the three models, so I think the choice of tasks in the lesson plans (see chapter 6) is quite suitable.

For the lesson plans it is not only important to know which approach is going to be used, but it is also crucial to think about concrete aims to be reached (which students have to work on). Tricia Hedge (195) claims in her book that the reading activities of literature lessons should be concerned with reading purposes students will have to deal with in real life. She lists the following purposes for reading:

...to get information to respond to curiosity about a topic, to follow instructions to perform a task, for pleasure, amusement, and personal enjoyment, to keep in touch with friends and colleagues, to know what is happening in the world, and to find out when and where things are. (Hedge 195)

The short story collection by Cecelia Ahern fulfils the purpose of reading for pleasure, amusement and learning. In order to make the reading of the short stories more purposeful for school, teachers should provide students with activities which might be important for the development of their language skills. The relevance and connection to the students' future is another motivational aspect for the students (Hedge 195). Therefore, for the lesson plans in the next chapter an attempt will be made to include reading purposes for real-life situations. Students should have the feeling that what they do makes sense and is important for their future. Furthermore, Mangelsdorf (119) claims that "[s]tudents will benefit most from literature if it's taught in a classroom that stresses integration of skills". Therefore, in the following lesson plans one can find activities targeting all four language skills.

## **6. Teaching the Short Story *The Calling* in the EFL Classroom**

In this chapter concrete lesson plans for teaching the short stories by Cecelia Ahern are presented. The lessons I have conceived are planned according to the three-stage procedure (see chapter 5 above). Furthermore, tasks have been chosen which are suitable for the CLT classroom. The reader-response approach is the basis of the lesson plans and, therefore, the lessons are student-centered. Another important aspect of the lesson plans is that they should not be sequenced one after the other but there should be approximately one week between the first and the second lesson. The reason for this decision is that the students need some time to deal with the story. Lessons two, three and four can then be taught consecutively.

The first lesson deals with pre-reading activities only. The students should get activated and encouraged to read the story. It is essential for the pre-reading stage that the students' interest is aroused as they should be motivated to actually finish reading the story at home.

Since the homework of the first lesson is to finish reading the story, students will already be familiar with the main characters and the plot in the second session. The second lesson focuses on while-reading tasks. The students need to read some parts of the story again during the lesson in order to fulfill the tasks (e.g. find specific vocabulary in the text, write down information about characters, find themes in the story).

Until the third lesson the students will have familiarized themselves with the story. The third lesson goes into some detail with a few of the themes of the story which are "typically Irish". This lesson already consists of post-reading activities.

Finally, the fourth lesson deals with a broader social topic which is addressed in the story, namely gender. This lesson consists of post-reading activities only. The post-reading activities of this lesson ask for students' opinion and critical thinking.

## 6.1. Lesson 1

### Aims and objectives:

The lesson lasts 50 minutes and is aimed at 15-16 year old students of a grammar school. The main aim is to familiarize students with the short story *The Calling* and to present important vocabulary. The students should get well-prepared for the reading so that they can fully understand the text and use it for further discussions in the next session.

### Lesson plan:

Time	Content	Skills	Interaction format	Material	Comment
15 min.	<b>Info about author:</b> What do you know about Cecelia Ahern? → Watch 10 minutes of <i>PS: I Love You</i>	speaking	plenum	handout	1
5 min.	<b>Clarifying title:</b> Read a short paragraph of the story, what does "the Calling" mean?	reading	individual, then plenum discussion	handout	2
10 min.	<b>Guessing the content:</b> Read the quotation and guess the content: "Mags wanted to find a man with shiny shoes, a man who didn't sweat for a living. If such a creature existed in Kilcrush."	speaking	group work (3-4 students)	handout	3
15 min.	<b>Inventing content:</b> Students read one page of the story, they write about 80-100 words on what they think the story might be about → to be handed in!!	writing	individual	handout	4
5 min.	<b>Start reading the story</b>	reading	individual		5
	<b>Homework:</b> finish reading the story	reading	individual		6

Comments on the lesson plan:

1) With the help of the first activity in the first lesson students should be made familiar with the author of the story very briefly. Cecelia Ahern is a young bestseller writer (see Ahern's Home Page) and students might know some of her famous novels like *PS: I Love You*, for instance. The introduction of the author is planned for the pre-reading stage because it could be a motivational factor for students if they are able to establish a connection between Cecelia Ahern's stories and books they know. A short sequence of the film *PS: I love you* could be watched with the students to awaken their interest.

2) The second activity is to read a short passage from the story in which the term *the Calling* appears. The aim is to clarify what this term means in the context of the story because the students should be able to understand the title.

3) One of the typical tasks of pre-reading stages is guessing the storyline of a story. In task three students should guess what the story might be about with the help of a quote (and the passage that has been presented in 2) in groups of three or four. It is more interesting to let students guess the content from only a small piece of information because they will come up with very different and creative stories. Students should discuss different possible plot-lines in groups of three or four.

4) At this stage of the lesson students should now write down what they personally think the story might be about. After the discussion in groups they should have different ideas of what happens in the story. When they have finished writing they should hand in their texts.

5) The last few minutes of the lesson are spent reading the beginning of the story. Students read individually and silently and hopefully get interested so that they continue reading the story at home.

6) The homework is to finish reading the story. The students have one week to read it.



Handout 1:

## Cecelia Ahern and *The Calling*

### 1. Cecelia Ahern

What do you know about her? Do you know any books she has written? Where is she from? Which of her novels has made her especially popular? Do you know why? Write down a few things about the author:

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### 2. Read the following paragraph of the story. What does “the Calling” mean in this context?

*Ah, yes, but our Lord does want young Margaret to find a suitor so she doesn't grow old a shamed woman. And unless the Lord requires her to be a nun there is no need for her to be without a man. The world isn't designed for woman without a man and as far as we know she hasn't received the Calling. (Ahern 56)*

Examples of *CALLING*

- ❖ He had always felt a *calling* to help others.
- ❖ He experienced a *calling* to enter the priesthood

(<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/calling>)

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### 3. Look at the following quotation and discuss in your group what the story could be about. Take notes.

*Mags wanted to find a man with shiny shoes, a man who didn't sweat for a living. If such a creature existed in Kilcrush. (Ahern 61)*

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**4. Read the following passage of the story and write about 80-100 words** what you think the story might be about and what the end of the story could be (you can suggest either a positive or a negative ending). You might use the notes you have taken during the discussion before.

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'Have you received the Calling?' Jackie, her twenty-year-old brother had asked her with a smirk on his face.

'Margaret! Margaret!' Her younger brother had called her name playfully in the background.

To Mags's surprise, her mother started laughing and then immediately smacked her son over the head with her handbag for joking about the Lord. Only Mags's father watched her face curiously.

'Em, no, I haven't,' Mags whispered in embarrassment. He simply nodded his head once as he absorbed this information and then continued on walking. The rest of the family trudged on after him, overtaking Margaret, whose feet remained firmly fixed to the spot with pure terror and shame. She knew what they were all thinking: if she hadn't received a calling like Kathleen from down the road and she hadn't courted a man at the age of twenty then maybe she was one of those 'funny ones' that cut their hair short and moved to the city.

'Hurry along, Margaret,' her mother had spat angrily, even more disappointed. 'The Lord waits for no one, especially not twenty-year-old girls who dilly-dally.'

Margaret's heartbeat quickened at her mother's tone and she ran to catch up with her family.

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## 6.2. Lesson 2

### Aims and objectives:

For this lesson students should have read the whole short story for homework. The aim of the lesson is to discuss the plot, the characters and the themes of the story with the students and to get them engaged in while-reading activities. While doing the activities the students need to read some parts of the story again. The tasks of this lesson plan should improve students' understanding of the story.

### Lesson plan:

Time	Content	Skills	Interaction format	Material	Comment
10 min.	<b>Brainstorming:</b> on the blackboard (characters, plot)		plenum		1
5 min.	<b>Oral summary:</b> A volunteer briefly sums up the plot of the story	speaking/ presentation	individual		2
10 min.	<b>Reading comprehension task:</b> True/False/ Not given	reading	individual		3
10 min.	<b>Vocabulary task:</b> Find specific vocabulary in the story (students might use a dictionary)	vocabulary	pair work	handout	4
10 min.	<b>Themes:</b> Discuss the themes of the story	speaking	groups of 3 or 4	handout	5
5 min.	<b>Comparing:</b> Compare the examples for the themes	speaking	plenum		6
	<b>Homework:</b> create a mindmap of all the characters (+ 2-3 bullet points)		individual		7

Comments:

1) The first task of this lesson is a plenum brainstorming about the characters of the story. Individual students should volunteer to write the names of the characters and some information about them as well as main issues of the plot onto the blackboard. The aim is to activate what the students have read and to prepare them for further tasks.

2) After the plenum activity one student should briefly summarize the plot of the story orally. This task develops the speaking abilities of the student who is presenting and the listening skills of the others.

3) The third task is a reading comprehension task. It is consistent with the format of the 'true/false/not given' tasks of the "New Matura" (see *Make your way to the written Matura*).

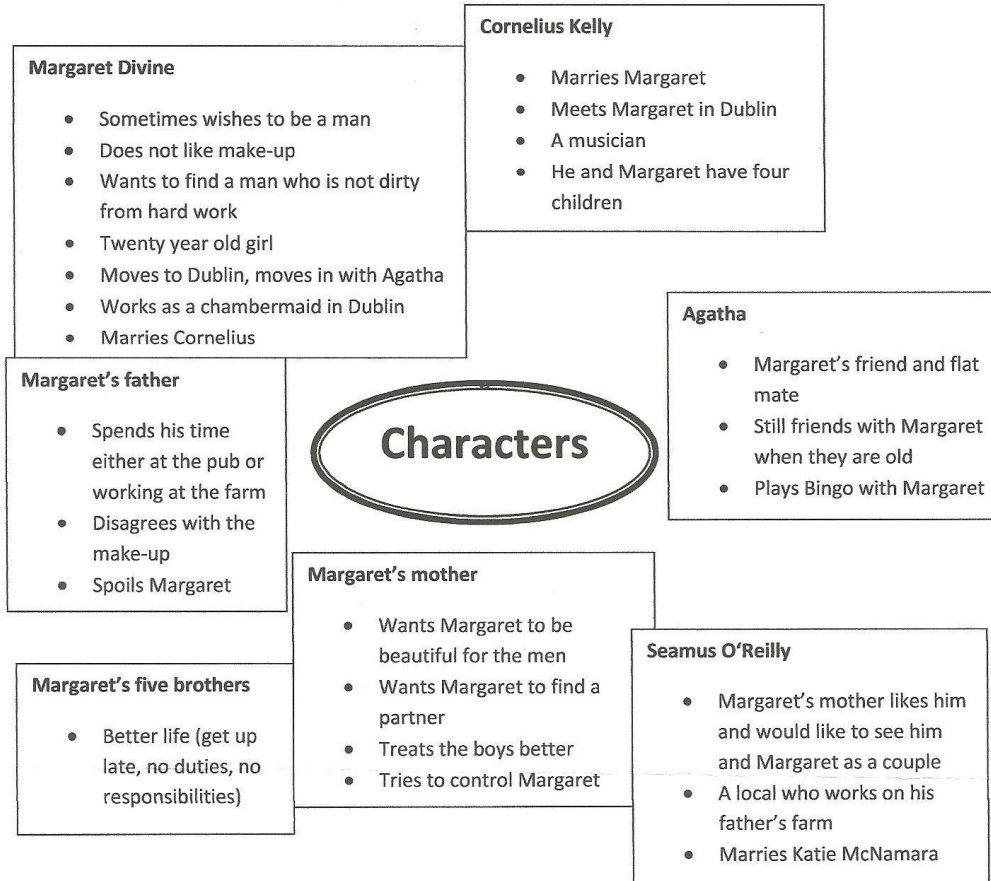
4) Task number four of this lesson is a vocabulary task. In order to present another while-reading activity a vocabulary task has been created, which demands the students to go back to the text and read certain passages again. They need to find specific vocabulary in the text and find out what the words and phrases mean in the specific context (with the help of a dictionary).

5) The fifth task is a group activity. Students in groups of three or four should identify the major themes in the story and write them on the handout. They should write down sentences in which issues of a theme appear. This is again a while-reading task and the aim is to make students aware of the deeper meaning of the literary text.

6) The results of task number five are compared and discussed. Students can read out their example sentences and explain if or why they think that they are related to major themes.

7) The homework for this lesson is to create a mindmap of all the characters in the story and add two or three bullet points with information on the characters. The students will be able to fulfill this task as the brainstorming at the beginning of the lesson pointed out a lot of issues the students can use for their own mindmap.

The aim of this task is to provide a summary which the students can have a look at and to call the story to mind again at a later stage. A sample mindmap would be the following:



**Figure 3:** Mindmap of the characters of *The Calling*

Handout 2:

***The Calling* in detail: plot, characters, themes**

**1. Reading comprehension task:**

Decide whether the statements (1-10) are true (T), false (F) or not given (NG) in the text. Put a [x] in the correct box.

		T	F	NG
1	Margaret and Agatha are playing Bingo every weekend. (NG)			
2	Twice a week Margaret would have to endure the make-up session: on Saturdays and Sundays. (F)			
3	Seamus O'Reilly was the name of the local who worked for the farm of Margaret's father. (F)			
4	Margaret's father spoilt her and Margaret's mother despised her for it. (T)			
5	Margaret's mother never joined in singing the songs of her father. (NG)			
6	Mags was not sure if a man existed in Kilcrush who didn't have to sweat for a living. (T)			
7	Margaret moved in with Agatha in Kilcrush. (F)			
8	Margaret married Cornelius in a church in Dublin without anyone of her family being there. (F)			
9	Cornelius played piano at the bingo hall till he got arthritis. (T)			
10	After her husband's death Margaret moved in with her friend Agatha again. (NG)			

**Table 6:** Reading comprehension task (adapted and amended from *Make your way to the written Matura*, [http://www.oebv.at/downloads/matura2009/mywa/mywa\\_reading\\_matura\\_true\\_false.pdf](http://www.oebv.at/downloads/matura2009/mywa/mywa_reading_matura_true_false.pdf))

**1. Vocabulary task:** Try to find out what the words and phrases in the list below mean in the context of the story. You may use your dictionary.

grumble (line 3): \_\_\_\_\_

swatted away (line 10-11): \_\_\_\_\_

read her lips (line 30): \_\_\_\_\_

vicious circle (line 51): \_\_\_\_\_

banged around (line 67): \_\_\_\_\_

gasp in awe (line 123): \_\_\_\_\_

dabbed at her eyes (line 127): \_\_\_\_\_

blood boiled (line 140): \_\_\_\_\_

pair her off with (line 161 ): \_\_\_\_\_

envied (line 95): \_\_\_\_\_

**2. Theme analysis:** In your group try to identify the major themes in the story and provide example sentences in which issues of a theme appear:

Theme 1:

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Theme 2:

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Theme 3:

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Theme 4:

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Theme 5:

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### 6.3. Lesson 3

#### Aims and objectives:

After the first lesson which focused on pre-reading tasks only and the second lesson which focused predominantly on while-reading tasks, two lessons follow which focus on post-reading activities. The aim of the third lesson is to familiarize the students with Irish culture (cultural enrichment!). Some typical Irish themes are analyzed as well as an Irish song is presented. Furthermore, students are allowed to present their own opinion and views on several issues.

#### Lesson plan

Time	Content	Skills	Interaction format	Material	Comment
15 min.	<b>“Irish” vocabulary:</b> Introduce vocabulary linked to Irish characteristics	vocabulary	pair work	handout	1
15 min.	<b>Examples in the text:</b> Find examples of the characteristics in the text + compare vocabulary task and the examples	reading (skimming a text)	individual	handout	2
10 min.	<b>A song:</b> Listen to the song and fill in the missing words + compare afterwards	listening	individual	handout	3
5 min.	<b>Discussion about Irishness:</b> Irish features of 1 and 2 and song	speaking	pair work	handout	4
5 min.	<b>Past Perfect Tense:</b> Revision of this tense with the help of a paragraph from the story	grammar	individual-then plenum	handout	5



Comments:

1) The first task of lesson three is a vocabulary task. The students should find the words of the box in the dictionary and write down a definition for each of them. All of the words are said to be linked to the characteristics of Irish people. After finding the definitions the students should decide on their own which characteristics they think are typical of Irish people and why.

2) Activity two focuses on some of the characteristics of box 1 again. Students should now find examples for them in the text, which means that they have to go back to the text again and read the relevant passages.

3) The third task is a listening comprehension activity. The song has been chosen because it suits perfectly with what is considered to be typically Irish. Furthermore, I tried to find a listening task in order to provide tasks addressing all four language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking). Students should listen to the song and fill in the gaps.

4) Another task of this lesson is to have a look at the characteristics which have been dealt with before and link them to the song. Which characteristics or Irish features appear in the song as well (e. g. drinking all day long)?

5) Finally, a paragraph of the story is used to introduce (or repeat) the Past Perfect Tense (additional handouts could be given to the students for homework!).

Handout 3:

**“Irishness” in the short story *The Calling***

**1. Vocabulary task:** Use your dictionary and try to find a definition for all of the characteristics of Irish people, which are mentioned in the box below.

Irish people are said to be:

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honest, imaginative, industrious, deeply religious, superstitious, deeply rooted in the native soil, hospitable, faithful, ingenious, imperturbable, witty, pub loving

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Now that you have read the story, which characteristics of the box are typical of Irish people? Why? Write a few sentences.

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**2. Irish people in the text:** Try to find examples for the following characteristics in the text. Write down the examples you can find.

Deeply religious: \_\_\_\_\_

Deeply rooted in the native soil: \_\_\_\_\_

Hospitable: \_\_\_\_\_

Pub loving: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. “They would stay up until all hours listening to his stories and listening to his songs” (Ahern 59).** This quote is taken from the story you have read. It alludes to another major feature typical of Irish people, namely love of singing and storytelling. Listen to the following song about Ireland and fill in the gaps of the song text.

(see *Song for Ireland*, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kz\\_dHcduUTU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kz_dHcduUTU)):

<p>DUBLINERS: SONG FOR IRELAND</p> <p>Walking all the day near tall towers where falcons build their nests Silver wings they fly, They know the call for _____ in their breasts, Saw Black Head against the sky Where twisted _____ they run down to the sea Living on your _____ shore, Saw summer _____, I asked for more, I stood by your Atlantic Sea, And I sang a _____ for Ireland</p> <p>Drinking all the day, In old _____ where fiddlers love to play, Saw one touch the bow, He played a reel that seemed so grand and gay, I stood on dingle _____ and cast, In wild foam we found _____ bass, Living on your _____ shore, Saw summer _____, I asked for more, I stood by your Atlantic Sea, And sang a _____ for Ireland</p>	<p>Talking all the day, With true _____ who try to make you stay, Telling _____ and news, Singing _____ to while the time away, Watched the _____ salmon run, Like silver _____, darting in the sun, living on your _____ shore, Saw summer _____, I asked for more, I stood by your Atlantic Sea, And I sang a _____ for Ireland</p> <p>Dreaming in the night, I saw a land where no-one had to _____, Waking in your dawn, I saw you _____ in the morning light, sleeping where the falcons fly, They twist and turn all in your air-blue sky, Living on your _____ shore, Saw summer _____, I asked for more, I stood by your Atlantic sea, And I sang a _____ for Ireland</p>
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**4. Discuss with your partner:** Which of the Irish features mentioned in point 1 and 2 also appear in the song? Write down some examples:

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**5. Past Perfect Tense:** Have a look at the following paragraph of the story and underline the Past Perfect Tense:

He had been like an excited child himself when he found out about the pregnancy. He had picked her up and danced her around the living room of their new home, then quickly put her down again with worry, afraid of hurting her and the baby. They had finally managed to gather the money together to buy their first home in a new housing estate of brand-new three-bedroom homes in Cabra, Dublin. They had spent the first few years of their married life working all the hours under the sun to help pay for the house, and now they would have an addition. (Ahern 74)

Formation of the Past Perfect Tense:

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## 6.4. Lesson 4

### Aims and objectives:

The fourth lesson will be the last one about the story *The Calling*. It deals with post-reading activities and goes into some detail with the story. It focuses on a social topic which can be recognized in the story when reading it in depth, namely 'gender'. The aim of the lesson is to make the students aware of social differences between men and women in the story as well as in the real world.

### Lesson plan:

Time	Content	Skills	Interaction format	Material	Comment
5 min.	<b>What is the gender discussion about?</b> Warm-up discussion about gender	speaking	plenum	handout	1
15 min.	<b>Pictures:</b> Discuss the pictures, answer the questions	speaking	pair work	handout	2
10 min.	<b>Quotations of the story:</b> Discuss the quotations in your group	speaking, note taking	groups of 3,4 students	handout	3
15 min.	<b>Information gathering:</b> Online research		pair work	handout	4
5 min.	<b>Writing a letter:</b> Write from Mags' perspective (→ finish at home!!)	writing	individual	handout	5

Comments:

1) This fourth lesson is about the very up-to-date topic 'gender' and 'gender mainstreaming'. In a plenum discussion at the beginning of the lesson it should be discussed whether students have already heard something about the topic, and if they have, what they have heard.

2) After the introductory discussion, task number two shows four pictures which should be discussed by the students (in pairs). There are again some guiding questions on the handout the students should talk about.

3) The third task finally establishes the relationship between that topic and the short story *The Calling*. On the handout students find some quotations from the story which could be related to the gender topic. The students should discuss the quotations in some detail and also present their own point of view on them.

4) The fourth task is an information gathering task. Students should go online to a specific website which deals with 'gender mainstreaming' and 'gender mainstreaming strategies'. The students should read the information on the website and write down the most important information (which will be discussed afterwards). The reason why this task has been chosen is that new media can be and should be included in modern teaching as well, or as Nünning (81) states: "In allen Phasen der Beschäftigung mit literarischen Texten ermöglicht der Einsatz des Internet neue, motivierende Arbeitsformen und damit weitere methodische Vielfalt".

5) If there is still time during the lesson the students can start writing a letter. The letter should be written from Margaret's perspective and should be addressed to her mother (see handout below). The students should finish the letter at home.

Handout 4:

## ***The Calling and Gender issues***

### **1. Warm-up: Plenum discussion**

What do you associate with gender? Why is gender a recurring topic?

What have you already heard about that topic? In which different areas do gender discussions come up?

### **2. Discuss the following pictures:**

- ❖ What can you see in the pictures?
- ❖ What is striking when looking at the pictures?
- ❖ What are the roles of the men and the women in the pictures?
- ❖ Do you have any idea why men and women are represented like this?
- ❖ Do you feel it is unfair? Why?



Photo 1: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Woman\\_working\\_at\\_desk.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Woman_working_at_desk.jpg) ("Woman working at desk", Date: 22 February 2010, Source: <http://flickr.com/photos/highwaysagency/6021680441/sizes/l/>, by Highways Agency)

Photo 2: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nursery\\_For\\_Working\\_Mothers-the\\_work\\_of\\_Flint\\_Green\\_Road\\_Nursery,\\_Birmingham,\\_1942\\_D9069.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nursery_For_Working_Mothers-the_work_of_Flint_Green_Road_Nursery,_Birmingham,_1942_D9069.jpg) ("Nursery for working mothers", Date: 1942)

Photo 3: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fotothek\\_df\\_roe-neq\\_0006641\\_027\\_Portrait\\_eines\\_arbeitenden\\_Mechanikers\\_beim\\_6\\_L.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fotothek_df_roe-neq_0006641_027_Portrait_eines_arbeitenden_Mechanikers_beim_6_L.jpg) ("Portrait eines arbeitenden Mechanikers", Date: 16 May 1954, by Deutsche Fotothek)

Photo 4: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kyoko\\_Nakayama\\_and\\_Tevi\\_Troy\\_20080917.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kyoko_Nakayama_and_Tevi_Troy_20080917.jpg) ("Kyoko Nakayama and Tevi Troy", Date: 17 September 2008)

### **3. Read the following quotations from the short story and try to answer the questions below:**

"Mags often felt like questioning her mother on why it was that men didn't need to make the same effort for women" (Ahern 54).

"Mags had sometimes wished, while sitting for her mother, that she had been born a man. There were few or no rules, fewer expectations and what appeared to be no pressures [...]" (Ahern 54-55).

"The world isn't designed for a woman without a man and as far as we know she hasn't received the Calling" (Ahern 56).

- ❖ Mags wanted to ask her mother why men do not need to make the same effort. Which effort does Mags mean? Why does she feel that way?
- ❖ Why does Mags rather want to be a man? What could be the reasons for her wish? Which rules are there for women which do not exist for men in the text?
- ❖ What does the last quotation mean in the context of the story? How would you explain it?

#### 4. Information gathering

Browse the internet for further information on 'gender mainstreaming' and write down some important information:

(see *Gender, Woman and Health*, also read the section on 'gender mainstreaming strategies', <http://www.who.int/gender/mainstreaming/en/>.)

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#### 5. Writing exercise

Imagine that you are Margaret. Write a letter to your mother complaining about how unfairly you are treated compared to your brothers. Tell your mum that you have the same rights as your brothers and tell her what changes you expect her to make. Write about 120-150 words.

### **6.5. Additional Tasks for *The Calling***

In this subchapter additional activities for the story *The Calling* are presented, which couldn't be included in the lesson plans above due to limited space.

First of all, a post-reading discussion could be planned dealing with the hobbies and interests of students. In the story it is briefly mentioned that Agatha and Margaret play Bingo together (Ahern 49 ff.). It could be discussed within a lesson what the students like doing in their leisure time. Several leisure time activities could be discussed (e.g. playing volleyball, inline skating, swimming, hiking, watching TV, shopping).

Furthermore, another possible post-reading activity would be a role play. Students could get together in pairs. One of the students could imagine being Margaret, the other would impersonate the mother. The students could be given about ten minutes to think about a dialogue between Margaret and her mother and write it down. Two or more pairs could present their dialogue afterwards.

What could be discussed additionally is the topic of beauty. The teacher could present several pictures which are quite contrastive. Pictures of the "Venus of Willendorf", as well as of supermodels of today could be presented. With the help of these pictures it could be discussed how the ideal of beauty has developed and changed over time. Discussions about the beauty ideal that is conveyed in the story as well as discussions about the beauty ideal of today could be started. Furthermore, it could be discussed how and in what way the beauty ideal might be harmful for teenagers or young women (e.g. anorexia).

### **6.6. Possible Tasks for *Next Stop: Table for Two***

First of all, what could be discussed in relation to this story is the cultural significance of Valentine's Day in Ireland and compared to Austria. The teacher could present information on the historical background of this specific day, and students could be asked to read an informative text themselves (e.g. *All Saints Parish*, [http://www.allsaintsbrookline.org/celtic\\_saints/valentine.html](http://www.allsaintsbrookline.org/celtic_saints/valentine.html)). After reading this text the teacher could tell the students when Valentine's Day was first celebrated in Austria. A discussion could then be started why Valentine's



Day has been an important day in Ireland, whereas it is not in Austria, where the main interest for keeping the tradition alive is making profit.

Secondly, the public transport system of Dublin could be dealt with. One possibility would be to ask the students to plan a tourist tour through Dublin (with the help of the Internet). The students could be asked to plan exactly how the tourists should travel around (by bus, tram, underground, hop-on hop-off bus etc.). Moreover, a plenum discussion could be staged about public transport in general. Students could do a brainstorming activity on the blackboard. Each and every student could get up and write down either an advantage or a disadvantage of public transport.

Over and beyond this, the teacher can present some pictures in class showing either happy families or a photo of friends hanging out together. Students could discuss in pairs what they see on the pictures (similarities, differences etc.). The teacher could prepare questions students should discuss concerning the importance of friendship or family life for perfect happiness. They could discuss what is more important to themselves (family or their friends) and they could discuss in how far friends could be a compensation for family.

A writing activity might also be suggested. Students could be asked to find a creative ending for the story. The story has an open ending with Lucy and the man meeting each other at the restaurant. Students could imagine what might happen to the two of them and whether they end up together or not. Secondly, students could be asked to write an inner-monologue about Lucy's feelings and dreams.

Last but not least grammatical or vocabulary tasks could be designed. Vocabulary in general could be picked from the story which students do not know, or collocations could be introduced. There are several collocations in the story, like the following: fall asleep, keep open, keep head down, make your way (Ahern 32 ff.), and students can learn their meaning within the context of the story. The teacher might add some other important collocations which would be interesting and valuable to know for students.

## 7. Conclusion

In this thesis the role of literature in language teaching at Austrian grammar schools was explored. Furthermore, it has been tried to prove that teaching literature, or the short stories by Cecelia Ahern in particular, can be beneficial for the language development as well as the social and emotional development of the students. Although it has been stated that a lot of articles and books were written about the benefits of teaching literature (like language development, cultural enrichment, personal enrichment, authenticity, etc.) in the last few years, literature is still used quite rarely in teaching nowadays. One reason for that might be that some teachers still think that teaching literature is a waste of time and they prefer spending the limited time they have for teaching on relevant linguistic issues regarding the final exam. However, it has been shown in this study that teachers can combine the pleasure of reading literature with competence-oriented teaching. Cecilia Ahern's short stories, for example, are beneficial in view of the requirements of the "New Matura" as themes and topics are dealt with which are listed in the table of "topics for communication" for the "New Matura" in Austria. Consequently, it can be said that teaching literature can be both pleasure and provide knowledge and learning at the same time. Moreover, it can be argued that the main priority in classroom teaching should not always be on 'skills' and on preparing students for the skills required at the "New Matura". Sometimes the focus of teaching should be on broader social or pedagogic topics like the personal development of students. Teaching literature can definitely play a crucial role in advancing the personal development. According to Carter and Long (3), "[h]elping students to read literature more effectively is helping them to grow as individuals as well as in their relationships with the people and institutions around them". The discussion about what is more relevant in teaching, language proficiency or personal, individual growth was dealt with in a chapter of this thesis as well. It has been considered which different approaches and theories of teaching literature there are and it has been assessed which of them are to be commended in today's language learning classroom. Two methodological approaches need to be emphasized, namely the 'personal growth model' of Carter and Long, and the 'reader-response approach' of Van, as these two models seem to be especially

beneficial. Unlike other approaches, these models do not focus on the language learning process alone but include the close analysis of the themes (which is of course also interesting and important). Additionally, these models also consider and aim at the development of students as individuals including their emotions and thoughts.

Concerning the choice of literary texts it can be said that there are good materials available in university libraries and also online. What teachers need to look out for is literature students can identify with, literature that deals with topics students are interested in and literature which complies with the language proficiency of the students. If these basic criteria are fulfilled, students will be (mostly) motivated to read and as a consequence of the motivation they will also learn a lot. Cecilia Ahern's short stories are in the center of this thesis and they have been analyzed in detail in order to show that the language of the stories can be coped with by grammar school students (advanced grade). The themes and topics are interesting and students can identify with them. Furthermore, the stories have also been linked to the requirements of the "New Matura" and it has been shown that they offer a broad range of activities for the CLT classroom. Some examples have been provided as to how the topics of the stories could be linked to the topics of communication for the "New Matura" in Austria. The introduction of the "New Matura" in Austria is a very important topic for young teachers like me. Therefore, it has been illuminating to consider Cecilia Ahern's short stories in view of the requirements for the "New Matura". Other stories by Cecilia Ahern, or other literary texts in general also offer possibilities for classroom teaching and it would be interesting to deal with some of them in future studies.

I hope that my thesis has shown how the short stories by Cecilia Ahern can be implemented at Austrian grammar schools in a useful and beneficial way. It has been demonstrated that literature can have positive effects on students in very different and multifaceted areas. The thesis has also shown that literature teaching aims at important goals. I think that I have acquired a lot of useful knowledge for my future job, while working on this thesis. My hope is that this thesis can encourage a few young teachers to teach literature at grammar

schools as it has a huge potential for the language development as well as the personal growth of students, and it may also prepare students for the oral part of the “New Matura”. With these words I want to conclude my thesis and wish everyone good luck who wishes to apply the lesson plans I have conceived in their own classrooms.

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## 11. Appendix

### 11.1. *Next Stop: Table for Two*

Lucy leaned her head against the window and felt the vibrations as the DART pulled away from the station. Her head repeatedly bumped against the glass as the carriage trembled. Like her, it seemed tired and fed up as it rattled along the tracks, shuddering occasionally as if almost falling asleep and then suddenly jerking awake in fright. Lucy tried to keep her eyes open. She sank down into the uncomfortable seat and looked around the carriage.

Couples.

Everywhere.

She decided to keep her eyes closed. The rhythmic rocking of the train comforted her and she felt herself drifting away. The train shuddered, Lucy's head jerked and her eyes flew open. They were stopping again. There was something about the train that she felt she connected with. It felt to her as if it too was tired of doing the same thing every day; tired of going up and down the same route all day, only being permitted to stop and start, stop and start and never fully gather speed. The monotony of it all made Lucy yawn.

She understood how it felt being surrounded by crowds of people every day, never physically being alone but all the time feeling it. She knew what it was like being used to get people from A to B, helping them get to where they wanted to go but never being able to join them.

Lucy watched as a couple stood up from their seats and walked hand in hand from the train. Once on the platform, the man draped his arm over his partner's shoulder and kissed the top of her head. She responded by wrapping her arm around his waist, tucking her hand into the back pocket of his jeans and resting her head on his shoulder. They fitted together perfectly. Like a jigsaw. They strolled towards the exit as if time didn't exist. Beside them on the platform stood a smartly dressed man with a beautiful bouquet of flowers in his hand. He was looking at his watch anxiously and studying the train timetable. Lucy imagined the woman he was meeting, waiting for him elsewhere, nervously looking at her watch wondering if he was going to show.

*Go*, Lucy screamed in her head to the train. There was urgency in the voice in her head. She didn't want to see any more displays of love.

As though the train were in tune with her thoughts, the doors slid closed slowly and it started moving again. Still not yet in the city, the train sped happily past golden fields, knowing that it didn't have to stop for at least a few more minutes. Lucy smiled as she looked at the view, at the greens, browns and golds all blurring together with the speed. Minutes later the reins were pulled from behind and the train screeched on the tracks, its cry of frustration at having to slow down.

Slow down, stop and start again.

The doors slid open slowly, tiredly, and invited another couple inside. The man sat beside Lucy, the woman across from him. She seemed the same age as Lucy. She

smiled at her partner, her eyes twinkled. He blew her a butterfly kiss and winked. Her face softened even more and she continued to watch him as if he was the most interesting thing in the world. Their knees touched in the centre of the booth; they were touching and smiling so much that Lucy had to close her eyes again.

Finally it was Lucy's stop. She jumped up before the train began to slow down, pushed her way through the kissing knees and waited at the doors. They opened slowly for her. Thanks, see you again tomorrow, she whispered quietly to the train, and stepped out into the cold afternoon. She buttoned up her coat to protect herself from the bite of the cold February wind, she felt the breeze slap her across the face, stinging her ears and numb her nose. She shoved her hands deep into her pockets, kept her head down and made her way to work.

The day was 14 February. Valentine's Day. Lucy worked as a waitress in a French cuisine restaurant in Dublin's city centre. They were going to be incredibly busy that evening, and there had been the annual argument about who would work that night. Everybody wanted the night off to spend with their loved ones but they knew better than to ask Lucy. Of course she would work. Her position was the same every night but especially tonight, on a night that celebrated the joy of loving. Everyone knew that.

Lucy had never been in love before. She would be thirty-one next month and she had never been in love. She had never had that look the girl beside her on the train had painted all over her face; she had never had anyone blow her kisses or wait anxiously with a bouquet of flowers while worrying that being late would mean precious time being stolen away, like the man at the train station. She had never received a bouquet of flowers. She had never known what it was like to feel a kiss on the top of her head through her hair. She had never shared that look. Never shared that feeling. She had never looked into anyone's eyes and seen forever with him, never felt such a connection that made her want to be with him and only him for the rest of her life. She had never been with anyone who immediately made her start thinking of her future babies' names. She didn't dream of fairytale wedding days with princess brides and handsome Prince Charmings.

But she *knew* about all these things. She knew they existed. She read about them in books and saw them on trains. She listened to friends and grew up with parents in love. And better yet she *believed* in love. But the older she got, with every passing year that failed to bring her a soulmate, she believed less and less that love was for everyone. Just for the lucky ones. And the longer she went without it, the more she saw it every day until it smothered her, wrapping its arms around her, like great big bear hugs of loneliness.

She hurried down Grafton Street and ignored the men and women standing together but alone outside Bewley's Cafe, stamping their feet to stay warm and looking at their watches nervously. She pushed through the crowd gathered around the flower stall outside the Westbury Hotel and received mouthfuls of orchids, lilies and roses as people bumped into her in their rush to get home. She scurried by the entrance to Stephen's Green Shopping Centre hearing loud greetings, hugs and kisses as other halves arrived at the meeting place. Everywhere people looked at their watches. They all had somewhere to be.

People spilled out of card stores, with little paper bags in their hands. Big red love hearts hung in shop windows grabbing at the heartstrings of passers-by and pulling them in as though they were puppets. Lucy's head and heart sank, her heavy heart causing her feet to drag against the ground. She turned right into her restaurant along Stephen's Green. A Valentine's Day special menu was displayed outside the door. More big red bubbly hearts.

At 6.30 p.m. the door opened as the evening's first customers arrived. Lucy greeted them at the desk with a smile bright enough to light the room.

'Hello and welcome,' she smiled happily at them.

'Thank you. Table for two?' the man asked politely looking around the empty restaurant.

'Have you a reservation?' she smiled.

'Yes. McCullough for six thirty.'

Lucy scanned through the list. 'Of course, Mr McCullough. May I take your coats?' She took their coats, led the couple to the table and handed them their menus. Always bringing people from A to B but never being able to join them.

The door opened and shut again as man and woman stepped inside, their cheeks and noses rosy from the cold.

'Hello and welcome,' Lucy said perkily.

'Thanks. A table for two, please,' the man said, looking around the practically empty restaurant.

Lucy smiled through gritted teeth. 'Have you a reservation?'

'Yes, it's under O'Hanlon,' he said peering over the desk onto her page. She scanned down through the list and ticked their names.

'May I take your coats?' She took their coats, led the couple to their table and handed them their menu. *The same routine all day every day.*

The door opened and closed.

'Hello.' Lucy smiled.

Stopping and starting, stopping and starting all over again. Never allowed to go at her own speed or take another route.

'Table for two, please,' the lady said, and a lump formed in Lucy's throat. Her hand began to shake as her finger leafed through the reservations book. *Table for two.* The words taunted her.

'Have you a reservation?' she asked as happily as she could.

'The name's Cooper,' she replied.



Lucy ticked their names. 'May I take your coats?' she asked the pair. She took their coats, led them to their table and handed them their menus. The door opened and closed.

'Welcome.' Lucy smiled at the boy and girl before her. She guessed they were around sixteen.

'Thanks,' the boy said shyly. There was a silence as they all just looked at each other. The girl nudged the boy in the ribs. 'Ow!' he yelped, and then realized he was supposed to speak. 'We were wondering if we could eat here.'

The girl smirked.

'I mean, can we have a table?'

'For ...?' Lucy couldn't say it. She couldn't say the words.

They looked at each other confused by the question. 'Well ... for us.' He pointed at himself and the girl.

Lucy smiled.

Then the girl added, 'A table for two, please.' He looked at her proudly for saying that.

Lucy's smile faded. 'What's the name?'

They looked at each other uncertainly again and he spoke. 'Eh, Shane and Michelle.'

Lucy smiled again. 'OK, Shane do you have a reservation?'

He looked shocked, 'Ah, shit no. Did I need one?'

Michelle elbowed him in the ribs again and hissed, 'I told ya to book it, ya eejit.'

'Hold on a minute,' Lucy said, studying the reservations. 'I can give you a table, but we have a reservation for eight p.m. It's six forty-five p.m. now, which doesn't give you very much time,' she explained.

Shane's eyes widened. 'Sure it never takes me more than an hour to eat me dinner at home.'

'Fair enough.' Lucy grinned. 'Can I take your coats?'

Michelle looked at Shane uncertainly. 'Eh, yeah,' Shane finally decided for the two of them, and they peeled off their denim jackets. Lucy led them to their table in the centre of the dining room and handed them their menus.

She went around the tables lighting the candles. What was it about candles that was supposed to be romantic? Could a flickering flame add an atmosphere of love? Lucy wondered if a candle should be lit for a table for one, or, if one person sat down at a table for two, should she extinguish the flame? She of all people should know.

'Excuse me,' Shane called her as she passed.

'Yes, sir,' Lucy smiled.

"Sir!" He looked at Michelle and laughed. She giggled too. He pointed at the menu, 'What's a whores devvers?'

Lucy smiled. 'Sir, the hors d'oeuvres on the menu are a selection of appetizers.'

'Oh.' Shane reddened. 'Well we won't have that, then, we'll both just have steak and chips.' They both looked nervous.

'It's not on the menu, though,' Michelle added quickly.

'I'm sure that won't be a problem,' Lucy said, taking their menus. 'How would you like your steak cooked?'

They looked at each other again. 'Eh, fried?' Shane spoke up.

Lucy bit her lip. 'Rare, medium or well done?'

'Oh.' He reddened. 'Well done.'

'The same,' Michelle said quietly.

Lucy never had anyone to learn things with like Shane and Michelle. Together they were going for a meal by themselves for what appeared to be the first time. They were learning about new foods, the different language used and how to speak up and ask for things themselves. Lucy had never shared moments like that with anyone. Everything she had learned was by herself. Of course she had been out on dates and had boyfriends but none of them were long-term and none of them helped her discover anything new about the world or about herself. Apart from the fact that they didn't love her and that she didn't love them.

She scanned the restaurant. There were ten tables for two so far with ages ranging from sixteen to sixty. All different kinds of love: new love, old love, stolen love, couples sitting in silence, others unable to keep their hands off each other, some in serious conversation, some laughing loudly. Lucy's eyes filled again and she scanned the reservations hoping for no more tables for two.

Clarke x 6.

*Ha! Thank god,* Lucy thought, the mist clearing from her eyes.

But when the six arrived she realized it was three couples, and there was nothing worse than a couple in love except *three* couples in love. The words *table for two* echoed and bounced around her lonely head as she overheard snippets of fights, tears, laughter and love from each table. *Surrounded by crowds of people all night, never physically being alone but all the time feeling it.*

Standing at reception, she heard the door open and close. Her heart dropped. She was tired, her eyelids were drooping and her feet and back were sore. How could the positive energy of so much love in the room drag her down so much?

'Welcome, sir.' Her colleague stepped in for her as she made herself busy by crossing out reservations and updating the sheet.

'Hello. A table for one, please.'

And there it was. The voice she had so desperately needed to hear. The voice of a stranger that would lift her out of her dark spell. Her head shot up, her eyes twinkling with happy tears. She was faced with a man aged what she would guess to be in his mid- to late thirties.

He looked her way and gave her a small smile. He wore a long navy-blue cashmere coat, with a brown Burberry scarf wrapped around his neck. His hands looked cold as he rubbed them together and glanced around the restaurant. Lucy's heart danced with delight at the man's request. A young man. Ordinary-looking. No rings on his fingers. *A table for one!* He had said it proudly, strongly, as if there was nothing at all wrong with it. Lucy loved to hear it roll off his tongue. She wanted to hear it again. *A table for one! Halleluiah!*

'I'm sorry, sir, if you don't have a reservation I'm afraid we can't accommodate you,' her colleague apologized.

'What?' Lucy snapped, her head turning to face her colleague. It was as if the record she was dancing to in her head had abruptly scratched to a stop.

'Lucy,' he hissed, pulling her away from the desk and out of earshot of the gentleman. 'What are you doing?'

'We have one table free,' she defended herself. She pointed down the restaurant at it. There it was by the window with a beautiful view of the park.

'That's a table for two,' her colleague said, dismissing her. 'We'll fill that by the end of the night.' He took a step back towards the desk to the man.

'We'll fill it now,' Lucy said far louder and sharper than she had intended.

'Excuse me one moment, sir.' Her colleague spun around on his heel with a face like thunder, 'What are you doing?' he hissed. 'Are you mad? We'll make more money with a table for two.'

More money. Lucy's eyes filled with tears. 'No.' Her voice shook quietly. No, she couldn't let this happen. She couldn't let being alone lose out to being in love. While she was lost in thought she heard the door open, she looked up and saw a couple approaching them.

'A table for two, please.' The man smiled.

'Do you have a reservation?' her colleague asked.

'No, we don't.' They smiled stupidly at each other. 'This was all very last-minute.' They gazed into each other's eyes, their fingers entwined.

'Certainly, allow me to take your coats.' He held out his hands and said very softly to the lone man still waiting at the desk. 'I'm very sorry, sir, we're fully booked.'

Tears spilled over the brim of Lucy's eyes. She felt the warm salty water run down her cheeks and drip from her chin. No one noticed her. No one ever did.

She just rattled along, shuddering occasionally through life, doing the same routine, helping people, bringing them from A to B but never joining them, stopping and

starting, starting and stopping. Never being allowed to go her own pace or change route.

Well not this time. She dried her eyes.

'Excuse me, sir?' she called out loudly to the man pulling the door open.

He stopped and turned.

'There seems to be a mistake,' she said politely to the couple before her. 'This man was here before you and he will be seated at our last table. I'm very sorry for the inconvenience, but my colleague was confused.' She smiled sympathetically at them.

Her colleague's jaw dropped and he was faced with the awkward situation of apologizing to the couple.

'Allow me to take your coat, sir,' Lucy said, eyes shining as she held her hand out to take the lone gentleman's coat.

He took her hand in his, it was warm. 'Thank you,' he said softly. Lucy blushed.

'You're welcome,' she whispered back.

She took his coat, led him to his table, handed him the menu and lit the candle in the centre of the table.

That night, on the 14th of February, the day she always hated, thirty-year-old Lucy fell in love for the first time, with the man at the table for one. It quickly became a table for two.

## **11.2. *The Calling***

'Seven and eight, seventy-eight.'

Her age.

Mags threw her eyes up to heaven and grumbled under her breath, in her raspy voice.

'What's that love?' Agatha shouted, moving her ear closer to Mags's head. 'You're going to have to speak up, love, it's me deaf ear you're sittin' beside.'

Mags wrinkled her nose up in disgust as she watched the black wiry hairs clinging to Agatha's chin bounce up and down as her mouth opened and shut. Her teeth became loose from her palette and were quickly clamped back into place as Agatha's bloodshot, tired, grey eyes darted around the table to see if anyone had noticed.

Mags threw her eyes up again and mumbled questioningly to the Good Lord.

'Wha'?' Agatha's blue rinse brushed off Mags's forehead as she leaned in to hear. Mags shook her head and swatted Agatha's head away as though it were a fly. She concentrated on what was going on ahead of her again.

'Two and two, twenty-two.' The year she was born.

She gritted her teeth and exhaled loudly. She leaned slightly to the left in her chair to sneak a glance at how her neighbour was progressing. The woman slowly raised her hand and covered her card. Mags raised her eyes slowly from the wrinkled hand blotched with brown patches, and came face to face with a tight smile.

Mags cleared her throat awkwardly, sat upright in her seat and tried to look insulted as she covered her own card with her hand as if to accuse her neighbour of cheating. The woman grunted and pulled her chair away from Mags. The steel chair legs, which had long lost their rubber grips, screeched along the tired oak floor. Faces winced and looked up. Her neighbour's face reddened and became buried in her hand as pained expressions stared at the cause of all the noise. Mags 'hmmphed' loudly as though she had been victorious in that particular round.

'WHAT'S EVERYONE LOOKIN' SO MOANY FOR, MAGS?' Agatha shouted, while looking around confused. 'DID SOMEBODY FART?' She sniffed the air and moved her head around animatedly, not wanting to be left out of the group's obvious discomfort. 'I CAN'T SMELL IT, MAGS,' she shouted again. 'IS IT AWFUL? IT MUST BE AWFUL.' She sniffed the air one last time, then shook her head, looking defeated. 'CAN'T GET IT OVER HERE AT ALL.'

'AAGH! JAYSUS, I'M DEAF, NOT NUMB, MAGS. WHAT'S WRONG WIT' YA?' She looked at her friend with a horrified expression while rubbing her sore side.

'Would you ever shut your trap, Aggie O'Brien,' she hissed.

'WHA?'' Agatha yelled, moving her head closer to Mags.

Mags stared at the blue-rinse mound of curls that had been shoved in her face and tutted at the patches of pink skin that were visible through the thin wispy hair. After not hearing a reply, Aggie turned to face Mags in order to read her lips. The two thin red lines were pursed, the deep cracks in her skin gathering around her mouth as though being pulled by a drawstring. A crooked finger stood perpendicular to her lips with a bright-red nail ordering her to, Stop!

'Sshh!' was all Aggie could just about make out. Then she realized what her friend meant.

'OH JAYSUS, SORRY, MAGS,' she yelled a little less loudly but not so much that the surrounding tables couldn't hear. 'I DIDN'T REALIZE IT WAS YOU THAT DONE

IT. SURE I CAN'T EVEN SMELL IT MESELF AND I'M RIGHT BESIDE YOU.'

Mags's cheeks pinked as they always did when she was embarrassed, looked as though she had dabbed two balls of baby-pink blusher onto her cheekbones. Her father used to say she was as pretty as the pink carnations that grew in her mother's flower garden of their country home. A circus clown, her mother had always used to rant angrily as though the very vision of them offended her. Her mother would cover her face in clouds of white powder before Mags would head out to the local dance on a Friday night. No daughter of hers would find a man with awful pink cheeks on her face, especially not her only daughter. The bristles of the powder brush used to scrape away at Mags's cheeks, causing her eyes to water and her irritated skin to redden even more. Faster and faster her mother would brush, nearly scraping the layer of skin away

so it would reveal pure whiteness. The angrier and angrier she would get, the redder and more sore-looking her daughter's face would become.

Twice a week Mags would have to endure this. Once on a Friday before the local dance and again on the Sunday morning before they walked along the potholed road to eight o'clock mass. Mags would have to sit for an hour for her mother while she tied up her hair and powdered her face. Mags wondered why she couldn't just dip her face into the bowl of flour her mother left sitting on the kitchen counter in preparation for the Sunday homemade apple tart. At least that way not a pink blotch would be in sight.

She would be ordered to sit still, afraid to move a muscle in case she felt the sharp sting of the back of the brush against her flesh, which inevitably caused her cheeks to turn rosy. It was a vicious circle. So she sat tight, hands on lap, back straight ('A man wouldn't want a wife with bad posture now, would he, Margaret?') while her five brothers could remain in bed for the extra hour. Mags often felt like questioning her mother on why it was that men didn't need to make the same effort for women. Mags certainly had no desire for a man who smelled of cow manure, sweat thick with the stench of stale black coffee, muddy big black boots with faded trousers and dried muck in the creases, tucked into their thick black socks (no doubt darned by their mothers and sisters) all held up by a pair of braces. Mags was convinced that the only reason for these was so the men would have a place to rest their thumbs while they stuck their chests out and strolled the town as if they hadn't a care in the world.

Mags had sometimes wished, while sitting for her mother, that she had been born a man. There were few or no rules, fewer expectations and what appeared to be no pressures apart from watching the weather and worrying about the amount of milk they could get from the cow that morning. But she wouldn't dare share these thoughts with her mother, especially while she had the spiky brush in one hand and a lock of her black silky hair firmly grasped in the other. Mags doubted her mother would have a problem scalping her in an instant; however, the only thing that held her back was the knowledge that a bald patch on a girl is not easy on the watchful eye of a hot, red-blooded young male. No, the hair remained untouched--it was pulled at and twisted, knotted and pinched, but remained unscalped.

Once ready, her mother would call the boys. Mags would hear them mumbling and grumbling and moaning about having to get up at such an early hour. Mags would stare desperately in the mirror at her reflection, her powdery white face appearing ghostlike against the whitewashed walls of her bedroom in the background. While her mother banged around the boys' bedroom, pulling open curtains and laying out clothes, laughing and pretending to be angered by their protests but secretly loving the attention, Mags sucked in her cheeks, widened her eyes and pretended to float around like the ghost she felt like. It was as though her mother wanted her to be invisible and it wasn't only the makeup that made Mags feel it.

Her father, when he wasn't at the pub or working the farm, doted on her. Her mother despised her for it. But he wasn't one to argue with the woman he married, and, sure, didn't she know best how to treat a growing young woman when she herself was one? One thing Mags loved him to disagree with was all the makeup she wore

going to see The Lord in His House. 'Our Lord doesn't need nor require young Margaret to wear a mask in his home, Grainne.'

'Ah, yes, but our Lord does want young Margaret to find a suitor so she doesn't grow old a shamed woman. And unless the Lord requires her to be a nun there is no need for her to be without a man. The world isn't designed for a woman without a man and as far as we know she hasn't received the Calling.'

Her parents and five brothers had all stopped walking at that point to stand still and stare at Mags. Her cheeks flushed instantly and her mother let out an exasperated sigh as though Mags was deliberately acting out against her mother's hard work.

Mags gulped and stared back at her family wide-eyed. 'What is it?' she stammered.

Her mother shook her head sadly at the lack of grace of her daughter.

'Have you received the Calling?' Jackie, her twenty-year-old brother had asked her with a smirk on his face.

'Margaret! Margaret!' Her younger brother had called her name playfully in the background.

To Mags's surprise, her mother started laughing and then immediately smacked her son over the head with her handbag for joking about the Lord. Only Mags's father watched her face curiously.

'Em, no, I haven't,' Mags whispered in embarrassment. He simply nodded his head once as he absorbed this information and then continued on walking. The rest of the family trudged on after him, overtaking Margaret, whose feet remained firmly fixed to the spot with pure terror and shame. She knew what they were all thinking: if she hadn't received a calling like Kathleen from down the road and she hadn't courted a man at the age of twenty then maybe she was one of those 'funny ones' that cut their hair short and moved to the city.

'Hurry along, Margaret,' her mother had spat angrily, even more disappointed. 'The Lord waits for no one, especially not twenty-year-old girls who dilly-dally.'

Margaret's heartbeat quickened at her mother's tone and she ran to catch up with her family.

'Sorry,' she had whispered to their backs as they walked ahead of her. And she had meant it. Sorry she wasn't more like them. Sorry she lacked the social graces of her mother, the personality of her father, the popularity of her brothers, the beauty of all the other girls in the town.

They arrived at the church at 7.30 in the morning, as they did every week, and gathered with the rest of the congregation for the next half-hour. Mags hated the way the women gossiped about that week's scandal, hated how her mother pretended not to be interested even though Mags knew she looked forward to those chats all week more than the mass itself. The men would talk about the weather and how it was affecting the crop. Mags loved when the weather was good because her father became a whole new man. They would stay up until all hours listening to his stories and listening to his songs, but when the farm wasn't going well it felt to Mags as

though there was a stranger in the house. He became an intruder who conversed in only grunts and monosyllabic words and appeared only at eating time. A man she didn't much like.

Finally, the gossip would end when the church bell signalled eight o'clock. They would all pile into the church, which would quickly become packed to the brim with hung-over men, crying children, coughing teenagers, women hiding their yawns out of respect for the 'Good Lord' in case he struck them down for such an act of humanity. Mass for Mags was a real-life cattle mart. Her mother would herd the family down the aisle, Mags would walk towards the crucifix to hisses in her ear of 'Watch your posture, Margaret' or 'Look happy for Our Lord, Margaret' until they reached their usual spot in the front row.

Mags knew now it was no more for Our Lord than for the mice in the field, it was for the rows of young single men who lined the outer aisles, backs against the cold, white, stone walls, thumbs tucked into their braces, wandering eyes staring back at her under floppy fringes. There was one man in particular her mother had her eye on. She tried to convince her Mags it was for her of course but Mags had her suspicions. Her mother became another woman when he was around, laughing at his jokes, being shockingly polite and being far too interested in what the young man had to say for Margaret's liking. Ploughing a field really wasn't that comical in Margaret's opinion and her mother never seemed as enthusiastic to listen when her father talked about it. Seamus O'Reilly was his name, a local who worked on his father's farm and who probably would be doing the same for the next fifty years of his life. He was twenty-five years of age, strong as an ox, great with his hands and a 'decent sort of a lad', according to her father.

He reminded Mags of her five brothers with his cheeky smile and overconfident stroll. She could see him demanding food on the table, hot water for his bath and freshly washed clothes every morning just like the boys. He leaned against the confessional box and watched all the single girls from the village being led in a neat line up the aisle by their mothers. The stone floor beneath his feet was scattered with muddy clumps as the muck on the soles of his leather boots dried, cracked and fell to the floor. So Mags felt far from upset when she watched him walk down the aisle with Katie McNamara that year. As all the women had watched the bride and gasped in awe at her dress as she passed, Mags had more interest in watching the soles of Seamus's feet as he walked away out of the church a married man. Her suspicions had been correct. The mud cracked and fell with every step. To Mags, an obvious sign of what future lay ahead for poor Katie McNamara.

Mags wanted to find a man with shiny shoes, a man who didn't sweat for a living. If such a creature existed in Kilcrush.

Her mother had been visibly devastated and had dabbed at her eyes throughout the wedding ceremony, claiming to be 'so happy for Seamus and Katie' between sniffles. Mags didn't think it was her posture or her smile or her hair or her walk or her conversation or any of the other things her mother claimed it was that drove him away. Mags didn't think Seamus even cared about any of those things. He had explained to Grainne that it was Katie's 'healthy glow' that did it for him. Mags had wanted to grab her mother by the hands and dance and twirl her around the room



when she heard that. For, much as she hated that brush scraping the powder onto her skin, it removed the healthy glow that could have imprisoned her in Seamus's farmhouse.

But, despite her joy at not been chosen by the best boy in the village, it left Mags still a single woman at twenty and, much as her parents prayed for it, Mags's Calling never came. Not of the sort they wanted, anyway.

Agatha's sniffing the air brought Mags's mind back to the present, 'I STILL CAN'T GET IT, MAGS, SO DON'T WORRY.'

Mags rolled her eyes. 'There is no smell, Aggie.'

'HA?' Agatha yelled squinting her eyes in concentration as though doing so would help her hear. 'There is no smell. Nobody farted, Aggie. Now stop screaming.' She raised her voice a little more.

'IT'S ME BAD EAR, MAGS, WHA?' Agatha shouted.

That did it. Mags's blood boiled. She was sick and tired of having to repeat herself, and, not only that, her voice was sore at having to shout at Aggie all day every day. If they weren't careful Aggie would be deaf and Mags would be dumb from having to raise her voice. 'THERE IS NO SMELL, AGGIE, OK? I. DID. NOT. FART.'

Agatha jumped, the announcer on stage was silenced and a few chuckles were heard around the hall. Mags's cheeks went pink again and she thought immediately of how angry her mother would be, just as she had been programmed to.

'Eh ... four and four, farty-four, I mean forty-four, excuse me,' the bingo caller stuttered.

The hall erupted in laughter and Mags snorted. She quickly grabbed her nose to stop it from happening again. Agatha looked around the room confused and turned to stare at her friend with her hand over her nose. 'DON'T TELL ME YOU DID IT AGAIN, MAGS. IN THE NAME OF JAYSUS ARE YOU TRYIN' TO KILL US ALL?' Agatha yelled, sounding exasperated. This time her words weren't heard by quite so many people over the sound of all the laughter.

Mags tried to control herself, not wanting to be seen to be enjoying herself at the weekly bingo. She liked to think that it was now something she had to do for her friend Aggie and refused to accept the notion that she looked forward to the few hours every week she spent in the local school hall. Her life was far too interesting to be excited by bingo because ... well, that would make her old.

And she wasn't old.

She was seventy-eight. All the same, she couldn't wait to tell her Connie when she left the bingo hall. How he would have laughed his heart out at this. Oh, yes, there was a man in the end. Cornelius Kelly was his name and Mags adored that man with all her heart. Still did. She couldn't wait to tell this story to him.

The bingo caller tried to recover from his embarrassment and when the giggles had died down in the hall he resumed his job. 'Four and three, forty-three.'

Mags smiled. The year she met her Connie.

She had found a man all right. A real man, not one of those ones her mother kept trying to pair her off with, either. She hadn't wanted to marry a dirty local and have to spend the rest of her life tending for his every unnecessary need. She wanted to fall in love, she wanted to work--and not the kind of work that involved scrubbing clothes and dishes, sewing socks and buttons and cooking. She wanted to work *outside* of a house.

So she left Kilcrush in the west of Ireland and headed to Dublin City. The big smoke. Her mother and father had been horrified at the very idea when she told them one evening that she was going to join her best friend from school, who had moved up the previous year. Her mother had been convinced she was one of the 'funny ones' and no daughter of hers was going to hang around the likes of her in a city full of sin. Dublin City, they said, was not designed for a single woman.

Her parents wouldn't hear of it.

So she didn't tell them.

With the money she had saved from selling eggs from the hen her father had given her for her twenty-first (and selling the hen) and a small amount of farm produce at the local market, she bought a train ticket and disappeared into the night. Standing on the pavement on O'Connell Street, she took in the sights, sounds and smells that her new life had to offer. She stared with delight in the great big windows of Clerys department store and had a pain in her neck from standing at the foot of the large granite structure and looking up at Nelson's Pillar, which she had previously only ever seen in photographs. She breathed in the smoke, the noise, the crowds, the buildings, the trams, so much concrete and such little green--she loved it.

She moved in with her friend Agatha O'Reilly from school to a dark, dingy bedsit in the heart of the city. It was dirty and grotty, noisy and smelly and within days it felt like home to Mags. She took to life very quickly in Dublin. She loved the freedom, she loved being able to go to eleven o'clock mass on a Sunday morning (or Saturday night if she so wished), where she could wear her hair any way she liked it, go barefaced, sit in the back row and yawn to her heart's content without being struck down by the Lord. She worked Monday to Friday as a chambermaid in a city hotel near the bedsit and she tried to save every shilling she made and stashed it in a box under her bed. She planned to create the best life for herself.

One night the sweet, sweet music that filtered up through the floor of their bedsit from the smoky club below made Mags and Aggie sit up in bed and listen. The voice of an angel accompanied by the tinkling sound of a piano flowed like warm silky caramel through their ears. Mags closed her eyes and pictured herself and Fred Astaire dancing around the room. It was music so unlike anything she had heard in real life. This was the stuff she saw and heard only in the movie theatres she went to occasionally with Aggie. It wasn't like 'The Fields of Athenry', which she was used to hearing sung in the pubs and at parties at home. There was no screeching fiddle or banging bodhran, there were just silky soothing sounds that made her feel as if she was a million miles from home.

Every weekend she was transported to New York City, to a smoke-filled jazz club full of sophisticated, strong, beautiful, confident women, with big made-up eyes, rich sparkling jewels and glitzy dresses that revealed more flesh than any man in Mags's home town dared to even dream about due to the fear of having to confess immoral thoughts. The kind of woman that inhaled sexily on a cigarette balanced effortlessly between gloved fingers, not a hint of their bright-red lipstick left behind on the cigarette tip. They would laugh flirtatiously as they tipped the ash into the tray right on target without even looking while sipping on a Cosmopolitan, being adored by men, envied by other women, not a care in the world.

Every Friday and Saturday night Mags and Aggie would become those women in the privacy of their own bedsit while they let the music take them away and let the noises from below make them feel as if they were in the very room. They would doll themselves up to the nines in their Sunday best, flicking cigarette ash around the room, revealing so much flesh their parents would be saying decades of the rosary. She lived life happily in a city not designed for single women.

The voice called out to her louder and louder week after week until Mags finally felt confident enough to leave the safety of her bedsit in order to explore downstairs. And when she left the room that night she left the Margaret Divine of Kilcrush behind her. For on stage performing was an angel, the stage spotlight acting as a beam from heaven shining on the man who sang as though he were from another world. His eyes sparkled at her as his magic hands glided gracefully over the keys, and he sang with a smile. A smile all for her. He just seemed to glow to Mags; she could hardly take her eyes away from him, couldn't stop listening to his voice. There was an air of sophistication about him and at the age of twenty-one Mags knew she had already fallen in love with the voice of an angel, and now she had fallen in love with the man. It had been the Calling she had been praying for. His voice calling her to leave her safety net behind and come downstairs.

He was smart and friendly and funny and listened to Mags's stories, laughed at her jokes, seemed interested in her opinions, made her feel loved and intelligent and sexy, and this was all new to her.

They became engaged only weeks later and, as Mags's parents still refused to visit her in Dublin, she embarked on the train journey to Kilcrush with her love. He made her feel strong, as if she could take on the world and perhaps even her mother.

And, for a woman who didn't think much of city people and their ways, Mags had never seen her mother so uncomfortable and nervous, so well dressed; she had never seen the cottage look so clean, not even as clean as when the local priest visited. It was as though her mother thought royalty was among them. But Cornelius was a man of the world. He had seen countries, learned of things Grainne could never teach her daughter or preach to her friends. Mags was surprised to find her mother intimidated by this confident young man who looked at her daughter in a way she found uncomfortable.

While Cornelius became acquainted with the men in the living room, it was required of Mags to help prepare tea with her mother in the kitchen. Her first greeting was a slap across the face. 'That's what you get, Margaret Divine,' her mother said

breathlessly while rubbing her hand in her apron as if to try to rid herself of the guilt of the act. 'That's what you get for not obeying me, for running off and becoming a scorned woman who hangs around smoky clubs with men like you were some sort of fancy woman,' she hissed. 'That's not the life you were reared to know, not the life your father and I worked hard to provide for you, and this is how you repay us?' She busied herself making sandwiches, slicing the tomatoes with neat precision, almost obsessive behaviour.

Mags stared at her mother, her eyes glistening from the sting of the slap.

'Well, Margaret, what have you to say for yourself?' She stopped slicing the tomato and turned to face Mags, sharp knife in one hand, other hand on hip trying to appear menacing. Margaret saw her then for the first time, for what she really was. A woman who knew very little about the real ways of the world. She realized that the woman who scared her all of her life knew very little at all. Margaret began to laugh, to her own surprise, quietly at first, but then she reached to the very bottom of her soul and found a loud bellyaching laugh that made her eyes run with tears of sadness and relief. This unusual act of disobedience angered her mother even more, and Mags received an even harder slap on the other cheek.

This stopped her laughing immediately but her eyes still glistened with bitter amusement.

'What have you to say for yourself, young lady?' her mother said angrily through gritted teeth. Loose grey hairs flailed around wildly as though they celebrated their escape from the tight bun in her head. Her face aged in an instant in Mags's eyes, sharp knife aimed pointedly at Mags's face. 'Well?' she pressed, the delight of putting her daughter back in her place causing her shoulders to relax a little. Margaret glanced at the small mirror over the kitchen basin, at the small wooden stool that she was forced to sit on for all of her teenage years twice weekly and endure the pain of covering her flushed cheeks. She didn't know what to say. Margaret caught her reflection in the mirror and her stinging cheeks slowly broke into a sad smile. 'Why Mother, you seem to have made my cheeks rosy.'

Her comment was greeted with an icy stare. But a shocked one at that. No words came from her mother's mouth. And, as the unusual silence hung in the air, Margaret turned her back and walked out of the kitchen, out of the cottage and out of the place where her mother had tried to hold such control over her.

She and Cornelius married a few weeks later in a small church in Dublin. Her mother could not bring herself to attend but, for the last time, Mags's father led her down the aisle of the church, with makeup on her face, up to the front row.

'Four and seven, forty-seven.'

Mags smiled. The year she and Connie had their first baby.

He had been like an excited child himself when he found out about the pregnancy. He had picked her up and danced her around the living room of their new home, then quickly put her down again with worry, afraid of hurting her and the baby. They had finally managed to gather the money together to buy their first home in a new housing

estate of brand-new three-bedroom homes in Cabra, Dublin. They had spent the first few years of their married life working all the hours under the sun to help pay for the house, and now they would have an addition. Mags smiled again. She couldn't wait to talk to Connie later about the day they moved in. She loved doing that. Going over the memories of years gone by with him.

They named their first son Michael after Connie's father, and over the following years they had three more children. Two more boys, Robert and Jimmy, and one girl, Joyce. A daughter Mags allowed to dress, act and speak for herself just as she pleased. They were all married now. Only Joyce lived in Dublin, the rest were living overseas with their families. They tried to get home as much as they could. Their eldest was now fifty-three years old. Not a baby any more.

'On its own, number eight.'

The number of her grandchildren.

She couldn't wait to finish up here and talk to Connie. She still loved him with all of her heart and every time she thought of him butterflies fluttered around her tummy. He used to work at the bingo hall until a few years ago, when the arthritis in his hands became too bad. He had missed playing the piano so much and Mags missed listening to him as she played her bingo. It was nice to hear his familiar sounds in the background and she liked being able to look up and watch him when he didn't know she was looking. His face furrowed in concentration as he played the tunes he had been playing for over fifty years. They had never been able to find a replacement piano player. But there was no one near as good as Connie anyway ...

Her thoughts diminished as she stared down at her card.

'Oh,' she said quietly with surprise.

'Wha'?' Aggie yelled.

Mags smiled at her lifelong friend. 'I got bingo, Aggie.' She clapped her hands together with glee.

'You got wha'?'

'Bingo, Aggie.' She rolled her eyes. Here she goes again.

'Ha?'

'For the fiftieth time, I said I got Bingo! she yelled, the veins in her forehead throbbing from the volume of her voice.

The room stopped what they were doing and stared at her. 'I'm so, so sorry, Ms Divine,' the bingo caller said, startled. 'I'm afraid I didn't hear you the first time. Would you like to come up and collect your prize? You've won ten euro. Everybody give Mags a round of applause.'

Mags's cheeks blushed as she slowly stood up from her chair and made her way shakily up to the stage. Her hip was at her again. Wait till Connie heard all her good news today, she thought happily, accepting the crisp ten-euro note.

Mags said her goodbyes to Aggie, eventually settling on just a wave after Aggie had questioned Mags's 'goodbye' over and over again. Glowing from her win, she stopped at her local newsagent and bought a small bouquet of flowers, EU1.99 for a bunch. She opened the gate and walked up the path to her husband. Seeing him in the distance, she started to explain. 'Oh, Connie, you'll never believe the day I've had. I won ten euro in the bingo and poor old Aggie accused me of farting in front of everyone.' Mags laughed at the memory. 'Well these are for you,' she said, thrusting the pretty flowers towards him. She placed them on the grass of her husband's grave. 'I miss you, love,' she said, her eyes filling with tears. 'I miss you so much. This life's not designed for old single women at all.'

### 11.3. E-mail BIFIE

**Gesendet:** Montag, 21. Oktober 2013 um 09:38 Uhr

**Von:** "Bernadette Kurtz" <b.kurtz@bifie.at>

**An:** "stefaniepruckner@gmx.at" <stefaniepruckner@gmx.at>

**Cc:** "Dousset-Ortner Eva" <e.dousset-ortner@bifie.at>, "Angerer Sophia" <s.angerer@bifie.at>

**Betreff:** AW: Frage betreffend "neuer" mündlicher Matura

Sehr geehrte Frau Pruckner,

vielen Dank für Ihre Anfrage. Der Begriff „individual long turn“ kann mit „monologischer Teil“ übersetzt werden. Der englische Begriff kommt von internationalen Englisch Prüfungen.

Wir hoffen, dass wir Ihnen behilflich sein konnten. Sollten Sie weitere Fragen haben, stehen wir Ihnen jederzeit gerne zur Verfügung.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen,

Bernadette Kurtz

**Mag. Bernadette Kurtz**

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**Von:** Stefanie Pruckner <stefaniepruckner@gmx.at>

**Datum:** 19. Oktober 2013 15:33:38 MESZ

**An:** <s.angerer@bifie.at>

**Betreff:** Frage betreffend "neuer" mündlicher Matura

Sehr geehrte Frau Angerer,

...128...

Ich arbeite gerade an meiner Diplomarbeit in Englisch. Da ich Lehramt studiere beschäftige ich mich in meiner Diplomarbeit unter anderem mit den neuen Themenbereichen und den Prüfungsaufgaben für die neue Matura.

Damit komme ich auch gleich zu meiner Frage: Woher kommt der Begriff "individual long turn" der auf der Homepage des bifie für den ersten Teil der mündlichen Reifeprüfung verwendet wird?

Der Begriff ist mir leider nicht ganz klar. Könnten Sie mir erklären mit welchem Begriff "individual long turn" im Deutschen gleichzusetzen wäre? Kommt der Begriff von einer pädagogischen Terminologie im Deutschen und wurde übersetzt?

Über eine Antwort würde ich mich sehr freuen!

Vielen Dank!

Mit freundlichen Grüßen,

Stefanie Pruckner

## **Deutsche Zusammenfassung**

Diese Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Frage welche Rolle englischsprachige Literatur im Englischunterricht an den Österreichischen Gymnasien hat. Die Rolle der Literatur im Unterricht hat sich schon des Öfteren sehr stark gewandelt. Heutzutage wird der Literatur wieder mehr Bedeutung zugesprochen, da man nach und nach festgestellt hat, welche positiven Aspekte und Einflüsse das Unterrichten von Literatur für Schüler/innen haben kann. Diese positiven Einflüsse werden in dieser Arbeit analysiert. Außerdem werden unterschiedlichste Ansätze diskutiert wie man Literatur unterrichten könnte. Es gibt Methoden die sich mehr um die sprachliche Ausbeute der literarischen Texte drehen, oder um die kulturelle Weiterentwicklung des Lesers. Jedoch gibt es auch neuere Methoden, die vor allem darauf abzielen die Leser/innen als ganze Person in verschiedensten Aspekten weiterzubilden. Diese Methoden sind vor allem für den Englischunterricht sehr interessant.

Nach der theoretischen Einführung über die Rolle von Literatur, sowie der Einführung über Methoden und Theorien wie man literarische Texte in den Unterricht einbinden könnte, konzentriert sich die Arbeit auf die konkrete Textauswahl für die Schule beziehungsweise für die Diplomarbeit. Es gibt zahlreiche Argumente warum Kurzgeschichten im Englischunterricht von Vorteil sind. Im Zuge dieser Vorteile wird auch das pädagogische Potential der konkreten Kurzgeschichten von Cecelia Ahern erläutert. Außerdem werden Themen der Kurzgeschichten analysiert und mit den Themen für die neue mündliche Matura verknüpft. Es wird somit gezeigt wie wertvoll die Geschichten tatsächlich im Hinblick auf die neue Zentralmatura in Österreich sein können. Es werden konkrete Aufgaben präsentiert wie sie bei der neuen mündlichen Matura abgefragt werden könnten. Am Schluss der Arbeit werden auch noch konkrete Stundenbilder präsentiert. Diese Stundenbilder zeigen wie man die Kurzgeschichten von Cecelia Ahern erfolgreich in den Englischunterricht einbauen könnte, auch mit Hinblick auf mündliche Übungen, die die Schüler/innen gleichzeitig auf die mündliche Matura vorbereiten.



## Curriculum Vitae

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### PERSÖNLICHE DATEN:

**NAME:** STEFANIE PRUCKNER  
**GEBURTSDATEN:** St. Pölten, 23. Juli 1991  
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### SCHULBILDUNG:

Ab 2009 UNI Wien: UF Englisch/ UF Sport  
2009 Matura mit ausgezeichnetem Erfolg  
2005-2009 BORG St. Pölten  
2001-2005 Europa-Hauptschule Pyhra  
1997-2001 Volksschule Pyhra

### BERUFSERFAHRUNG:

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**Sprachen** Englisch in Wort und Schrift  
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Französisch in Wort und Schrift (5 Jahre)  
Spanisch (1 Jahr)

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